



Brightness (The Tampa Defiance MC #2)

Author: *K E Osborn*

Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: I was raised a sinner.

Constantly seeking enlightenment.

But my world crashed down around me, and I was set free.

I didn't know it then, but the early years of my life created a void inside me.

I had to find a new home, a new family, and I did. As the VP of Tampa Defiance MC.

Ivy wasn't supposed to be here.

She's far too virtuous for a place like this.

The fact she's younger than me makes it even harder.

Ivy's supposed to be pure.

And I'm trying desperately to leave her untarnished.

But I can't fight who I am.

And when my past comes back to haunt me... she'll have to embrace the poison inside her too.

Previously published as Luring Light in the Royal Bastards MC, Tampa FL Chapter, Brightness has been re-edited and reworked before publication.

Total Pages (Source): 23

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

VOID

It was only meant to be a job.

A simple transfer of packages from a shipping container to the buyers. But Nycto, my president, had to go and change the fucking plan on us.

Because one of the packages caught his eye.

And he wanted a taste.

Nycto threw everything in the air, sending our clubhouse into turmoil, while he made us fall in line with his new plan.

We never stray from the path.

We do our job.

We get paid.

That's what Tampa Defiance does.

But Nycto got a hard-on, and in the process, put us all in the firing line. For what? A hot piece of ass.

Problem is, the fiery Cuban goddess we transported wasn't going to go without a fight, or without her fucking little sister.

Thing is, the little sister isn't so little.

Her name is Ivy.

Instantly, I knew she could be as poisonous to me as her namesake.

I don't feel.

For anyone.

For anything.

They don't call me Void for nothing, but Ivy sparked something in me. Curiosity at how someone like her could be such a pocket rocket and not have every man hanging off her arm.

The thing about Ivy—she's smart.

And she's super happy all the damn time.

The bitch wears you down.

I tried like fucking hell not to view her as a play toy. Not to think about all the ways in which I could ruin her. But every time she smiles at me with her damn pure innocence, it does something.

It wrecks me.

It burns me alive.

And I'm left reeling in her wake.

Ivy's nothing but naive, virtuous in every way. I can't thrust myself into her life, tarnishing the good in her with the depravity in me.

With all the shit that's gone down the past couple of months since the sisters arrived at the club—Eva finding out Ivy's here, them reuniting, the seller figuring out Nycto took them and then coming for his vengeance—it's been one hell of a shitshow.

Though through it all, Nycto and Eva found their happiness together.

My president made an Old Lady out of Eva. She's now wearing his property patch, while I struggle to deal with my damn emotions regarding Ivy.

She's brought me out of my shell.

Made me think that maybe I could be the type of man for her. The type of man I could only hope to be.

But, no. I can't think that way.

Ivy—she's special.

The seller chose her because of her blood. It's some kind of rarity that makes her and Eva genetically different from everyone else. But Ivy is a little extra special. She's a virgin, and with my past, that's too much for a bastard like me.

She deserves a man who will treat her right, not some asshole who was raised the way I was.

My past continually haunts me. My family made me into the man I am.

A void.

An empty shell.

I'm not sure I know how to be anything else.

With the sisters settling into club life, Ivy's made herself at home. The thought of her being here excites and irritates the hell out of me at the same time. Knowing she's right there for me to take, but also the fact I can't just take her whenever I want is debilitating. She's the kindest, most intoxicating woman I have ever met.

She's so attuned to everything around her. That alone could be dangerous, but it might also make her an asset to our club. Ivy's already shown that side of her skill set by working in the Chamber with the prospect, Dash, on cultivating and maintaining our crops for our club girl Trixie's gourmet line of munchies.

Have to say, who the fuck would have thought the venture would be so damn popular? But the shit sells like fucking french fries at McDonald's.

Then there's Dash—the jackass prospect—who's spending much more time with Ivy than I'd like. They spend a lot of time working together, getting the crop just right. Dash doesn't think I see him making moves on Ivy, but I sure as shit do.

She and I were close until I realized just how fucking much she was getting under my skin. Just how much I wanted to see her fall to her knees in front of me, watch her big doe eyes peer up at me from under those lashes as she gifts me her submission.

I want to fuck her.

Make her scream out in agony until she can't breathe.

But I can't, because she's a fucking virgin.

So, I stepped back.

Sure, I get that it probably confused her.

But it is what it fucking is.

I was down in the lower bunker with Ivy all the time, spending hours with her. Fuck, I was laughing with her at one point. Don't ask me how, but I was even opening up to her, letting my guard down, showing her the real me. And that's the problem. If I let my guard down too fucking much, I'm concerned about what I could do to her.

Now she's off with that fucking pussy, Dash, while I spend my time drinking and trying not to have her enter my mind every three point five seconds. It doesn't work most of the time. Especially when her sister, Eva, is up here. They look alike. Not so similar it's jarring, but certainly enough for my chest to clench.

I'm drowning in a sea of Cuban goddesses, and nothing will ease the goddamn pain.

Instead of getting lost in the bottom of this bottle, maybe I need to sink myself into one of the club girls. Problem is, they wouldn't satisfy my craving for her.

Ivy is downstairs with Dash, caring for the crop.

Nycto and Eva are madly in love and prepping for the Labor Day festivities starting next week.

And me, well, I'm wandering around aimlessly trying to find something to curb my appetite. Because all I can think about right now is Ivy, and how much I want to go down those stairs to be with her. Sure, I'd love nothing more than to lay her out before me, make her scream my name, but hanging out with her was fucking awesome too. She brought something out in me, something I didn't know was even

there.

As I stroll through the clubhouse, I spy Nycto and Eva getting a little too fucking hands-on for my liking. Nycto nibbles on Eva's earlobe while they're practically dry humping in the middle of the room for everyone to witness. He whispers something in her ear, and my lip pulls up in disgust. "Get a room," I call out as I walk past them, into the kitchen.

I need to get away. Their PDA only makes my desire to go to Ivy even more fucking intense.

But Ivy's with Dash.

Their relationship is developing into something I don't even want to fucking comprehend. The thought of him being with her makes my muscles tense so damn tight, it's like I'm being electrocuted.

Pulling open the refrigerator, I stare aimlessly inside.

I don't even know what I'm searching for.

A cure for my sins.

An answer to life's problems.

Fuck! I'd happily take a punch to the head to knock me the fuck out right about now. That'd ease my mind.

"Void... you wanna tell me what's so fucking interesting in the fridge?" Nycto calls out from behind me.

He startles me, and I turn quickly, slamming the refrigerator closed so hard it rocks with the force. I'm angry, but not at him. I fold my arms over my chest, scowling in contempt at myself more than anything else. Then I can't help the word vomit erupting from my mouth. "Why the fuck is Dash helping Ivy? I thought he was learning to be a mechanic, not a fucking weed horticulturist."

Nycto's face lightens a little, like he's amused by my outburst. "You done?"

I glare, seeing red. "Am I done? No, I am not fucking done! I don't understand why she's always fucking laughing at his lame attempts at humor. He's a fucking kid."

"Mm-hmm... anything else?"

I throw my hands in the air, frustration overwhelming me. "As a matter of fact, yes. Dash is trouble. We gotta kick him out. He doesn't deserve a patch. I won't vote yes at the table, so he may as well leave now."

Nycto shakes his head, but looking at his closed fists, I see the anger building inside him. "You're done. Dash is due his patch. I get that the table has to be unanimous, but the kid has earned it. He took a fucking bullet in the bar brawl when Spark got himself in trouble. Kid's got balls. We need brothers like him."

With a huff, I turn and start pacing. "Don't care."

"This isn't about Dash at all, is it?"

I stall, glaring at Nycto. "The fuck it isn't—"

"Then what's your fucking reasoning? All I can see is jealousy." A groan of frustration leaves my mouth as I restart my rapid pacing. "You can't deny the man a patch because he's spending time with Ivy."

“I don’t have to stand here listening to this bullshit from you, of all people.” I turn to storm off, shaking my head in irritation.

Nycto reaches out, grabs me by my shirt, and forces me back against the refrigerator, his eyes meeting mine dead-on. “Remember who your president is.” He shoves me forcefully as he exhales, and I run a hand through my hair. “Void, it’s time to pull your fucking head out of your ass. I get you have issues. Hell, I, of all people, understand that shit. But, brother... if you’re infatuated with Ivy, then you need to stop avoiding her. Spend some damn time with her. You were in a better place when you did.”

My face scrunches in confusion. “She’s still a fucking virgin, Nycto. She’s too pure for someone fucked-up like me.”

“Yeah, she is, but she’s also strong, sassy, and so full of fucking fight and fire. She handles anything thrown at her. Fuck, brother, she’s helping us grow weed. The woman lives in an underground bunker with a room full of dying and decaying bodies next to her, knowing and willingly... including Andrés’s rotting corpse, which she bricked behind the wall without batting a damn eyelid. She’s not pure and virtuous... you’re making her that way in your head.”

He’s right. I know he is.

I huff because it doesn’t change anything. But still, I have to ask. “What if I’m too late? What if the kid’s made his move?”

“There’s only one way to find out, you fuckin’ idiot.”

Indecision crosses my mind, but if I stand around waiting and let Dash win Ivy over without me trying everything I can, then I only have myself to blame. There’s no doubt Ivy and I have a connection. We have ever since the night I took her from the

boat. She saw something in me, and she worked damn hard to get me to break out of my shell.

She was fighting for me. Now I need to do the same for her.

As I walk past Nycto, he slaps me on the shoulder. “Go get your girl, brother.”

“Gonna try. It’s time for me to find out if Ivy is pure or poisonous.”

I take off, heading for the stairs down to the Chamber. I’m sure she’s there. She always is. It’s just a matter of what I’m going to find when I get downstairs.

As my feet hit the concrete slabs, I breathe a little faster. I’ve never put myself out there for a woman before. Never had to. I’ve always had them falling at my feet, doing my bidding. It’s how I was taught. I’m not even sure what the fuck I’m going to say when I see her.

As I enter the cold, dank lower bunker, the smell smacks me right in the face. The Cell always stinks with a rancid, moldy odor. Why she likes it down here is beyond me, but my little Cuban goddess is one twisted sister. Taking in a few deep breaths, I make my way toward the lab. The lights are on, and light chatting fills the air. The door is partially closed, so they won’t see me coming, but her girly laughter makes my breath catch. She sounds like a freaking angel.

“Stop, you’re gonna make it bigger,” Ivy calls out with a giggle.

Dash’s chuckle comes next, grating on my nerves.

I wish I could see what they’re doing as I walk closer.

“I thought women like big things?” Dash teases.

My top lip curls up as I stride faster, each step falling harder.

“I get you’re into this kind of thing, but can we just get to it? You’re making me anxious.”

She scoffs out a half laugh. “You’re such a pussy. Okay, hold on tight. It’s about to get messy in here.”

Dash lets out a guttural groan. “Fuuuck, Ivy, that hurts so good.”

My brows pinch tightly as I round the corner to take in the sight in front of me. Dash sits on a chair with his back to me, legs spread and his pants around his ankles. My chest squeezes as I spot Ivy. My innocent, naive Ivy is on her knees, her head between his legs, where I can only assume she’s throat deep on his cock.

What the fuck?

My hands ball into tight fists, and heat flushes over my body so fucking intense sweat beads across my brow. With my anger brewing so severe, I know I have to let it out, so I bring my hand up and slam it into the brick wall. My knuckles instantly split, blood running down my hand, and Ivy gasps, her head popping up from between Dash’s legs. She spots me before I turn to storm toward the exit.

“Shit! Void,” she calls out, but I don’t stop because if I do, I might turn back and break Dash’s face. Then Nycto would really have my balls in a vise.

When my feet hit the stairs, a wave of something crashes over me.

Regret.

That’s what I think this feeling is.

I let it go on for too long, and now Ivy's giving her firsts to Dash.

My stomach rolls, bile burning the back of my throat as I take the stairs two at a time.
I have no one to blame but my stupid fucking self.

"Void, stop!" she yells, but I don't turn back.

I can't.

I need something to take this pain away.

Ivy can indeed be poisonous.

And I have just gotten a toxic fucking dose.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

IVY

Adrenaline surges through my veins as I shoot up from between Dash's legs. "Void, stop!" I yell, my heart pounding so hard I can't catch my breath, but the idiot has taken off quicker than I can even comprehend.

Dash scowls at me. "We weren't doing anything wrong, Ivy."

"Dash, I had my head between your legs." I huff. "It would have come across a whole lot different from where Void was standing."

Dash grimaces, his eyes dropping to the now lanced boil on his inner thigh. "Well, I appreciate you helping me. It does feel better since you released the pressure."

My eyes shift to the stairs. "I should—"

"Go... I can patch myself up."

"Don't forget the antiseptic," I add, pulling my gloves off with a snap and throwing them in the trash, then heading for the stairs.

It's not like Void and I are in any sort of relationship, and I wasn't actually doing something with Dash. I was merely helping him. So I shouldn't feel the need to explain myself, but the hurt in Void's eyes was clear. He thought I was sucking the life out of Dash, and that's not okay.

I don't want him upstairs wallowing over something which simply isn't true. Void

and I might not be in a good place, but I don't need to make matters worse by letting him believe something that simply isn't there, so I rush to find him. To stop him from spiraling out of control, which he seems to have a university degree in.

As I enter the clubhouse, it's calm and quiet. At least Void hasn't come up here in a rage, making a damn scene and embarrassing the shit out of me. My eyes quickly scan the area. Over to my left, I find him sitting at the long, concrete bar.

His strong, tattooed arms rest on the black marble-effect slab as he sips on something amber—probably whiskey. His dusty blond hair is swept back over his head haphazardly like he's been brutally running his fingers through it.

As I stride toward him, he turns. It's obvious Void is overtired, and he looks frazzled. His strongly defined jaw is clenching from side to side like he's grinding his teeth, and his nostrils are flaring the way they do when he's angry. The left one is turned up slightly more due to his crooked nose from one too many fights, but for me, that only makes him more endearing. His muscles flex under his shirt—it's clear he's having trouble holding himself together.

I hate that I've put him in this rage-fueled state.

Void might be revved up, but damn, it's a good look on him.

Stacey wipes the countertop while Pepper stocks liquor bottles on the shelves behind the bar. I take in a deep breath before I step up to him. He's drinking his problems away, as per fucking usual.

It's time Void faced them head-on like a man instead of running away like a fucking child. His eyes shift to mine as I approach, then focus back on his glass. "Didn't even let the poor bastard bust a nut? That's shitty of you."

I scoff. “You pendejo asshole!”

Void turns up his lip, then takes another drink.

Stacey turns and walks down the other end of the bar, obviously to give us space to argue in private.

Void swivels on his chair, turning his back to me. All the action does is cause my anger to flare inside me even hotter. Never upset a Cuban woman if you want to live.

“You know what? You’re not even w-worth it anymore.” My voice comes out a little louder than I wanted it to, breaking a little with the pain searing through me at Void’s detachment.

He shrugs with his back still to me. “Good. Go back and finish Dash off. You don’t want him pissed off at you for not doing a good job.”

“Deja de comer mierda!” I throw my hands in the air, spinning to walk away, but slam straight into Dash’s hard chest.

“No disrespect, VP, but you shouldn’t talk to Ivy that way.”

Void lets out a small laugh as he turns on his stool. His hard eyes pierce through Dash with such vicious intent, even I feel the burn. “This conversation isn’t for you, prospect. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll leave.”

With a sharp inhale, Dash nods and turns to leave, but then looks back over his shoulder and continues anyway. “Just so you’re aware, because Ivy’s too worked up to tell you, what you thought you saw? You didn’t. Ivy was lancing a boil on my thigh. You know, putting her medical training to good use. So, while you’re basically calling her out and slut-shaming her for no good reason...” He pauses and looks to

the ceiling. “Maybe you should respect her for the amazing professional she’s turning into.”

I give Dash a weak smile, and he hightails it out of here before Void has a second to punish him for speaking out of turn.

My eyes shift back to Void. His electric blue orbs are vacant, with a shadow of what looks like regret. Small droplets of sweat top his brow, and a deep frown etches into his features.

He exhales, placing his drink on the bar, then stands, walking over to me.

My eyes drop to the floor as he grumbles under his breath. “Don’t... don’t do that. You’re so full of fight and fire. Don’t lose your confidence because I’m a fucking jerk.”

My stomach clenches at his admission as I slowly look up at him. There’s a pained expression on his face, and he pinches the bridge of his nose. “I am an asshole, Ivy. I fucked up. I only saw half a picture. I reacted... I just...” He exhales, running his hand through his hair. “I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know who I am when I’m around you.”

I stand taller. “You hurt me. No one has ever talked to me the way you just did.”

Void grimaces and reaches for my hand, taking it in his comforting hold. I let him, despite the hurt simmering. The second our fingers connect, my heart slams into my chest wall, making it hard to catch my breath. My skin comes alive, tingling with pins and needles, but in a damn good way. I’ve never felt more energized or electro-charged than when Void touches me.

It’s like every atom in my body fires all at once.

It's like the air changes, becoming thinner, harder to draw in, but somehow, it tastes and smells sweeter too.

How does any of that make sense?

I swear Void makes me crazy. He's so fucking hot and cold with me. Even now, he just treated me like absolute crap, yet here I am, drawn in by his mere presence.

As I stare into his electric-blue eyes, I'm captivated by his gaze. That stare covers my body in a warm blanket of comfort, yet he somehow sends the coldest of chills through me.

Hot versus cold.

Cozy and safe one minute, left out in a blizzard to fend for myself the next.

Right now, he's attempting to make me feel safe. Like even though he knows he fucked up and did the wrong thing, he's trying to right that wrong.

Void could be bad for me.

But aren't the bad things in life the things we enjoy the most?

"I wasn't actively trying to hurt you..." he stops as though pondering his next words, "... or maybe I was, I don't know. Seeing you with Dash, seeing what I thought I saw, it shocked me. I didn't think you were—"

"That kind of girl?"

"Not necessarily. I didn't know you and Dash were there yet."

My lips turn up in the corners as I grip his hand tighter. “We’re not, Void. Me and Dash... we’re not like that. Romantic, I mean.”

Void’s eyes light up, perhaps in hope, as he lets out a long exhale. “You’re not?”

“No. I haven’t done anything... with anyone. Ever.”

Void swallows hard. “Shit... I fucked up.”

This thing, whatever it is between us, has been strained for a while. I know I need to spend some time with Void, and since I arrived, I’ve wanted more than anything to experience what it’s like to be on the back of Void’s bike. Eva’s been able to ride with Nycto, but I’ve yet to even venture out of the safety of the clubhouse.

Chewing on the inside of my cheek, I debate whether he will be okay with what I’m about to ask, but I’m going to ask it anyway. “I understand that I was confined to the clubhouse when Andrés was alive for our safety... because he didn’t know Eva and I were here, and finding us was a big deal. Technically, the men who were sent to buy me and Eva are still out there, and that’s an issue for us and the club. But Void, Andrés is gone, and Eva’s been outside these walls. No one else knows we’re here. To make it up to me, I just... take me for a ride on your bike?”

“You... wanna go for a ride?” His eyes widen like he had no idea that was coming.

“Is that so surprising?”

He shrugs. “You’ve never mentioned it before.”

“I just want to get out and see a little of Tampa. I’ve been here for months, but I’ve been restricted to the inside of the clubhouse. Don’t get me wrong, I love this place, but I want to feel the Florida sun on my skin. I want to see palm trees. Hell, I want to

go to Trixie's new café!"

Void's lips turn up in the most glorious of ways. He's usually frowning, like his face is in a permanent scowl. But when his face lights up, damn, he's fucking gorgeous.

"Well, today is your lucky day."

"It is?" I can't help but smile.

Void chuckles. Grabbing my hand, he pulls me along. "I just so happen to know Trixie's making Key lime pie today, and man, does she make a good one."

Excitement bubbles inside me while my feet struggle to keep up with his rapid pace. "You're taking me to the café?"

"Yep, and we're taking the scenic route."

I can't help but giggle as we race through the clubhouse toward the exit, passing Nycto on the way.

"Where you off to in such a hurry?" Nycto grunts.

"Taking Ivy for a ride."

" 'Bout fuckin' time," he murmurs as we scurry outside, up the concrete ramp to where the club's bikes sit in a proud line of sleek metallic paint and shining chrome. They sparkle in the heat of the midday sun, almost blinding me they are so freaking brilliant in their sheen.

Void leads me over to his ride. When he stands next to it proudly, I draw my bottom lip in with my teeth, and he grabs an open-face helmet from the fence and hands it to

me. “You need to wear this.”

Void steps close and places the helmet over my long, chestnut hair. His eyes meet mine, while one corner of his lips turns up in the most devilishly gorgeous way.

“We’re really doing this?” I bounce on my toes.

“Yeah, we are.” He does the strap up firmly under my chin, then gently taps the top.

“There... nice and safe.”

I crinkle my nose as he throws a leg over his ride, the move making my insides quiver. I’ve never seen a simple movement be so sexy in all my life. The way his strong, thick hands grip the handlebars, and the way his shoulder muscles pull taut with the positioning of his arms... the man’s fucking intense, but it’s a sight I need to witness more often. My thighs clench together in a futile attempt to dull the ache forming between my legs.

I’m not a stranger to this feeling. I’ve been turned on plenty of times. Being a virgin doesn’t mean I’m not attuned to my body. I am all too aware when something or someone is turning me on, and Void like this, on his bike and ready to ride, is definitely turning me on.

“You gonna hop on behind me, sweet thing?”

I raise a brow. “Sweet thing?”

“Don’t worry, I know you’re strong enough to break my teeth like taffy if I’m not careful. Now stop delaying and get your sexy ass behind me.”

I smirk, secretly loving my new pet name. Moving in, I shift my leg over the bike and jostle into position behind him. Wrapping my arms around his toned waist, I hold on

probably tighter than I should, but I'm going to enjoy it while I can.

"Hold on the whole time, Ivy. Move with me. No jerky movements or letting go. Got it?"

"Mm-hmm," I murmur, a sudden flush crossing my cheeks for no apparent reason.

"You're not scared, are you?" he asks, looking over his shoulder at me.

Being wrapped around him, my front pressed to his back, with the power of his machine beneath me and the excitement of what's to come is all more than a little arousing for me. My clit throbs in my panties as images of Void taking my virginity on this bike race through my mind. "No... not scared."

Void grins. "Good." He faces the front and turns the engine over, and the motor roars to life, sending vibrations all the way through to my bones. The energy seeps into my very soul as I clench my eyes tight, taking in the endorphins that seem to be racing through me.

"Holy hell," I whisper, more about the fact my arousal is now in overdrive than anything else.

"I knew you'd love this," Void calls out over the dulcet purr of the engine.

Void duck-walks the bike back, then slowly rides toward the front gate, where West is waiting. When he pulls the gate open for us, we ride through, making our way past the wrought iron fence, then Void hammers down, unleashing the bike's full potential.

We speed off down the road at terminal velocity, which forces a loud squeal to escape me. I grip onto Void tighter and feel his torso moving up and down with his laughter.

My hair whips behind me in the breeze, and calm rolls through me. My eyes water a little from the windburn, but they soon adjust, and I take the time to admire the beauty that is Tampa.

With my need to be hiding out in the Cell, secluded from everything, I'd forgotten what it was like to be out in the sun. There's a huge, wild world out here I was hiding away from. I'd gotten so caught up in the fact I didn't want the life I had in Cuba that I'd made my life here all about sheltering myself away.

From the outside.

From the other members of the club.

Sure, I have Dash, Void, and my sister, but I hardly talk to anyone else. I mean, I do, but only when necessary. I hardly ever come upstairs. I found my home down there, but only because I was trying not to be the person I once was. In trying to find someone new within myself, I've created a person I'm not sure is completely healthy.

I need to get out more.

Talk to people.

Create a life that's not all gloom and doom.

Sure, I'm probably going to keep my bedroom in my little cell since I feel safe down there, but I do need to get to know the other members of the club, and I have to be more involved. If I'm going to be part of Defiance, I need to embrace the lifestyle, embrace the family, and it's taken being on Void's bike to show me that.

I can't help but snuggle into Void's back, needing to be closer to him. He's opened my eyes to so much today. Sure, if he wasn't being an asshole to begin with, I

wouldn't be here right now, but with all the endorphins coursing through my veins, I'm finding it very hard not to wipe that slate clean.

We ride for... I'm not even sure how long. It feels like an eternity, yet only a minute. I take in the splendor all around me, enjoying everything Tampa has to offer, loving every second of being out in the world. The minute Void pulls over to the side of the road, a sense of anguish washes over me—I never want the ride to end.

He shuts off the engine, hops off the bike, and turns to face me. I'm sure I am practically glowing.

"Hop off, sweet thing. We're here." He gestures behind him, then moves in to undo my helmet. I move my head past him to glimpse through the giant front window glistening in the sun.

Void chuckles, trying to keep up with me as he continues to undo the strap. "Jesus, stay still. You're like a fucking toddler, Ivy!"

I giggle and stop bouncing. "Sorry. Just excited to be out."

Finally, he manages to pull the helmet off my head, and I run my fingers through my hair. He reaches over and places the helmet on the seat of the bike with a heavy exhale. "I should have taken you out sooner."

"It's not your fault. There were extenuating circumstances. Then, if I'm honest, I didn't want to be anywhere but in the Cell, you know? It felt like safety. Like home."

He drops his chin once in recognition. "I know. Still, I could have tried. After Andrés—"

I reach out, gripping his arm. "We're here now. Let's go have some of this pie."

Void slides his hand down over mine, and we entwine our fingers.

Tingles.

Goose bumps break out all over me.

My heart gallops, taking off at breakneck speed as we head for the door. How Void can infuriate me to the point I want to snap his neck one minute, then make me swoon the next, I have no idea. What I do know is there is something here, a connection between us. There has been since he took me off the boat and out of the shipping container, away from the men who took us from Cuba.

Maybe we aren't on the same page.

Maybe we are.

But I need to find out, because this back-and-forth whiplash is going to give me a complex.

And right now, I don't need to add to my ever-increasing problems.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

VOID

It's been damn good spending the afternoon with Ivy. She loved hanging out with Trixie at the café, seeing how it all works. While Trix got to work, Ivy watched on in awe as the product she's cultivating with Dash was baked into the items the club's selling.

Ivy does a lot of hard work, and now she's seeing the end result. It never occurred to me she hasn't experienced this side of what she's been creating.

I stand back, observing Ivy in her element as Trixie explains all the various recipes she uses, and how you need specific amounts of product for each baked good. The precision of it all made Ivy's inner nerd come out, showing me just how exciting this is for her. Have to admit, I got a semi watching her geek out the way she does. She's fucking adorable when she gets giddy over shit.

The way her wavy chestnut hair falls perfectly over her shoulders makes me hard just from looking. Ivy's sun-kissed skin is so gloriously perfect. Her lips are so fucking delectable I want to kiss them every damn chance I get, not to mention that adorable button nose. But it's the fire behind those eyes that does me in. She's like a fucking goddess, and I want to worship at her feet.

She might be small, but it's that spirit inside of her that lets you know she'll kick your ass in an instant if you let her down. How can a woman like her be so innocent in every way, but then talk about doped-up donuts and baked brownies like it's a normal conversation?

It messes with my head.

How is she fragile and breakable in my mind, yet I stood back while she bricked a man behind a wall, leaving him to his death right in front of me, without so much as a blink of her eyes.

Hell, I saw her smash a brick into said guy's face with reckless abandon.

She's not a delicate wallflower, so why do I keep picturing her as one?

Whatever my problem is, Ivy isn't going to stand for it. But can I really be anyone other than who I am? Who I was raised to be?

It's a hurdle I need to jump over.

I need to figure out if I'm willing to take the leap and risk falling to my knees, because Lord knows I'm going to have to ask for forgiveness more than once.

Glancing out the front window as I sip on my coffee, I exhale.

We should be getting back.

Ivy's been gone for hours, and I'll feel safer with her back home, in the clubhouse. Cars pass by on the road out front. Diners sit in the café, oblivious to the rear-of-shop operations, where extra-baked goods are being held for the lowlifes of Tampa.

There's an entire back section of the shop blocked off like a vault, with a built-in exhaust filtration system to hide the pungent odor. We have Ominous pick up the product and ship it all over the place. It's turned into a real fucking big enterprise.

I shovel another forkful of Key lime pie into my mouth, the hit of sweet and the tang

of lime smacking me at the same time. Trixie always gets the balance exactly right. Smiling, I peer over at Ivy and Trixie, who stand in front of the everyday bakery section as Ivy points something out. Trixie goes behind the counter, fetches it from the cabinet, then places whatever it is into a small box.

She's obviously bringing something home with us.

Ivy practically skips over to my table, beaming with happiness. She slides into the seat opposite me, placing the small pink box on the table. "I got some treats for us for when we get back to the club."

"More pie?" I ask.

She draws her bottom lip in by her teeth, the move sexy as fuck. "Taffy-flavored truffles," she says with a wry smile.

This woman sure is something else.

"Shall we?" I ask, tilting my head to the exit.

Ivy glances back, taking in every inch of the store as if she's reliving her time here. I let her have a moment because who knows when she will return. She sighs, then turns back to me. "Okay, let's go."

Standing, I grab the box of truffles and raise my chin. "Thanks, Trix."

She waves as she fumbles with something behind the counter, half distracted. "Thanks for popping in, guys. I've loved having you."

"I had so much fun! I hope I can come back," Ivy calls out as I place my hand on her hip, edging her toward the door.

“You’re welcome any time, hon.”

We exit, heading for my ride as Ivy lets out a long, exaggerated sigh. “That was... exactly what I needed.”

I smile. It’s a gesture that doesn’t come naturally to me, but I find myself doing it more easily around her. Then I place the small box into my saddlebag and grab the helmet, placing it over Ivy’s head. Her plump, full lips turn up just enough to show me how genuinely sweet she really is. She’s completely calm in this moment. The right amount of warmth teamed with a sense of satisfaction—the ease showing on her face giving her a glow brighter than the midday sun.

This woman—she’s fucking gorgeous.

She’s enticing me, pulling me in with her radiance—a brightness to my darkness and depravity. But if I stand here staring at her, she’s going to think I’m a fucking cretin. “I’m glad you enjoyed yourself. Are you full? Do you need anything else to eat?” I ask, in a lame attempt to carry on a conversation.

Good going, dickhead.

“Nope! The giant pressed sandwich, fries, kombucha, and pie were all pretty filling, but thank you for offering. Thanks for bringing me here. It was so freaking good to see how my work is being put to use. Trixie’s doing an incredible job.”

Instinctively, I reach out to slide my fingers up and down her arm. “It’s good to see you smiling. I’m sorry about going off on you earlier. I... I have this version of you in my mind. This innocent, breakable—”

“Virgin...” She sighs. “That’s what this all boils down to, doesn’t it, Void?”

Scrunching up my face, I exhale. “Maybe. I haven’t had anyone like you around me for a long fucking time, and it’s messing with me. Makes me think you should be acting a certain way, but you never fail to surprise me.”

“Just because I haven’t had sex doesn’t mean I have to be this virtuous, Mother Mary, freaking saint-type person. Please don’t make me out to be that kind of girl. I’m just... not.”

“I’m beginning to see that. When I thought I saw you with Dash, it fucking sent me over the edge. You’re also almost ten years younger than me. That’s a big age gap. I have no right to feel that way. But seeing you on your knees, especially with another man... I wasn’t prepared for that vision or the feelings it sparked.”

“I’m twenty-one, you’re thirty. That’s nothing in the scheme of things.” Ivy moves forward and wraps her arms around my waist, her head sliding in against my chest. The shock makes me tense, as I’m a little unsure as to why she’s embracing me. “But thank you. Thank you for opening up to me and not running away this time.”

I wrap my arms around her, holding her to me. My cheek rests on the top of her head. I don’t hug people—ever—but we’re hugging, and fuck, if it’s not the most perfect damn thing in the world.

“I’m fucked-up, Ivy. I won’t even try to hide that fact. There’s a reason they call me Void. I don’t...” Exhaling, I pull her back to an arm’s length away, delving deep into her gorgeous chocolate-brown eyes. “Emotion is not something I’m used to dealing with. Feeling something for someone is foreign. You bring out shit in me that, quite frankly, scares the living hell out of me.”

Ivy brings her hand up to the side of my face, gently caressing it. “I’m glad I scare you. It means you care. When I thought maybe you didn’t, that hurt more than you ignoring me, more than you abandoning me.”

My chest squeezes. “I care...”

Suddenly, a vehicle in my line of sight parks down the street, and the man in the driver’s side pulls out a camera. Not even trying to hide, he brings it up to his eye and takes a snapshot of Ivy and me. Every muscle in my body goes rigid as I grab Ivy, pulling her behind me.

“We need to leave... now.”

She tries to push around me to see what’s happening, but I block her. “Stop! Don’t act suspicious. We have to leave right now.”

“What the—” I cut her off by letting her go, then I slide onto my bike.

Grabbing her hand, I yank Ivy probably harder than necessary for her to sit in behind me, and she doesn’t hesitate to move into position. “Hold on tight, sweet thing. This is gonna be quick.”

I flick the switch, rev the engine, and we peel out onto the street. My eyes focus on the man in the car, but I have no clue who he is. I pass him quicker than legal, with Ivy gripping onto my waist so fucking tight as I speed down the street.

Checking my mirrors, I notice the guy pulling out to follow, so I wrench the throttle to go even faster. The light ahead turns yellow, and I know I’m not going to make it before it goes red, so I give her a bit more acceleration.

“Hang on,” I yell, though Ivy probably can’t hear me over the roar of the engine.

The light flashes red, and I hammer down hard, entering the intersection. I look to my left, not seeing anything, then flash to my right and see two cars heading straight for us.

I drop gears, and the squeal of the cars as they hurtle toward us screeches through the air. The first car fishtails trying to avoid me. He overcorrects, which allows me to ride straight through the middle of the two. Ivy lets out a squeal that sounds more like excitement than anything, and I pull back on the throttle, smoke billowing from my tires as I get us the fuck out of there.

In my side mirror, I see the two cars now blocking the intersection, halting our photographer friend from getting through.

My lips curve as I spin around, making damn quick work of heading the fuck back to the clubhouse. I haven't been involved in anything like that for a long time, and I have to admit, it excites me.

We nearly crashed, though.

If anything happened to Ivy, I would never forgive myself.

But I knew I needed to get away from that guy, whoever he is.

Having someone take pictures of Ivy is not ideal. She's not in America legally. Though she has paperwork saying she is, technically, it's all fake. One wrong move and she could be deported.

I can't have that.

Won't have that.

The idea of Ivy and her sister, Eva, coming so far these past few months just to have it all ripped away again is abhorrent to me. So, I ride like a bat of hell until we're back to the safety of the club and my brothers.

West pulls the gate open as I ride through a little faster than I know I should. Pulling into my usual spot, I kill the engine, and Ivy jumps off, yanking the helmet off her head before I have a second to even slide off my ride.

“What the hell was that?” she screams out.

“Ivy, there was—”

“It was fucking incredible! I’ve never felt such a rush of adrenaline in all my life. Holy shit, Void. That was the most heart-pumping thing I’ve ever done. It was exciting, scary as hell, exhila-fucking-rating! Can we do it again? Right now?” she blurts out in quick succession.

I’m still sitting on my bike, more in shock than anything. I’m not sure why I am surprised by Ivy’s excitement for scary, dark, illegal shit anymore. I should know better. I underestimate her too fucking often.

She places the helmet on the fence, then turns back to me, her face erupting with joy. “Honestly, I’ve never had a rush like that. It was better than sex!”

I snort out a laugh, cocking my brow at her.

“Or... well, so I imagine,” she corrects herself.

Sliding off my ride, I exhale, running my fingers through my hair. “You really are something else.”

She giggles. “No, really... can we do it again?”

Rolling my eyes, I wrap my arm around her shoulders and guide her down the concrete ramp. “No. It was dangerous. I could have gotten us both killed.”

Ivy scoffs, waving her hand through the air dismissively. “You ride like a pro. I was never in any ‘real’ danger.” She uses air quotes, and the smile she sports is contagious.

I shake my head. “That’s not entirely true.”

“What do you mean?” she asks as we walk through the clubhouse doors. She detaches from me, scrunching her face.

I reach out for her hand and grab hold. “C’mon, we gotta go see Nycto.”

Ivy cocks her head, standing her ground. “Void, no. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Void,” Nycto grunts out as he walks across to us. “Got a call from Trixie saying you left the café in a shower of shit. She thought something might be up.”

I roll my shoulders. “Not here. Chapel.”

Nycto grits his teeth but tilts his head toward the rear of the bunker. I grab Ivy’s hand, then walk with her past the pool table toward the large, dark gray double doors with the Defiance logo proudly displayed across the metal. I walk in behind Nycto, the industrial wall lamps giving the ominous vibe it always has in here.

Nycto rounds the metal table and takes his seat at the head. I edge around the other side, sitting to his left, while Ivy moves in beside me.

Nycto pulls out his pack of cigarettes, lighting one up. “Feel like I’m gonna need nicotine for this.”

I grimace. He’s not wrong.

“We were at Trixie’s, as you know. When we were about to leave, I noticed something—”

“Is that why you got weird before we left?” Ivy asks, cutting me off.

I turn to her. “Yeah. There was a car pulled up about fifty feet away from us, but the weird thing was, the driver had a camera. He was taking pictures of Ivy and me.”

Nycto rubs his forehead, clenching his eyes shut tight.

Ivy shrugs. “So? What does that mean?”

“Nothing good,” I tell her. “We’re in the dark about who this could be. What does he want? Is he targeting you, me, the club? If he’s after you... is it just you, or is it Eva too? Is he an underground asshole, or an official—”

“An official?”

I pause, attempting to figure out how to word this right. “You and Eva... you’re here illegally.”

“Oh, shit! You think he could be immigration?” Her eyes widen, and the whites show her fear.

My stomach knots as I turn back to Nycto.

He raises his hands to placate her. “We don’t know anything. Did you get the license plate number, at least?”

“I needed to get out of there, Pres. I needed Ivy safe.”

Nycto sits back in his chair, puffing out a ring of smoke. “Dick move, Void. If you had an opportunity to get the plate, you fucking should have. It would have given us a lead about who the asshole is. Now, we have to sit back and wait, which could be more dangerous than you waiting twenty seconds to get a little intel.”

I sit forward, placing my fists on the table.

I get it. His Old Lady is on the line here too.

He’s angry at the situation, not just me.

“What if we don’t wait? Atomic is fucking smart. You can’t tell me our tech guru didn’t install cameras outside Trixie’s shop. If they’re at the right angle, it might have picked up the car?”

Nycto rubs his chin. “I fucking hope so. In the meantime, you and Eva are back on lockdown,” he says to Ivy. “No going outside the clubhouse gates. Inside the bunker is preferred. You understand me?”

“Yes, Pres,” Ivy relays, like a good little soldier.

I peek at her. Her eyes show strain, the concern etched across her features as she gnaws on her bottom lip so much I’m worried she might break her beautiful skin. I reach across and grab her hand to help calm her.

It doesn’t work.

“As for you, VP, you need to be on lockdown as well. We can’t be sure the photographer was after Ivy. To be safe, you need to stay put too.”

I groan. “I need to be out there trying to find this fucke—”

“No, you need to keep your head. Learn which fight to fight. You can provide insight and feedback, but only if you stay at the club. Plus, I’ll feel better if you’re here to protect my Old Lady when I leave. First step, Atomic—”

“You sayin’ I can’t even be a part of makin’ decisions?”

Nycto scrunches his face. “How have your decisions today gone?”

I scoff. “What the fuck? Not so long ago, you were the one making a hell of a lot of bad decisions around this club.”

“Yeah... exactly! Look what the fuck happened to me because of it. Maybe it worked out in the end, but we all had to go through a truckload of shit to get there. Good people died, Void. If your process is compromised, I need to step in and stop you before you end up hurting yourself or those around you.”

I stand, sending the chair skittering across the floor, then start pacing. I feel Ivy’s eyes on me, but fuck if Nycto isn’t making some version of sense right now. Even though I don’t want to, I get it. Crow and Spite died because of all the shit that went down when Nycto did everything he could for Eva. If I start throwing my weight around for Ivy and shit gets out of control, we could be facing the same damn situation all over again.

My focus is compromised.

Nycto needs to handle this.

“Fine. I’ll step back. But if anything, and I mean anything, comes to light, Nycto—”

“You’ll be the first to know.”

“Right.” With an exhale, I nod.

“Good.” She looks at Nycto. “Ivy, go tell Eva about lockdown. Void, grab Atomic, tell him I need him in here, then go have a fucking drink to take the edge off. Take a minute, yeah?”

My mouth goes dry, and an ache forms at the base of my skull. I breathe in loudly through my nose, trying to calm the nerves firing through me as Nycto’s cell buzzes on the table.

“Take a minute, Void,” Nycto reiterates, then gestures for the door with one hand while picking up his cell with the other.

I grab Ivy’s hand, and we walk for the door. She smiles weakly at me. “C’mon, let’s go to the bar.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

VOID

The Next Day

Ivy seems okay. I spent most of the night with her, and I don't think what happened yesterday has affected her in the same way it has me. Ivy doesn't know this world like I do, so she doesn't know what it could mean. Sure, we've explained it to her, but the depths it could go to and the sinister bullshit behind it could mean so much more.

I make my way over to Nycto. "Pres, can we chat? In the Chapel..."

Removing his lips from Eva's neck, Nycto turns his head, and his eyes bore into me like glaciers. "Now?"

"Now."

Pres groans as he shifts Eva from his lap and onto the seat next to him. "Sorry, chiquita, duty calls."

Eva pecks him on the cheek, and he stands, then walks with me to the Chapel. As we head inside, he grunts out his discontent. "This better be good, VP."

"It's been hours, for fuck's sake. Surely something's come up from yesterday?"

Nycto groans, flopping onto his seat, and I can tell by the lines on his face he's not happy. "Seriously? That's what you called me in here for? Fuck! If I knew something, don't you think I would have already talked to you?"

Letting out a frustrated groan, I run my fingers through my hair when Nycto's cell begins to buzz. I turn to face him as he glances at the number on the screen, then swipes the call. "Yeah?" Nycto grunts down the line. "Didn't quite catch that... who the fuck did you say you are?" Frown lines etch deep into Nycto's forehead as he listens intently to whoever's on the other end.

His expression has me rolling my shoulders, a new tension forming at the base of my neck.

Nycto sits straighter in his chair, listening to every word with steely focus. "Ah-huh. And why would the head of the DeLucas, the biggest Mafia family in Miami, be wanting to meet with me?"

My head jerks back in confusion. The club has known about the DeLucas for years, but with them being almost four hours away from us, we've never crossed into their territory, and they've never ventured into ours. We have nothing to do with each other, so hearing that the head of the DeLucas—Antonio, more commonly known as Titanium Tony because of the number of times he's been shot and lived to tell the tale—wants a meeting with Nycto is something for us to be wary of.

Nycto continues his conversation as I make my way over and take a seat.

"I hear what you're saying, Tony, but I need a reason to allow you to come down here. It's not every day a Mafia kingpin calls asking to drop by my clubhouse to fucking talk. Is this some kind of business transaction?"

Not being able to hear what's being said, my leg bounces as I wait for the next piece of the puzzle.

"All right, Tony, I'll allow it... this time. But don't bring a whole brigade. I'm allowing you and a couple of your capos. You want a meeting, we'll have one, but

this is to be nothing other than mutual talk. You got me?”

I scrunch my brows in confusion. I don't understand why a man like Titanium Tony would need to discuss anything with us.

“Yeah, right. See you in a few.” Nycto ends the call, then slides the cell across the table like it's covered in acid and he's been burned. He lets out an unsatisfied grunt as he turns to me.

I raise my brow, waiting for him to speak, but he says nothing. “Well?” I urge.

Nycto runs his fingers through his hair and lets out a huff. “I couldn't get a read on it. Tony's coming here, now, to have a chat. They're already in our territory. Wouldn't tell me what about. Said he wouldn't discuss it over the phone in case people were listening. Have to admit, it's piqued my interest.”

“You believe it's a good idea to let the DeLucas on our home turf?” I ask, with more than a little concern.

Nycto shrugs. “At least here we have the home advantage. I don't know what Titanium Tony wants, but I am interested in finding out.”

There are many stories of Titanium Tony, the most notorious Mafia don in Florida. He's sneaky, cunning, and a big believer in famiglia. You come after anyone in his house, your body is never found. Fuck knows how they handle disposal, but it's no concern of the club's because we've never crossed paths. Basically, we stay out of his way, and he stays the fuck out of ours. We're far enough away for our territories not to be an issue, so for him to make a special trip down here to see us, it must be for a good reason.

He needs something.

Or one of us has done something.

There's always a reason for another crime syndicate to cross our path, and I'm anxious to hear Tony's.

Atomic signals that the convoy's approaching, so we head outside to the gate as a club, united. We can't be sure how many men Tony's bringing with him, but we need to show him we're not sending out any sort of welcoming committee.

We're being cautious, as we should.

While West pulls open the gates, we stand in a long line with Nycto and me in the center, arms folded across our chests in a show of impatience. Our other brothers are fanned out at our sides in a formation that barricades the entry to the clubhouse.

Four black Audis pull up, and their doors open in perfect synchronicity, so much so I have to hold back my laughter. How many times have they practiced that shit?

In the lead car, the driver steps out, along with the front passenger, both wearing perfectly tailored suits. Their five-o'clock-shadowed chins are well manicured, and they appear more like Italian princes than Mafia as they arrogantly shift to the rear of the car.

They stand to attention while Tony steps out. He's exactly how I would imagine what the ladies call a "silver fox." His hair is dark gray, with a few strands of silver running through it, matching his neatly trimmed graying beard. There's an edge about him as he shoves his hands into the pockets of his impeccably tailored black pants. His crisp white shirt is so fresh, I'm sure it's as new as his ridiculously shiny shoes, which reflect his face.

The man screams wealth.

Actually, more like dirty money, which I'm assuming he has in spades.

Tony's eyes drift to the other side of the car, where a younger man steps out, dressed much the same in an impeccable dark-blue suit. His dusty blond hair sweeps over his head in a styled wave. He too has a well-maintained beard, though his is a darker blond and is in total contrast to Tony. Both are broad in the chest, strong in stature, and ooze confidence as they turn and head toward us, flanked by their men.

Ten guards surround them. So much for coming with a couple of capos. Instead, the asshole's here with a small arsenal.

I glance at Nycto, who appears to stiffen his posture. He's angry—furious. As he should be. This gratuitous show of force from Tony is totally uncalled for.

"Tony, this is not what we agreed," Nycto yells as they approach.

"Your little welcoming party doesn't instill confidence in me either. We both came into this without trust, didn't we, Nycto?"

"I guess so." Nycto sneers. "This, however, is my territory... my clubhouse."

I roll my shoulders. Hearing footsteps behind me, I peek over my shoulder and see Eva chasing Ivy out the clubhouse door. Eva tries to pull her back inside, but Ivy is having none of it, and they both rush up the ramp toward us.

Fucking insolent damn woman!

Swinging back to Tony, I try not to bring attention to the girls, but it's too late. Tony's eyes shift straight past me and directly to them. His lip turns up crookedly.

“Shall we get down to business, then?”

Nycto narrows his eyes. “Thing is, Tony, I don’t know what the hell kind of business you’re bringing to my club. I’m not even sure I want to do business with you.”

Tony signals his men. They begin to fan out, moving in front of us. I tense, not liking how this is going. Nycto grabs for his gun. I reach for mine at the same time, causing a chain reaction from all our brothers. We lift our weapons high, pointing directly at the mafiosos. They halt their approach but don’t react. Their lack of reaction is unnerving, but still, we have the upper hand.

This is our turf. They don’t know Ominous and Brass are hiding outside the gates, sniper rifles aimed directly at these fuckers.

One false move, and it’s hunting season.

“What the hell do you want, Tony?” Nycto grunts, turning his gun to the side menacingly at the don.

Tony’s eyes drift past us toward the two women at the back, who are currently holding each other for comfort. “I want something of yours.”

“You couldn’t ask nicely first, asshole?” I scoff.

The blond capo steps forward and into my space, as if to test my patience. “Call him an asshole again and you’ll see the full force of what the DeLucas can do.”

“You think you can come into this clubhouse and throw your weight around?” Ivy yells, rushing to my side. “This is our place. These are our men, and you’re nothing but a damn gángster!” Ivy curls her lip and spits on the ground.

Matteo surges forward. “Gangster? You think I’m nothing but a gangster, you little who—”

“Matteo, enough!” Tony snaps, placing his hand on his second in command, pulling him back.

“No, I want to hear what he was going to call her,” I jab at the arrogant prick. “You’ll only get the chance to say it once,” I sneer.

Blondie huffs, straightening out his ridiculously expensive suit. “I apologize. I let my anger get the better of me,” he mutters unconvincingly through his teeth.

Ivy shouldn’t even be out here, let alone trying to start a fight with a capo. But I can’t say I’m surprised.

This woman’s a damn firecracker.

“You think you can come in here demanding shit after that display of arrogance?” I scoff out a laugh while Ivy wraps her arms around my waist.

Tony’s eyes linger on Ivy a little longer than I like before he turns to Nycto. “We want to make a deal, Presidente.”

Nycto cracks his neck to the side and clicks the safety off on his gun. “Titanium Tony. Tell me, why should I make a deal with you?”

Tony exhales, his muscles relaxing as he softens his posture. “I have a proposition for you. Purely business. You have something that was en route to me, and I want it back. I want her.”

A shudder runs deep in my very soul. My arm protectively loops around Ivy as I pull

her to me. I don't even want to fathom what the hell he means.

“No.” I’m blunt, curt, my anger coming through like a raging tornado.

Nycto turns to me slightly, his brow creased. “What do you want her for?” Nycto asks, questioning what I’m too fucking terrified to say out loud.

Tony rolls his neck. “Ivy was purchased in Cuba and sold. Then she was taken by her transporters... you, I believe.” He raises an eyebrow. “She was bought for a reason, Nycto, and I paid a hefty sum of money for her.”

Ivy clings to me tighter as this all starts to sink in, and I shift her behind me.

Tony put the purchase order out on Ivy. Possibly Eva too.

Now, the bastard’s here to collect.

Fuck.

Standing taller, Nycto lets out a mocking laugh. “Ha. You got paid, Tony. The money was sent to Andrés, and I know the debt was paid in full. So, technically, I bought Ivy. She belongs to me now, and I plan on keeping her here at the clubhouse, where she belongs.”

Tony rolls his shoulders like he’s trying to keep himself calm. “Thing is, Presidente, I need her. Why do you think she had such a high price tag? She’s valuable... to me, to my family.”

“I’m gonna need a reason, Tony, and ‘valuable’ ain’t gonna cut it,” Nycto grunts out.

Tony turns to Ivy, ignoring Nycto and me. “Ivy, signora. As I’m sure you’re aware,

your blood is rare. When other people who have the same blood type as yours are sick, it's extremely hard for them to obtain blood transfusions. They need blood from a matching donor."

I don't like where this shit's going.

"I'm following," Ivy calls out to him.

Tony's forehead creases. Something passes over his eyes, but only for the briefest of moments, showing a weakness in him. "My daughter, Mia..." He pauses, like he's having trouble saying the next part. "She's sick. She needs transfusions. She needs blood... your blood."

I roll my eyes, letting out a scoff. "Yeah, right."

Matteo rushes forward, but Tony stops him. "Matteo, stop! Mia wouldn't want this."

Matteo's nostrils flare. He breathes harshly through his nose as he turns, pacing his anger off. Either Matteo's playing this up, has serious anger issues, or he actually cares about this Mia girl.

Ivy steps out of my grip and toward Matteo. I go to pull her back, but she warns me off with a wave of her hand and a death glare. Ivy reaches out and grabs Matteo's arm.

He spins dramatically, but notices it's Ivy and softens.

"You care about Mia?" she asks.

Matteo huffs. "That's not your concern."

“Um... it actually is. If I’m going to come with you, I need to know everything.”

“She’s but a child, signora,” Tony continues. “We had hoped you would donate your blood to help her. I can show you a photo. She is my world.”

“You want to let an innocent child suffer?” Matteo says through gritted teeth.

“Don’t try to manipulate her!” I snap.

“What’s wrong with Mia? Why does she need my blood?” Ivy’s pressing the issue... as though she’s actually thinking about going with them.

“Mia has leukemia. She needs a transfusion to replace the red blood cells in her body after treatment. But because of her blood type...”

“Golden blood,” Ivy mumbles under her breath.

Tony and Matteo dip their chins as Ivy exhales. “I’ll need to do this close to home—”

“We should discuss this as a club, Ivy,” I blurt out.

Ivy returns to me, grabbing my hands in hers. “Void, I understand you want to protect me, but I can’t let an innocent girl suffer when I can help. Plus, it’s only a transfusion. It’s not like they’re going to kill me for it.”

I scoff. “They might.”

“We won’t,” Matteo states.

“Ivy’s blood is rare,” Tony offers. “We need Mia to get well and live a long, happy life. No harm will come to either of them, not while Mia is alive. If you help us with

Mia and be there when we call, we will return the favor. We will protect them, at all costs. This is our deal.”

Nycto glances at me, raising a brow.

Everything in me screams not to agree, but it’s a good fucking deal. If the DeLucas are putting themselves on the line to protect Ivy and Eva, and all we have to do in return is give a little blood and show up to protect Mia, then I guess it’s a fair trade.

I give Nycto a subtle nod, and he walks over to Tony. “All three girls are safe in this,” Nycto clarifies.

“All three,” Tony reassures.

“Does this mean we’re in alliance? The DeLucas and Tampa Defiance?” Nycto asks.

Tony bows his head. “If Ivy comes with us willingly, then yes, we are at an understanding.”

Nycto’s eyes shift to mine. He’s testing the waters, seeing where I sit with this deal. An alliance with the DeLucas is huge, but putting Ivy in danger churns my stomach. The idea of her going with them has me on edge. I turn to her, and she smiles.

“I’ll go, as long as I get to come back to the clubhouse. I’m not staying with you indefinitely, Tony,” Ivy asserts.

There’s that fire I adore so fucking much.

“Fine. You come with us... alone. Today. You donate. We bring you back. Simple as that.”

“Not simple. She’s not going alone,” I blurt, my skin crawling at the thought of no one being there to protect her.

Ivy grips my hand tighter. “I’ll be fine. They need me, Void. They won’t hurt me.”

“Yeah, but what about after they take your blood?” I whisper in her ear.

The corner of her lips creeps up infinitesimally. “This isn’t a one-time thing. Why do you think they’re making this alliance? It’s because they anticipate needing me in the future. This is the deal, Void. I’m Mia’s very own personal blood bank. They’re not going to risk anything happening to me... for Mia’s sake.”

Matteo shrugs in agreement. “She’s right. We do need her,” Matteo mumbles, his voice becoming strained.

“I go with her,” I say. “I won’t have her going on her own. We might be in an alliance, but I don’t trust you as far as I can throw you.”

Tony huffs out a grunt. “I’ll take a prospect. No one else. No offense, Vicepresidente, but having one of the heads of the MC table in my home doesn’t sit right with me. Not yet.”

“Then she doesn’t go. End of discus—”

“Void... I have to go. Not only for Mia, but for the alliance. You know it’s true.” Ivy’s tight grip on my bicep tells me she’s not messing about right now.

My muscles clench as I grit my teeth. Bartering with mafiosos isn’t my finest hour, but at least this way, someone will be with Ivy. A prospect who will take care of her, even if that person irritates the hell out of me. “Dash... it has to be Dash. Dash will go.”

Ivy's eyes meet mine. There's understanding in them. She knows I only want to protect her, but also how hard it is for me to send her with Dash.

Dash steps forward hesitantly, a little unsure of himself. My narrowed eyes meet his, and he nods, letting me know he's got this. If anyone will put themselves on the line for Ivy, I know it will be Dash.

He cares about her.

He's the only choice.

Nycto walks over to Tony, holding out his hand. They shake, and Tony claps Nycto on the shoulder.

"Perfecto. Now we are settled, let's be on our way. We have a four-hour drive to Miami—"

"You look after them like they're a part of your own fucking family, Tony," I demand. "Any harm comes to either Ivy or Dash, and we won't hesitate in starting an all-out fucking war. And trust me when I say, the first target we hunt down will be Mia."

"Understood. We'll bring Ivy and Dash back tomorrow evening. I'll keep in touch, Nycto. Make you aware of what's happening."

"Make sure you do."

"It's hard for me not being in charge of this situation," Tony continues, "but I do appreciate you helping us out. My famiglia thanks your MC."

Nycto dips his chin as I pull Ivy to me in a tight embrace, pain searing through my

chest like I can't breathe. Ivy's hands smooth up and down my back under my cut in a calming manner as I cling to her. I'm anything but fucking calm.

"Stop. I'm going to be fine," she whispers in my ear.

Pulling back slightly, I stare into her gorgeous chocolate-brown eyes. They're so calm, so stoic, while I stand here, ready to fucking explode. "You call me the second you feel something's off," I tell her. "I'll be on my bike and there faster than you know."

She smiles weakly. "You'll be four hours away. If anything happens, you'll be too far to do much. But Dash will be with me. I'm sure he won't let anything happen. I'll be fine, I promise."

She didn't mean for it to sting quite like that, but fuck, it did. Dash is going to be there for her, not me, and there's not a damn fucking thing I can do about it. Why the hell didn't I choose West?

"Be safe. Listen to your gut instinct," I tell her.

Ivy's lips turn upward. "Always do." She leans in, plants a light kiss on my cheek, then turns to grab Dash's hand, and they both step toward the Audis.

"Matteo," I call out. He lifts his chin in answer. "Touch her in any way, I'll fucking kill you."

Matteo chuckles. "Putting all your cards on show is stupid. Anyone here can see what... or who... your weakness is, and your enemies can use her to their advantage. You need to rein in your emotions. Just a word of advice, brother."

"I'm not your fucking brother. And was that a threat?"

“Not a threat...” Matteo smirks. “Purely an observation. Keep your emotions in check when she’s around, or people will use her against you. I speak from experience.”

I raise my brow in curiosity, but Matteo spins, then heads for the car without another word.

Tony exhales, cracking his neck to the side. “The thing is, Vicepresidente, Matteo is complicated. His past... well, you remind me of him a few years ago. We will get your woman back to you. In one piece. Alive and well. You have my word.”

Nycto grabs my shoulder as I exhale. “That’s all I ask.”

“I’ll wait to hear from you, Tony,” Nycto adds. “Regular updates. We’re nonnegotiable on this. You hear me?”

Tony dips his head in acknowledgment, then walks back to the car he vacated and glides inside.

As Ivy and Dash slide into the back of an Audi, I keep watching. The door closes behind her, then the car reverses away from the clubhouse gates, and I know there’s little I can do now.

My feet are restless with the urge to chase after her, but the car turns, drives off onto the main road, and then out of sight, taking Ivy and Dash with them.

Did I just let Ivy go with a prospect—the same prospect who’s been vying for her affections?

What the fuck have I done?

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

IVY

The four-hour drive to Miami should have felt long—tedious, even—but to be honest, it's been nice. I've been able to see parts of America I would have never been able to on my own. Dash has been making me laugh the whole way, keeping me entertained and my mind off the idea that I'm going to have blood drained from me in a short while. But in all honesty, if I'm going to be saving a little girl's life, then I'll do it weekly if it means she gets to live.

Dash's stomach growls loudly, and I grin.

"You ever not hungry?" I ask.

He shrugs. "I don't think so. I believe my stomach goes the full length of my torso, then down my legs, at which point, it's bottomless."

I snort out a laugh while rolling my eyes. "Hopefully they will feed us where we're going."

"Feed us to the wolves, more like it." Dash eyes the men in the front of the car warily.

"I don't know. It seems to me like they really just want to help Mia." I take a drink from the water bottle Tony gave me, which he said I needed to drink before we arrive. Dash drank some of it first and waited twenty minutes for a reaction, just to be safe.

“You trust too easily.”

“Maybe you don’t trust enough?” I smile, and he bumps his shoulder into mine.

“I trust you.”

“Then trust me when I say we’re going to be fine. From the sounds of it, Tony and Matteo only have Mia’s best interests at heart. They’re trying to look out for their family.”

Dash’s stomach growls again, so he grabs the backrest of the driver’s seat and leans through the gap in the middle. “Yo, chauffeur. Can we drive through a Chick-fil-A? I have a hankering for a Deluxe.”

The front passenger pulls out a gun and aims it at Dash’s head. “Sit back and shut up. We’re almost there.”

I stifle a small giggle.

Dash raises his hands in surrender before slumping back into his seat. “Geez, man. Hunger pangs make some people real snappy.”

Looping my arm with Dash’s, I say, “Stop causing trouble.”

Dash flashes his lopsided smirk, then winks. “My middle name is trouble.”

I groan. “Pleecease stop!”

He chuckles under his breath. The car turns a corner, then pulls down a pristine street. Off to the left is a waterway sparkling in the evening sun. Boats line the docks in the marina, swaying in the gentle breeze.

The cars pull into a white driveway lined with giant palm trees. The house in front of us is huge—all red brick and beams with massive windows. The front lawn is perfectly manicured, almost like someone has cut it with a pair of scissors, making this exude Floridian paradise. Except for all the security cameras—attached to the overhangs of the roofing, they give the place a menacing tone.

It's gorgeous. Like nothing I've ever seen before. I wish Eva were here to witness this splendor.

Dash's stomach rumbles again, breaking me from my daze as the car halts completely. My face is practically smooshed against the window as I try to take it all in.

The front passenger steps out and comes around to my side, then opens the door. "Miss Pérez. If you'd follow me?"

I glimpse over my shoulder at Dash.

"She's not going anywhere without me," Dash grunts as I slide out of the car.

Dash follows, and the soldier reaches out, grabbing me by the arm. Dash instantly hoists his gun, aiming it directly at the guy. "Get your fucking hand off her. You want her to go somewhere, you ask her nicely, like a damn gentleman. You do not, I repeat, you do not manhandle her, or I will put a bullet in your skull."

The soldier drops my arm as Tony and Matteo storm over with anger crossing their faces.

"What the hell is going on?" Tony asks, his voice louder than necessary. "Why are you aiming your weapon?"

Grabbing Dash's loaded hand, I pull it down, placating him. "Simple misunderstanding. Everything's cool here, right, guys?" I offer as the two men stare each other down.

Dash curls his lip but stows his weapon as the Mafia soldier rolls his shoulders.

"I was bringing her over for you, Tony."

"Ivy is an honored guest in this house. We treat her as such, capisci?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ora vaffanculo!"

The soldier spins on his heels and scurries off without saying another word.

In amusement, I raise my brows at Dash, who's trying to hold in his laughter.

Tony holds out his hand to me. "Come, signora. Let's take you to meet Mia."

Taking Tony's hand, I smile as he starts walking me toward the entrance of the giant house, but I make sure to peek over my shoulder to ensure Dash is following. He's walking behind me alongside Matteo, so I relax a little, now being more at ease.

I'm glad Dash has my back, but I do wish Void were here.

Tony ushers me inside the lavish two-story mansion.

My eyes widen as I take in what's in front of me. A grand staircase leads up to the second floor, with plush cream carpet lining the stairs. Gorgeous polished wood banisters and ornate ironwork railings lead to the top.

To my right is an offset coffee area with a built-in seat. Plush white and silver cushions are placed perfectly, giving it a homey feel. The opaque curtains are pulled to the side, and the coffee area overlooks the sparkling waterway and marina out the back—a perfect spot to spend the afternoon reading and relaxing, I would imagine.

Tony leads us through and to the left, which opens to a spacious living room, the colors warm and earthy, brown leather and chestnut wood. Red cushions are scattered along the huge black chesterfield sofa, which seems excessively large in the floor space. A matching armchair sits at the end of the sofa, in pride position. It's worn, like maybe it's been in the family for generations.

At the rear of the living area, the kitchen is sleek and modern in design with accents of red, black, and stainless steel, but Tony guides me away, leading us up a set of stairs before I can take a good look at it.

Damn! I really wanted to investigate the house further. It has an old-world charm about it, but it's still really freaking beautiful and tasteful. I've never seen anything like this. Ever.

The soft sound of a television flows through the air when we make it to the top, and it's just as stunning up here. As we reach the landing, it opens onto another living room, only this one is a hell of a lot smaller. This might be more of a chill-out zone, with a two-seater love seat and two smaller recliners facing the massive television mounted on the wall between two giant windows. They, too, gaze out over the glorious waterway. The views from this home are to die for.

“Seriously, Tony, how rich are you?” Dash quips.

Tony doesn't reply as he leads Dash, Matteo, and me across the expanse toward the room where the sounds are coming from. “Money isn't an issue,” Tony finally replies.

“I bet it’s not, you ol’ dog.”

I roll my eyes, and Tony doesn’t respond.

We approach a door, and Tony knocks gently on it.

“Come in,” a gentle voice chimes from the other side.

Tony opens the door and tilts his head for us to follow him. As we enter, I take in a beautiful blonde woman sitting on the pink princess-themed bed, running her fingers over the bald head of a little girl. She must be six, maybe seven at most.

Mia.

The woman stands and smiles wide at Matteo, but bypasses him for Tony. She slides into his arms and gives him a polite kiss on the lips. “Amore mio.”

“How is she doing?” Tony asks, as Matteo moves in to sit on the edge of Mia’s bed. Matteo stares lovingly down at her.

The love Matteo obviously has for Mia pours off him in waves as he sits back, leaving her to sleep.

Dash and I stand by the door, letting the scene play out in front of us, not really knowing what to say or do.

“She’s doing better today. It’s a good day,” the woman says, appearing happy.

“Excellent news, Amalia. Our family would be lost without you.”

Is Amalia Tony’s wife? Mia’s mom?

“We’d be lost without you, Antonio.” They lean in and kiss again.

I widen my eyes at Dash, suddenly a little uncomfortable with the DeLucas’ public display of affection. Matteo groans.

Tony chuckles and pulls back from Amalia, who wipes her lips before moving over to me. “Sorry... my husband has a profound effect on me. You’ll understand when you meet someone you can’t get enough of.”

My mind flashes instantly to Void.

The way my body reacts when he touches me.

The way I want to let all my inhibitions go when I’m around him.

I could get lost in him—if only he would let me.

Amalia smirks. “I know that look. You have someone already. Someone you feel strongly about.”

Dash turns to face me, his eyes lighting up.

Amalia tilts her head. “You do too, prospect. Hmm... this will be a fun excursion for you both.”

Mia mumbles under her breath, making us all turn to look at her.

“Mia, principessa? Are you waking up?” Matteo whispers, his hand moving out to caress her pale cheek.

Her eyelashes flutter, her bright green eyes blinking leisurely. A slow smile lights her

face as she sees Matteo sitting on the edge of her bed. Suddenly, with all the energy she can muster, Mia shoots up and throws her arms around Matteo's neck, pulling him in for an embrace. "Uncle Matty, you're here, you're here!"

My stomach clenches as Amalia's palm moves to her chest, her face drooping like her happiness is bittersweet. Matteo embraces Mia tightly, but there's a little hesitation in him—he doesn't want to hurt her. He adores her.

It's only now I realize the blond hair of Matteo, the blonde hair of Amalia, and the fact Mia called Matteo 'uncle' suggests maybe Amalia and Matteo are siblings. Matteo is Tony's brother-in-law. The reason Matteo cares for Mia so much is because he's actually Mia's uncle.

They are family.

I get it.

She's his niece, and he wants to protect her.

"I'll always be here for you, Mia-bear, you know that," Matteo tells her, pulling back to plant a tender kiss on her bald scalp.

"You're showing your hand, Matteo," Dash quips.

After elbowing Dash in the ribs and he snickers to himself, my eyes widen when everyone turns to face us. Their eyebrows shoot up in surprise—it's like they forgot we were here.

Matteo grunts, stands from Mia's bed, and straightens his suit. "The thing is, prospect, with the way you look at Ivy, you've played yours too. Guess it makes us both vulnerable."

I scrunch my brows, and Dash's nostrils flare as he lashes out. "You don't know shit!"

"Enough with the pissing contest." Tony interrupts Matteo and Dash in whatever the hell that little display was all about. "We're here to introduce Ivy to Mia. Nothing more."

My eyes meet Mia's, which are practically glowing in happiness, even though her weakened body doesn't show the same light. "It's nice to meet you, Ivy."

I give a little wave. "Nice to meet you too, Mia. I'm going to help you with some... um, stuff," I say, not really sure what they've told her about me or what I'm allowed to tell Mia.

"You're the one with the golden blood, like me?"

With wide eyes, I turn to Tony. "Matteo likes to tell her stories of a fair maiden with golden blood who will come save her. Mia loves a good fairy tale."

"Uncle Matty tells the best ones." Mia shines with excitement as Matteo winks at her.

"So, are you her? The fair maiden?" Mia asks, bouncing up and down on the edge of her bed excitedly.

"Don't waste your energy, principessa," Tony warns.

She instantly stops, but her big doe eyes stare up at mine.

She's so freaking adorable. I can't deny her. "Yes. I'm the maiden Uncle Matty told you about." I shift my eyes to Matteo, and he grimaces—pretty sure nobody but Mia calls him Matty.

Oh well, he can deal with it.

“I’m gonna try to make you feel better, Mia.”

Her face lights up as if I’ve just told her I’m the fricking tooth fairy, or like all her Christmases have come at once. “Thank you! Can you stay and play dress-ups?”

My eyes shift to Dash. “Only if Dash can play too.”

Matteo snorts out a laugh as Dash cracks his fingers with a cocky smirk. “I dunno. I mean, really? I’ve never played dress-ups before. Not sure I want to start now.”

Matteo narrows his eyes like he’s unimpressed by Dash’s less-than-enthusiastic attitude.

“Oh! Can I put makeup on you?” Mia gushes.

Matteo glares at Dash, almost snarling at him. “Dash, I’m sure you don’t want to let the little principessa down, now, do you?”

Dash rolls his shoulders, his eyes meeting mine pleadingly.

I grimace and mouth, Sorry, before Tony gently grips my bicep. “Signora, I need you to come with me. We have a technician in a room across the hall ready to start,” Tony states.

Taking in a deep breath, I bob my head. “Okay, yep. Sure.”

“It will take some time. Dash will stay in here with Mia. There’s no need for him to come. We are literally across the hall. I want Mia occupied, and I need your full attention.”

I turn to Dash, who's preoccupied with having an Elsa costume held up to his torso by an excited princess. "Dash, I'm going to be right across the hall getting this done."

"I'll come with," he says, sounding desperate.

"No, you stay here. Entertain Mia. Get made up all pretty, but make sure you keep it all on to show me when I'm done."

"Are you sure? I don't want you out of my sight. The VP will kill me if anything happens to you."

"I'm going to ensure Ivy is well cared for, Dash," Tony reassures him. "Thank you for playing with Mia. I appreciate it. Matteo will stay also."

Dash somberly slams his ass down on a tiny little pink plastic chair as Mia pulls out her children's kit of makeup. Matteo steps in beside him and leans against the wall, his arms folded over his huge chest, with a slight upturn of his lips. I can tell Matteo's going to enjoy this.

The DeLucas lead me out of Mia's room and across the hall.

"Without your blood..." Amalia's eyes flood with tears. "I don't know what would happen to Mia, or how much longer she will have."

With an exhale, I reach for her hand and give it a reassuring squeeze. "Everything's going to be just fine."

Amalia quickly wipes a stray tear from her eye. Her tough Mafia queen exterior shifts firmly back in place as Tony opens the door to the room. Laughter from Mia's room echoes across the hall, making me smile despite the sterility of the room I'm walking into. It's like a doctor's surgical area. A patient bed sits in the middle of a linoleum

floor, the color scheme a stark white, with medical equipment lining the walls at every turn. A bench with surgical tools and instruments sits off to one side, and a couple of people dressed in scrubs stand out of the way, with gloves on and surgical masks covering their faces.

“Mr. DeLuca, we’re ready to go when you are,” a woman in scrubs says.

Tony nods and ushers me inside. I have to admit, seeing all this medical shit is making me second-guess my decision.

Amalia comes into my line of sight, but her kind eyes soothe me somehow. “This must look daunting, Ivy, but I swear, it’s only because we want everything to be as sterile and as precise as possible. We have the best team working on this so nothing will go wrong.”

My breathing has become fast and shallow, my muscles clenched with nerves. Through gritted teeth, I say, “Okay. What do I need to do?”

The nurse—doctor? I have no idea what she is—comes over carrying a clipboard. “Ivy, I’m Larah. I have just a couple of questions to ask before we get underway. Okay?”

“Sure.”

“Have you had any aspirin in the last forty-eight hours?”

I shake my head. “No.”

She ticks something on her clipboard. “Excellent. Did Mr. DeLuca have you drink some fluids on the way up here so you’re well-hydrated?”

“Yes. I was told to drink half a gallon of water before I arrived. It’s why I had to stop to pee so much.”

Larah chuckles as she ticks whatever the hell she’s ticking off on her paperwork.

“Now, I have to ask the following questions, Ivy, so bear with me...”

I nod, taking a deep breath to try and calm my nerves.

“Do you have high or low blood pressure?”

“Not that I’m aware.”

“Do you have or have you ever come into contact with HIV, hepatitis, or viruses of the like?”

I widen my eyes. “No. God, no!”

“I know these questions are invasive, Ivy, but you’re doing great. Almost there...”
She smiles. “Are you or is there a chance you could be pregnant?”

Heat flushes over my face as I sink in on myself. I’ve never been ashamed of my virtue, but for some reason, hearing it out loud in this setting makes me realize how much I’ve been missing out on. There’s no real reason I haven’t had sex. I just haven’t found the right guy to give myself over to. I haven’t found anyone worthy enough for me to give them my body. Maybe by doing that, I’m holding myself back from experiencing life, from experiencing all the things a twenty-one-year-old should be experiencing.

“Ivy?”

I snap my head back to the woman. “Shit, sorry! I got distracted. No. No chance I

could be pregnant.”

Tony inhales deeply, like this fills him with immense pleasure, even though—assuming nothing has changed since he ordered my abduction—he should already know this fact.

The woman’s kind eyes meet mine. “Then we’re good to go. The process we’re about to do is called a red blood cell extraction. Hemoglobin, a protein within red blood cells, delivers oxygen from the lungs to every part of the body. It’s a basic transfusion... we’re just going to take some of your blood, test it for any concerns, then provide it to Mia as an infusion.” I follow along, understanding what she’s saying from the small amount of medical training I had before I was abducted from Cuba. “This entire process takes around an hour or so. You may experience some mild side effects like chills, tingling, or light-headedness. So please, inform me right away if you feel anything like that.”

I expel a long breath through my mouth as I let it all sink in.

Tony steps up to my side and reaches for my hand. “Signora, thank you for coming here of your own volition. I will never be sorry that I purchased you and had you taken from your home, because I need that blood in your veins. However, you are a decent woman, and I will give you one chance to walk away before I change my mind.”

My eyes widen. “You’ll let me leave? Even though it’s detrimental to Mia?”

Amalia scowls, folding her arms over her chest. “Antonio, what are you doing?”

Tony exhales. “There is a caveat, but I won’t tell you what it is before you make your decision. Stay of your own free will, or leave. It is your choice.”

“I don’t know what your so-called caveat is, Tony, but I’m sure it’s not good. Regardless, I’m not walking away from Mia. I am doing this.”

Tony smiles, then signals to the medical team.

They start fluttering around, setting everything up.

“Excellent. I know you and Eva suffered when you were taken. That you suffered, I regret. But you seem to have found your feet in Tampa.”

When I think about the bunker-style clubhouse, the brothers, the club girls, and everyone there who makes it my home, warmth floods through me. I have never felt like I belong somewhere more in my life.

“The clubhouse is my home now. I can’t imagine my sister and I being anywhere else.”

Tony gestures to the bed.

With anxious steps, I walk over and sit, and a cocky expression lights his face.

“It’s a good thing you chose to stay, then, because my caveat would have been to take your sister instead.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

IVY

The tang of the orange juice hits my tastebuds, refreshing my dry mouth. I have to admit I'm a little dizzy, but it's nothing I can't handle.

"Are you feeling well?" Tony asks.

"Accomplished. I hope this helps."

Amalia wipes under her eyes again, and I smile at her as Tony helps me sit up in the inclined bed. "I can't thank you enough, signora. Now, we get the blood cells into Mia and see how it works."

"When will you do the transfer?"

"Probably tomorrow. Larah needs to examine the blood to make sure it's viable before it goes into Mia. Everything must be perfect."

"I hope it works out for you, and that my blood is good enough."

Tony squeezes my shoulder. "Me too, bella, me too." He holds his hand out in front of me. I take it and slowly slide off the bed. My head spins ever so slightly, so I stand still to get my equilibrium to settle down. Tony gestures to my juice box. "Drink, signora. It will help."

I bring the juice to my lips, sucking on the straw as Tony walks with me back to Mia's room, where laughter bellows through from the other side of the door. When

we enter, Matteo is sitting in the corner, holding a fairy wand, with a big scowl on his face.

His eyes widen. He places the wand on the bed, stands tall, and puffs out his chest, while Mia sings out the chorus to “Let It Go” from Frozen. Dash spins as if he’s pretending to shoot ice from his hands, his face covered in the brightest blush I’ve ever seen. His eyelids are an almost neon blue eye shadow, and he has lipstick smeared all over his lips, and even a little on his five o’clock shadow. And don’t forget the long blonde Elsa wig he’s sporting or the blue ice-queen dress.

He looks spectacular.

Dash spots me, smiles cockily, then keeps playing with Mia, completely unashamed as he rushes around the bed with her.

I think he’s actually having fun.

Matteo glances over at us, folding his arms over his chest. “If Mia wants you to dress like a princess, you dress like a fuckin’ princess. Mia asked politely if Dash would dress up with her. He was hesitant, so I pointed a gun to his head, and now, he’s Elsa... just like that.”

I raise my brow as Mia flops down on the mattress in a fit of giggles. “This is the best! Uncle Matty, can you and Dash come play every day?”

Dash leans against the wall and lets out a long breath. He must be exhausted. I wonder how many musical numbers he’s done. I try to hold in my laugh as Matteo walks over and sits on the bed next to her. “Dash can’t be here every day, principessa. Plus, you need to rest, especially after that.”

Mia’s happy expression weakens, and she sighs. “Dash?”

“Yeah, kiddo?” He’s puffing like he’s still trying to inhale a lungful of air.

“Will you come see me again?”

Dash lights up like a damn neon sign. “You better fuckin’ believe it.”

“Prospect! Stop swearing in front of my daughter. I let you get away with it once, but that’s enough,” Tony grunts.

“Sorry! Shit! Fuck!” Dash raises his hands in the air in surrender as I snicker. Dash’s eyes flick to mine. “How did you do? You okay?” Dash asks, trying to change the subject.

I nod, which causes my head to spin. Grabbing hold of the wall, I reach out to stabilize myself, and Dash scurries over to me. He wraps his arms around me tightly to hold me up. “Hey, I got you. What did you do to her?”

I groan. “Stop, Dash, I’m fine. I just need to sit down for a little while. They took my blood, remember?”

Dash places the back of his hand to my forehead. “You’re all clammy. You sure you did it right, Tony?”

Tony rolls his shoulders. “Let’s get you to bed. You can rest. We will bring you something to eat.”

“Not sure I’m up for food right now,” I admit.

“I am. Shit, my stomach’s been growling for hours,” Dash quips.

“That’s true,” Matteo adds. “Like him, his stomach never shuts up.”

“It’s getting late. We’ll set up your room so you can both get settled,” Amalia offers.

Dash’s ears prick up. “We’re in the same room?”

Amalia laughs. “Separate beds, cowboy.”

“Good.” Dash nods matter-of-factly. “Then I can keep an eye on her. Make sure she’s okay through the night.”

Tony’s gaze shifts to Amalia. “We thought you’d want to do that.”

My muscles tense. If Void knew I was sharing a room with Dash, I don’t know how he would feel. But we’re in separate beds, and Void did want Dash to watch over me.

It’s only one night. And I like that he’s right there for protection should I need it.

“Okay, Ivy looks like she’s about to pass out. Let’s get her to bed,” Dash instructs. “Night, Anna.”

Mia giggles again, the sound angelic. “Night, Elsa!”

“Night, Olaf,” Dash and Mia both say in unison to Matteo.

He groans, trying to fight back his smile. “Goodnight, principessa.” Matteo leans down to place a kiss on Mia’s forehead, then gently pulls the covers up over her. “Sleep tight.”

She reaches out, grabbing Matteo’s hand. “Uncle Matty?”

“Yeah?”

“Love you.”

He leans down, taking her into a tight embrace. “Ti amo anch’io amore mio.”

I’m not sure what Matteo just murmured to Mia, but apparently, she understands as she cuddles into him. Leaving them to their moment, I turn and head out the door.

Dash wraps his arm around my shoulders, leaning into my ear. “Don’t tell anyone I told you this, but Matteo’s all right. He loves that kid more than anything. He’s a great uncle, and once he started loosening up in there, he was pretty cool with that cute kid.”

Tony chuckles behind us, making us both turn. “Matteo has many layers. It surprised me he unraveled some of them in front of you, Dash, especially considering how turbulent you both started out. But as we all know, my daughter is his weakness, and if she took a shining to you, then he will too. Your room is this one.” Tony gestures to a room off to the right.

We all veer, and as I walk in, Dash switches on the light, sending a glow over the room. The first thing to catch my eye is the giant floor-to-ceiling windows looking out over the waterway, the silvery moon shining bright as it reflects on the waves. There’s a large bed, maybe a queen-size, facing the giant windows overlooking the water. I can’t think of anything more calming to wake up to. Then there’s a small alcove where a single bed is situated with a couple of sofa chairs and a door leading out to a balcony. I shake my head at the extravagance of this room. I’m sure there’s also an attached bathroom off to the side. Tony is crazy rich. I can’t even fathom having a home like this, and this is only one bedroom.

“I hope everything is to your satisfaction?” Amalia questions.

I walk over to the window, taking in the magnificent view. “You have an amazing

home.”

“I’m very lucky. You should get some rest, Ivy. You’re free to roam the house, but please don’t leave the grounds, for your safety and ours. We will have the staff bring some food to your room in a short while,” Amalia offers.

I turn back to see Dash checking out the softness of the single mattress.

Tony dips his chin at me. “You’re welcome to call home, tell them what’s going on. You’ll be heading back in the morning. I will have my men drive you. For now, though, good night, signora.”

I wave my hand in the air. “Night, Tony.”

He and Amalia head off, closing the door behind them.

Dash opens his very intense shadowed eyes. “Holy shit! Did we crack the jackpot or what?”

I try to hold it in but fail as I burst out laughing.

Dash scrunches up his face, and I sit on the giant bed before I fall over. “Jesus, Dash, I can’t take you seriously made up like that.”

He waves me off dismissively. “Just ’cause I’m pretty don’t mean you gotta hate on me for it.”

“Seriously, you need to look in the mirror.”

His dorky smirk lights up his face, then he heads for the adjoining bathroom while I sip on my juice, waiting for his reaction.

“Jesus. Fucking. Christ! It’s like a bunch of paint cans exploded over my face.”

I erupt in laughter again, falling back on the bed. “Told you so!”

“That little shit! Good thing I like her.”

I laugh as I hear the faucet turn on.

“I’m gonna call Void!” I yell out to Dash as I pick up my cell, dialing the number.

It’s already ringing when Dash calls back, “Tell him I’m looking gorgeous for you tonight!”

“What the fuck?” Void grunts down the line.

I chuckle. “There was this whole thing with Dash and Mia... yeah, I’ll tell you about it later. I just wanted to check in and tell you I’m okay.”

Void lets out a relieved sigh. “I was so fucking worried, sweet thing. Is Tony treating you okay?”

A genuine smile lights my face. “Yeah. They’re really hospitable. And the donation wasn’t that bad at all.”

“And the room is fucking epic, man,” Dash calls out, rubbing a towel over his hair as he walks in.

Void is quiet for a pass as I relax back. “Void, you there?”

“Are you and Dash sharing a room?”

My muscles tense. “I mean... kind of. It’s the same space, but his bed is in a different section—”

“But he’s in there... with you... while you’ll be sleeping?”

“Void, you sent him here to protect me. How can he do that if he’s in a different room?”

Dash quietly walks over to his side, giving me some space.

Void grunts down the line, letting out a loud, annoyed huff. “I’m glad you’re okay. I gotta go—”

“Void!”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” And with those few parting words, he ends the call.

Closing my eyes, I sigh, then slowly place the cell on the bed next to me. I wish Void were here with me so he could see there’s absolutely nothing for him to worry about. His fears are not warranted.

My one simple wish is that he would trust me.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

VOID

Listen to him, prancing around like he's king fucking dick. I should have never let that fucker go with her! The idea that he's spending the night with Ivy, fantasizing about her while she's practically sleeping beside him, eats at my very fucking core. She can't see that he's in deep, but I know lust when I see it, and the prospect is all about getting into Ivy's panties.

If the fucker makes a move while I'm not there, so help me fucking God, the outcome won't be pretty.

My muscles tense, and heat washes over me as I pick up the nearest thing and hurl it across the room. The short glass narrowly misses Nycto, smashing on the floor by the pool table. Shards burst all over the concrete by his feet.

Nycto's eyes widen, and he glares at me.

I swing back to the bar and give it a few taps.

Stacey grimaces but quickly pours me another Jack.

The heavy boots of Nycto moving in behind me are unmistakable as I simmer at boiling point. His hand on my back doesn't shock me, but the jerking motion of him hoisting me by my shirt up from my seat does. I stumble haphazardly as he yanks. I turn to face him, but he drags me toward the Chapel without stopping.

“What the fuck, man?”

He shoves me forward. “Walk!”

I shrug and straighten my cut, trying to gain some semblance of dignity. But I know I’m on the edge of something here. The problem is, Nycto knows it too. This was coming.

We walk into the Chapel, and he slams the door shut behind me.

“Look, I wasn’t aiming the glass at—”

“I don’t give a shit about the glass, brother. I’m more concerned about you! What the fuck has you throwing projectiles through the clubhouse?”

Letting out a heavy exhale, I slump back on the edge of the table. I need to take a load off. This shit is weighing me down so heavy. “This ain’t me, Pres.”

Nycto dips his chin in understanding and moves to the head of the table, sliding out his chair. “Sit. Talk to me.”

Groaning, I rub the back of my neck, but then move to my chair and slump down onto it. “My entire life, my emotions have been the one thing I can rely on. The one fucking thing I can control. They have been off like a switch I just flicked. My father taught me to let it go. Don’t allow anyone in. That way, no one can hurt you. Everyone is fucking equal, so no one can make you feel anything more than anyone else. No one can make you feel any-fucking-thing.”

Nycto sits back in his chair and tilts his head. “I get that. I do... I mean, it’s why we named you Void, man. You’ve been closed off to everything. So, what’s going on now? What’s happening in your head?”

I lean forward, my elbows on the table, and scrub at my face. Letting out a groan of

frustration, I exhale. “Ivy. I don’t... she... fuck!”

“She’s making you feel. Breaking down the walls you spent your entire life building.”

Leaning back, my tired eyes meet his, and I nod. “I don’t know how to deal with this fucking shit. She means abso-fucking-lutely everything, and that doesn’t... I mean, it’s not who I am.”

Nycto shrugs. “Well then, who are you, Void?”

A sick bastard.

“What do you seek?” I asked the new disciple.

“Enlightenment,” she replied. Her white dress was saturated in the blood of the farm members before her. The ritual had gone smoothly. All that was left was to officially initiate her into the family.

This was my job.

Even though I was young, my father was teaching me the ways—the path to enlightenment.

My hands moved in, gripping onto her blood-soaked white dress, ripping it open and pulling it dramatically from her body. Her nakedness underneath was a sight to behold. The blood from the disciples covered her flesh, and all that did was make me hard.

This was the way.

The way of the farm.

Her fresh branding only made her more attractive. She would forever be a part of us now.

The farm.

Family.

With my ram's head still firmly in place, I signaled to the two disciples ranked below me to start the proceedings.

They grabbed her—I don't even remember her name.

There were so many before her, but she was my last. The one forever engrained in my memory. Her rose tattoo that took up most of her left hip was dripping in blood as my disciples pulled her back against the Saint Andrew's cross.

She was ready for her initiation.

Here, she would be welcomed by the men.

All of us.

As family, we are one.

They chained her to the cross as she panted with bated breath.

She was willing—I was able.

My breathing was rushed beneath my ram's mask as I slid down my white pants, now

wet from the water ceremony. I was first in line—it was an honor my father bestowed upon me for the first time. He was preparing me to take over from him as leader.

And I was prepared.

I was honored.

This was my calling.

I stepped up to her, my father by my side. Her eyes looked right at me, but she wasn't looking at me. She was staring at the mask—the ram.

“Take her, son. But remember, emotion is useless. So, do whatever you need to. This is her initiation. To be a part of the farm, she needs to take whatever is thrown her way.”

I nodded, then stepped up to her with a smile on my face and eagerness in the pit of my stomach. I spread her legs, my cock ready and waiting for her as my hands snapped out, wrapping around her throat, gripping as tight as I could, and then...

“Void?”

I shake my head, ridding myself of my nightmare past. “I’m a fucking asshole, that’s who I am. I’ve done shit, Nycto. Bad shit. How can I ever be the man Ivy needs?”

Nycto exhales. “If your mind is going back to who you were at that farm... you’re not that guy anymore. You aren’t the man your father tried to turn you into. You’ve grown. Hell, if you’re feeling something for Ivy, doesn’t that prove it to you?”

Hesitating, I place my head in my hands. “Dash is trying to make a move on her.”

Nycto chuckles, then he exhales. “She only has eyes for you. If you let your newfound emotions get in the way of that, you’re gonna fuck it up with her.”

“I don’t know what the hell I’m doing, for fuck’s sake. I don’t know how to handle this shit. I don’t fucking like it.”

Nycto grins. “No one likes not being in control. You just have to figure out if Ivy is worth you dealing with your emotions, or if it’s better, for the lack of a better phrase, being void. No one can figure that shit out but you.”

I’m quiet for a moment as I think about how much I hated letting Ivy go with Tony. Allowing her to drive away was too much to bear.

Is Ivy worth this torment? You bet your ass she is.

“I don’t like her being there. Letting her leave was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do.”

“Then, I think you have your answer. If you can’t stand the thought of her being harmed—”

“Then she’s worth fighting for... even if half the fight is within me.”

Nycto leans over, slapping my shoulder. “Feelin’ better?”

I shake my head. “No. I’m fucking wrecked. Ivy’s still at Tony’s, and she’s there with motherfucking Dash while I’m trying to figure out this emotion bullshit. Goddamn, I need another drink.”

Nycto chuckles. “Okay, brother, let’s get something stiff.”

We stand to walk to the bar.

I don't know if having a drink will help. The idea that Dash is sleeping so close to Ivy slays me. But the fact that I'm opening myself up to feeling shit I never knew I could, well, that's just as fucking frightening.

And I don't know which one I need to be more afraid of right now.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

IVY

The Next Morning

Before we left, Dash said a heartfelt goodbye to Mia. They really connected during their playtime, but it was Tony who surprised me. He pulled me aside, giving me his personal number. He told me if I ever need anything, I'm to call him directly.

To be honest, I imagine Tony's profoundly grateful for what I've done for Mia. I hope like hell it works to fix her anemia. She has a long recovery ahead because anemia is only part of her battle.

Void's standing, waiting for us when Tony's driver pulls up at the gates of the clubhouse, and a smile instantly lights my face.

I've missed Void and his broody attitude.

Not to mention his fucking sexy-as-hell face.

Or his killer body.

Crap! I need to control my thoughts, or I'm going to end up jumping on him the second I get out of this car, even with his shitty attitude on the phone last night.

West opens the gate, and Void starts walking toward us.

Dash hops out his side as I move for the door, but Void is on me in a flash. My door

flies open and Void places his hand out for me to take.

God, he's gorgeous.

My hand slides into his perfectly.

Tingles.

No, not just tingles, a damn electric shock strikes all the way up my arm, slamming straight into my chest. My breath catches as his kind eyes meet mine.

"Are you okay?" he asks in his deep, gravelly voice.

My eyes lock with his as I stand. "I'm fine. Last night after they took the blood, I was a little woozy, but today I'm good. Maybe a little tired, but good. Happy to be home."

Void's lips turn up as I mention the word 'home.' "Let's get you inside. You need rest." He's being attentive and caring and maybe a little overprotective. He doesn't need to be, but I'll take it. He wraps his arm around my shoulders as we head for the gate.

Dash moves in beside us as Void glances over at him. "Thanks for taking care of her." His tone is curt and abrupt. It's like he's only saying it for my benefit.

Dash raises his chin. "She's a handful, but... it was bearable."

Void narrows his focus on Dash. "Are you wearing eye shadow?"

Dash scoffs. "You're seeing shit, brother."

I try to hide my giggle as I smirk up at Dash. He winks, then walks off toward West

at the gate.

Void continues with me down the ramp to the bunker. “He was wearing eye shadow, wasn’t he?” Void whispers in my ear.

“Yeah. Take me to my room, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

“I can’t wait to hear this.”

As we enter the bunker, everyone turns, expressions brightening when they see me. Eva instantly jumps from Nycto’s lap, doing a mad dash to reach me. “Ivy! You’re okay?” Her body slams into mine, taking me into the tightest of hugs.

I wrap my arms around my sister. After seeing what Tony and Amalia are going through with Mia, I understand the need to embrace family, to hold onto them while you have them. You’d think I’d get that after Mom and Dad’s accident, but I guess they were taken from me suddenly. Seeing a family losing someone slowly has put things into perspective.

You need to appreciate the people you love, loudly and without abandon.

All. The. Time.

“I love you, Eva. I don’t say it nearly often enough.”

She pulls back from me, tears welling in her eyes. “I love you too. Where is this coming from?”

I shrug. “Just seeing Mia. She’s sick. Really sick. And... I... don’t ever want to lose you.”

Eva exhales, pulling me back to her. “You and me, Ivy, we’re in this together. Always. Why do you think I fought so fucking hard for you when we got here?”

Guilt flows through me. I didn’t do enough when Nycto held Eva captive. “I’m sorry, Eva. I’m sorry I didn’t try harder to convince Nycto to tell you I was here. I absolutely should have.”

She brings her hands to my face, smoothing across my skin. “Shh... we’re good. You and me, Nycto and me. Everything turned out the way it was supposed to. Now, go get some rest. You’ve had a big night.”

She leans in and presses her lips to my forehead before sending a look to Void. I’m unsure what the look means, but he dips his chin, pulling me with him toward the stairs.

“Have you been plotting while I’ve been away?”

“No. Eva wants you to rest. We all do.”

We slowly take the stairs down to the Chamber. The Cell at the end is lit up, waiting for me.

Home.

Calm washes over me for the first time in over twenty-four hours. It’s like I’m able to finally relax. Like things might get back to some semblance of normal. The man who tried to buy me from Cuba came after me, found me, but also let me go. I’m sure this won’t be the last time I see him, though I’m free to live my life now he’s gotten what he wanted. This is a perfect outcome. I am always waiting for the sword of Damocles to fall, where this is all some dream, and the nightmare’s about to kick in.

Because good things don't happen to me.

Everything goes bad in one way or another.

Void leads me over to my bed, and I can't help the contented sigh that leaves my lips. "Home sweet home." I flop back on my bed, arms spread as I close my eyes and relax.

Void slides onto the bed beside me. "So glad you're home, Ivy. I... missed you."

My eyes open as I take him in. A slow smile crosses my face, and I turn on my side. I wasn't sure where we stood after our phone call last night. "I missed you too."

"I'm here for as long as you need me. Anything you want, you let me know."

"That's not necessary. I'm fine. You don't need to worry."

He groans. "I do, though... I do worry. Probably too much."

Wow. Honesty! This is a refreshing change.

I prop my head on my hand, resting my elbow on my bed as I look him over. "You worry about what's going to happen to me, or about the people around me?"

Void slides his hands in under his head, getting comfortable. "Both. You know by now I care about you. Last night was pure fucking hell. After our phone call, fuck... I think Nycto stopped me from riding out at least three times."

My eyes widen, and I gnaw on my bottom lip. "I'm sorry. I know you have an issue with Dash, but he was the perfect gentleman."

He exhales. “That’s good to know. I... I don’t know how to act anymore. I’m just...”
He trails off, seemingly unable to find the words.

“You’re not yourself when I’m involved.”

He turns his head to look directly at me. “I’m more myself when you’re involved, and that fact scares me.”

“I scare you?”

“I scare me,” he clarifies.

I slide in to rest my head in the nook of his shoulder and chest. He’s tense, but as my fingers slide up his shirt to rest over his heart, he relaxes. “You don’t scare me. Not even a little bit.”

His hand slides up to rest on top of mine, our fingers threading together. I take the hint and loop my leg over his, cuddling into his side completely. Closing my eyes, I release a contented sigh as his other hand moves in to caress the back of my head, the move gentle and soothing.

I adore us like this.

Calm.

Content.

Completely blissful.

Void’s opening up to me like never before.

I tell him about what happened while I was at Tony's, and he chuckles when I tell him about Dash getting his Elsa makeover. He holds me when I discuss how helpless I feel that I can't do more to help Mia. Void and I are always able to connect when it's just us in a room alone together, but this, right here, this is something else.

We're treading on new ground.

Taking a step in a different direction.

Maybe spending the night apart is exactly what we needed.

To show us both the thing we need is each other.

Maybe the bad luck ball isn't going to drop after all. Maybe this is the dream, the dream where good things do happen for me—the dream where finally something is going right.

If this is my good dream, then please don't let any fucker wake me up.

We may not have been asleep for long—just a nap—but that hour or so was the deepest, most peaceful sleep I've ever had.

I have never felt more relaxed than I do right now. Falling asleep in Void's arms isn't something I've done before, but damn, do I want to keep doing it. After having my blood taken last night, I thought I would be completely drained today. I wouldn't say I am one hundred percent, but this little power nap has certainly recharged my batteries.

My eyelids flutter open, and I slowly take in the sights of the Cell—my home. I'm

lying in bed, my leg over Void's, snuggling into him while he continues to sleep. He's so fucking gorgeous, completely vulnerable and exposed. I glimpse down at his soft, supple lips—they're so pink and delectable right now. Arousal surges as I lick my lips, wanting to taste him. I've never felt the need to act on my sexual urges or instincts, but with Void lying here like this, I want to take advantage of him. I want to know what it's like to kiss him, to have his hands roam all over my body, to have him deep inside of me.

My eyes shift to his crotch, and I swallow hard when I notice his jeans tenting with an erection.

I gasp. I was not expecting to see that. My breath hitches as I gnaw down on my bottom lip.

Should I do something about it?

Would he want me to touch him?

I've never even held a cock.

How would I know where to start?

But there's something about this situation that's calling to me. I want to make him feel good. I want him to make me feel good.

With my pulse racing like a jackhammer inside my veins, my hand sitting above his heart slowly starts to edge down his stomach. My body throbs with need as I squirm uncomfortably, edging further toward the zipper of his jeans.

Void wriggles a little as if he's waking up, but I don't stop. My breath quickens as I grip the zipper of his jeans, gently slide it down, then edge my hand inside. The tiny

hairs leading to his cock tickle the tips of my fingers. Adrenaline surges through me as I reach the top of his boxer briefs and wriggle my hand under.

Suddenly, Void's hand slams against my wrist, halting any further movement. I jolt with shock as I turn to look at him. Startled, his eyes are wide and his breaths rapid, nostrils flaring.

"Ivy, what the hell do you think you're doing?" He yanks my hand out of his pants, shifting me off him as he sits on the edge of the bed with his back to me, the sound of his zipper sliding back up a sharp contrast to the silent room.

A cold shudder runs through my body as I sit behind him, wrapping my arms around myself more for comfort than anything. "I... I thought... I mean, I saw your erection, and I thought—"

"You thought wrong, Ivy. You can't just shove your hand down a guy's pants."

"Jesus, you make me sound like some sort of predator."

Running his fingers roughly through his hair, he jumps from the bed and begins pacing. Without even looking at me, he says, "I have to go," and heads toward the exit. I stand, letting out a loud, angry-as-hell huff.

"So that's it? After everything we shared since I got back, you're shutting down on me again?" Fear sweeps over me, tears threatening to fall.

Void hesitates in the doorway for a moment, his chest heaving. But then he lets out a low grunt and heads for the stairs.

A tear slides down my cheek, pooling on my chin. "You're a fucking coward, Void," I yell at him, then wipe my face. I will not let him affect me, but I don't understand

his aversion to us fooling around.

Maybe he just doesn't want me that way?

Maybe it boils down to exactly that—Void does not want me sexually.

Clearing my throat, I shake my head. No. I'm much stronger than this. I'm not letting Void ruin my day, especially when I woke up feeling so good only moments ago.

It's just after lunch, and I'm not going to spend the rest of the day wallowing.

I'm going to do my job and do it fucking well.

Screw Void!

Grabbing my clipboard from the sofa, I walk across to the lab.

After pressing the combination to the keypad lock, the brick wall opens, revealing our crop. I amble over to the small technical area and grab my white coat. After doing some of the simpler checks, I get to work. Feeding, maintaining, monitoring the growth rates—all the usual shit.

I'm lost in my work when a set of footsteps gain my attention. I peek over the plants to see Dash striding over, looking like he's about to bite my fucking head off.

"You should be resting," he scolds as he grabs his lab coat, then starts working next to me.

I scoff. "Stop! I had a power nap, but then I had to get moving. I need to distract myself."

Dash grabs the clipboard from me, reading over my notes. “Mm-hmm... you can distract yourself by closing your eyes and falling asleep. Got me?”

“You worried about me, Dash?”

He glances at me, suddenly concerned. “I had to hold you up before you fell over. So, yeah, I’m concerned you’re heading back to work too soon. Go! I’ll take care of this shit. Put your feet up. If you want, you can yell at me from next door.”

“I’m fine. But thanks for caring. You’re too good to me.”

He bumps his shoulder into mine. “I’ll always care about you.” He reaches out and wraps his arm around my shoulder, pulling me to him. I lean my head on his shoulder with a sigh.

Why is it always so easy with Dash?

With Void, everything seems magical, then bam, the magic evaporates, and I’m left in a black hole figuring out if I’m even still in reality or not.

It’s frustrating.

Void is frustrating.

“C’mon, it looks like it’s time to harvest,” Dash says, placing the clipboard down and wagging his brows at me.

“Yeah, it is. I’ll turn on the fans.”

We move off as another set of footsteps echo through the Chamber. We both turn as Eva strides toward us.

“Void’s in a good mood,” she states.

I scoff, turning to continue with my work. “Not my problem.”

“If one of the brothers is having a mental breakdown all the time, and the common denominator in their breakdown is you, then yeah, Ivy, it’s your problem.”

I throw my hands in the air. “What am I supposed to do? I try talking to him, he shuts down. I let him talk to me, he shuts down. I ignore him, he shuts down. There’s only so much I can do.”

Eva’s eyes shift to Dash, who’s trying to appear busy, ignoring our conversation. “Try. Fucking. Harder. You have a connection, Ivy. Hell, everyone’s seen it. Void’s not like that with anyone else the way he is with you.”

“Maybe he should be the one to try harder, then, ’cause I’m sick of being the one always trying. I’ve been fighting all my life, Eva. I’m tired of fighting. You, of all people, should understand that.”

Eva exhales. “I get it. But tell me this... is Void worth fighting for? Search deep down, because you know the damn answer.”

I peer over my shoulder at Dash, who’s stopped working and is invested in the conversation, clearly listening in. Turning back, I grab Eva and spin her toward the exit. “I have work to do. Can we catch up later?”

Eva chuckles. “You trying to get rid of me?”

“I’m trying to get rid of this conversation.”

“Okay, I’m going. But this topic is not closed, Ivy.”

“Bye, hermana.”

Dash glances over, and with a slight snicker, says, “Siblings, huh? They wanna know all your shit.”

I groan. “This Old Lady business is going to her head. She’s always been in charge, but now it’s giving her even more of a reason to boss me around.”

“You don’t seem the submissive type. I see you more as the take-the-bull-by-the-horns type.”

“Exactly. I like being in control. It’s not easy for me to give that up.”

“Well, I, for one, like it when you take charge. You bossing me around gives me the tingles.”

I snort out a laugh and shove him playfully.

Dash might be an idiot, but at least he’s not an asshole.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

VOID

After I woke up to Ivy's hand down my pants, I nearly lost fucking control. The urge to pin her to the bed and fuck her like a damn madman washed over me in such a fierce adrenaline rush that all I could see was red.

In a flash, it could have gone either way.

For me to revert to the man I once was.

But seeing her gorgeous, innocent face pulled me back and woke me from my past.

Usually, I wouldn't be concerned about it happening with a woman. They might understand, they might not. Hell, some even get turned on by it. But the first time I take Ivy, I need to be gentle, and honestly, I don't know if I fucking have it in me.

Her first time would be better with someone like Dash. A man who can be attentive to her needs. Not someone like me, too far fucking gone to give Ivy the first she deserves.

I take another sip, straight from the bottle. A quarter of the Jack Daniel's whiskey now seeps through my veins. I've been here a while. Idiot. I shouldn't have left Ivy the way I did. I shouldn't have spoken to her the way I did. But if I hadn't left, I would have done something I'd regret even more, and then she would never forgive me. As it is, it took me forever to deal with the hardcore fucking boner I had from her almost touching me.

The thought of her hands on me—goddamn! I clench my eyes, trying to stop my mind from wandering off again. Ivy tears me apart in all the right ways. She doesn't understand the effect she has on me.

I wish I could tell her.

Fuck! I wish I could show her.

But she's not ready for that.

I take another sip from the bottle as my door slams open without a knock. Usually, I'd be annoyed at whoever's breaking into my room without knocking, but right now, I just don't have one single, solitary fuck to give.

"You need to get your shit together," Nycto grunts out while walking over, then he shoves my feet across the bed.

The whiskey spills from the bottle with the force of Nycto's shove, and I bring it away from my lips. I let out a groan, sitting on the edge of the bed. "I need to do fucking nothing."

"Can you ride?" Nycto asks, swiping the bottle away then screwing on the lid.

I shrug. "I've had a quarter bottle. You're fully aware I can handle my liquor."

"Good. I need you to go to the café. Trixie called, said some people are hanging around acting suspiciously."

I stand, yanking my cut into place. "On it."

"Void?" I raise my brow. "You'd best not get pulled over for a breath test, brother."

I dip my chin and take off for my ride. If Trixie's in trouble, at least there's something I'm good at—letting unwanted people know how much they're not wanted.

Hopping on my ride, I turn over the engine. My baby purrs beneath me, and for some reason, I wish Ivy was on the back. It felt so right when she was clinging to me, her arms wrapped around my waist under my cut, holding on tight. I shake away the feeling and take off anyway, the kick of the alcohol buzzing through my system.

The ride doesn't take long. As I pull up to the café, a couple of men inside the store are obviously yelling at Trixie, so I jump off my ride quicker than I thought possible. Hoisting my gun from my jeans, I storm in, thrusting the door open so quickly it hits the wall with a thud. Loud screeches reach my ears, but the assholes don't even stop to notice me.

“Hand it over, you stupid bitch, or I swear to God—”

I aim the gun, cocking it right at the stupid fucker who doesn't see me coming. “You swear to God, what? Better choose your next words carefully, asshole, or this bullet will choose them for you.”

The loudmouth and his friend snap their heads toward me, eyes widening as they take in my club cut. Their hands shoot up in surrender, and they start backing up.

“Hey, man, it's a simple misunderstanding.”

“Yeah, I figured. You'd better get the fuck out... and if you come back, I'm gonna put a bullet in your dick so you know what it's like to be the dickless idiots you are, then I'll shoot you between your eyes for good fucking measure.” I point, aiming at the loudmouth's foot, then squeeze the trigger.

My gun recoils, the bullet flying out with speed and precision.

The idiot screams out in agony, jumping on the spot, leaving a trail of blood on Trixie's freshly mopped floor.

"What the fuck did you do that for, you fucking maniac?" loudmouth's sidekick screams, wrapping his arm around his friend in support.

"Because I am Defiance. You cross us, you pay. And just for calling me a fucking maniac, let me prove you fucking right!" Bringing my gun up again, I aim it at the sidekick, his eyes widening with fear when I pull the trigger without hesitation.

The gun recoils in my palm, the bullet slamming straight between his eyes. His body jerks with the force. The loudmouth I initially shot in the leg was being held up by the now-dead sidekick. Loudmouth goes down with him like a ton of bricks, letting out a girlish scream as his friend's head explodes beside him. Blood spatters across the back wall like some artistic painting.

Snorting out a laugh at loudmouth cowering like a bitch, I flick the safety back on my gun and stow it away. "Now, we have an agreement, you and me... don't we?" I mumble, my voice low and gravelly as I step closer to the loudmouth.

His body trembles as he nods frantically, slowly sliding across the tiled floor toward the door. Blood from the wound on his leg leaves a trail, creating a masterpiece glistening in its perfection. "I... I swear I won't come b-back."

My lips turn up, and I glance over my shoulder, my eyes meeting Trixie's. She smirks at me like she's enjoying the show I am putting on.

I turn back to the idiot who's almost at the front door. "And you're going to tell all your junkie friends that this café is off limits... right? Because we know what

happens when people like you come onto our property. Or do I need to remind you?”
I say, reaching for my gun again.

He throws his hands into the air, his eyes wide with fear. “No! No. I’ll remember. I’ll get the word out. This place is safe. I p-promise.”

Shrugging, I aim my gun at him for good measure anyway. “Then get the fuck out of here, asshole!”

He nods and struggles to get to his wounded feet, slipping in his own blood a few times, but then pulls the front door open, takes one last look at his friend, and rushes out the door.

I grin, turn, and stow my gun while Trixie rushes out from behind the counter. She lunges at me, wrapping her arms around my neck, pulling me to her in a tight hug.

I tense, still hating fucking affection.

I stand uncomfortably, not even game to pat her awkwardly in support.

I’ve only just gotten used to letting Ivy touch me—I’m not on board with this—so I reach up and grab Trixie’s arms, moving her a step back as she exhales dramatically.

“Thank you, Void. You’re a lifesaver. It didn’t look like they had guns or anything, but they were starting to become pretty damn vocal. I was getting scared.”

I take in the café, trying to see if there’s any damage other than the excessive blood and one dead body. “Did they take anything? Do any damage?”

“No, they were after cash. Junkies after a fix, maybe. I don’t even think they’re aware of what’s out the back, ’cause they didn’t come looking for it... just the cash.”

“If it’s any consolation, I don’t believe that guy will be back, but I’ll have a brother stand guard during the day for a while.”

“Thank you... I appreciate that.”

“Looks like I made a mess. Got caught up in the moment... I’ve had a day.”

Trixie grips my bicep. “Hey, I’m just glad you were here. You saved my ass. Even if we have a mess to clean up.”

Rolling my shoulders, I glance back out at the scene. “West will be here soon. He can do cleanup. You girls don’t have to worry about this shit.”

Trixie smiles. “Well, in the meantime, I’ve just made a batch of macarons. You wanna take some back to the clubhouse and try them for me? Make sure I got the ratios right? It might help you relax?”

“ ‘Macarons,’ ” I say, using air quotes, and chuckle. “I’m sure they’re awesome.” She wants to make sure the ratio of sweet treat to weed is good to go before we sell them.

I got her back.

I’m more than happy to test them.

I need to space out for a while anyway. I’m sick of this damn day. “Show me the way.”

“Lizzy, can you close the store down while I head out back? Make sure to black out all the windows. We don’t need anyone casually walking by and seeing all... this,” Trixie calls out to her staff member, thankfully also one of our club girls.

“Sure thing!”

Trixie turns, leading me through the kitchen and into the back area. She walks me to a concealed door and opens it, and we enter, ensuring to pull it shut behind us. Trixie punches in the code, it beeps, then she pulls on the heavy handle, and it opens. As we walk through, she looks back at me, smiling. The door automatically shuts once we pass through into the small vestibule chamber where plastic see-through blinds hang. After pushing our way through to a roller door, she slides it up, and instantly, the smell hits me. It’s then I realize why there are so many safety precautions. The barricades need to be in place to block out the pungent smell of the product as well as to hide its existence.

As we walk further inside, there’s row after row of benches lining the large area, all packed with what look like desserts ready to go. There’s even a refrigerated section. Along the back wall is the kitchen, complete with industrial stoves, mixers, sinks, white goods—you name it, Trix has it.

This is an elite setup.

Nycto and Trixie did good!

I like how covert this all is. “You must love this part of the store.”

She shrugs. “It certainly brings in a hell of a lot more money than out front, but those who purchase these goods generally buy in bulk, and we ship the product out to them. It’s a mass-production enterprise.”

“Okay, show me these treats.”

She walks me over to a bench where a tray of green macarons sits. “Green... creative,” I mock.

She rolls her eyes. “They’re lime-flavored, smartass.”

“Okay, let’s do this.” I pick one up. It’s smooth in texture on the outside, and as I bite into it, it’s a little chewy but soft. The tang of the lime hits me immediately. It tastes a lot like her Key lime pie. I can’t taste the dope at all, and the flavor is incredible. Swallowing the whole thing down, I lick my lips. “This is fucking delicious, Trix.”

I reach out to pick up another one, but her eyes widen as her hand comes out, stopping me just as I go to put it in my mouth. “You shouldn’t if you plan on riding back any time soon.”

I scoff, shoving the whole thing in my mouth at once. “One more for the road,” I say with my mouth full of the tasty treat.

Trixie grimaces, shaking her head. “You should let it hit you and mellow out before you take off, VP.”

I wave my hand through the air. “I’m built outta brick, Trix. I’ll be fine. I’ll let you know how it goes, though, okay?” I turn to walk out of this elite fucking setup to the main café, Trixie following me apprehensively.

I spend a while talking shit with Trixie about her new recipes and how the shop is going, but I need to get back. As I make it to the front of the café, West strolls inside for protective and clean up detail.

My skin begins to prickle. My head starts to feel like it’s floating or spinning, not sure which. Clearing my throat as I walk over to West, I grip his shoulder and look directly into his eyes. Seeing my reflection in them, I could almost swear my irises are red... I blink a few times, shaking the image away.

He tilts his head, studying me. “You okay, VP?”

“Call me if there are further problems. I dealt with the idiots who were here, so I don’t expect any further issues,” I say, ignoring his question.

West nods.

I slap his back, then turn for the exit.

“Void,” Trixie calls out. I turn back to look at her and blink a few more times to get things into perspective. Is there two of her?

“Ride slow, okay?”

I give her a two-fingered salute and head out the door toward my ride. The shining chrome is even brighter today. Fuck, she’s beautiful! I blink rapidly again, shielding my eyes as I walk over, then slide quickly onto my bike.

I shouldn’t ride, but the trip home is short.

I know I can make it.

As I take off, my bike lurches. I widen my eyes, not anticipating the speed in which I accelerate. Still, I hang on, taking all the appropriate turns, focusing on the road with all my attention. I need to concentrate so I make it back in one fucking piece.

I’m not sure how, but as my eyes focus, I try to take in my surroundings and figure out where the hell I am. From what I can tell, I’m about twenty minutes in the opposite direction of the clubhouse, out on Van Dyke Road. Fairly sure my bike’s swerving, I try to correct it, zeroing my eyes in on the road like a hawk. The trees on either side of this stretch of asphalt are monotonous.

Tree. Tree. Tree. Tree.

A sense of foreboding creeps in and takes hold.

I need to keep focused.

I blink rapidly, narrowing my eyes, but a white statue up ahead on the edge of the road catches my attention. As I approach, I take my eyes off the road for a second.

Only one second.

The statue isn't a statue at all—it's an image of my father.

My body jerks as panic sears through me. I pull on the throttle, making my back tire squeal and then slide out from under me. My bike hitches, turning to the side, catches on something, then I'm hurtled off over the handlebars. Time slows as I fly in cartwheels through the air, my bike somersaulting along the road. The sound of metal scratching, breaking, and squealing grinds in my ears as I fly across the top of the asphalt, the whole thing playing out in slow-fucking-motion. The sky is so blue. I'm flying! But I'm brought back to reality as I slam down hard onto the road. Sliding along, my body rolls with the friction, and I groan as my skin is torn to pieces, my jeans ripping apart. Eventually, I come to a stop in a ditch at the side of the road.

My head spins like a motherfucker, and my body aches so damn much I want to hurl. I look around and see my bike resting against a tree in the ditch a few feet away from me. I lie on my back, looking up at the sky, panting for breath as the clouds form skulls and crossbones above me. I must still be fucking tripping. I rest in the ditch, broken and bleeding.

I'm not sure how long I stay here for, staring up at the skulls. I swear they're mocking me, but I need to do something. I can't just lie here. My hand slides into my jeans pocket for my cell.

I cough, and my entire body tenses, the pain incredible as I bring my cell into my line of sight and dial the number I need right now—Nerve.

“VP! Everything okay at Trixie’s?”

I grimace, shifting on the ground to try and get some semblance of comfort. “Nerve... I’m tripping hard. I’ve eaten asphalt, brother, in a bad way.”

“Fuck! How bad are you hurt? Do you need an EMT?”

I glance down at my legs, where there are no obvious open fractures. “No, I’m good. You should be able to patch me up. My ride, not so much.”

“Okay, hold on... I’m coming. I’ll have Atomic track your cell.”

“Thanks, brother.” I end the call, dropping my cell to the ground because I’m too fucked-up to keep talking.

Trying to hide those fucking skull clouds from my sight, I slump my arm over my eyes.

Goddammit! I should have listened to Trixie. I should have brought the macarons home with me, but no, I was in a downward spiral because of Ivy and thought I could handle it. But this—this is just plain stupid.

Nycto’s gonna fucking kill me, and I deserve it!

Groaning, I somehow find the strength to lift up, then pull myself out of the ditch. I move to the edge of the road and sit, waiting for Nerve. I peer over my shoulder at my mangled ride. Wincing, I turn back to the other side of the road. I must still be tripping. The shadows...

Like swirling capes, shadows dart to and fro in the forest in front of me, moving far too fast to be anything real. My anxiety creeps in further as the white statues appear, slowly edging their way out from the trees.

“Fuck off, all of you!” I yell.

Now I’m really losing my mind.

Yelling at my own imagination.

As the white statues show their faces, I tense. They’re all people from my past. I clench my eyes shut, trying like hell to wipe them from my memory, attempting to fight the images from my mind. When I open my eyes again, they’re still there, and this time, my father is back, but he’s standing there, not saying anything, quietly watching me fall apart in my mind.

It’s fitting.

They would do that.

“I said... Fuck. Off!”

The squealing of tires echoes in the distance. I turn my head to see a tow truck heading toward me, like one of those mirages people see in the desert. I feel like it’s only been a few minutes, but it must have been a while for Nerve to grab the tow truck and get everything in order to find me.

Man, tripping makes you lose all sense of time.

I turn back, the statues now retreating into the forest. “Ha! Yeah, you better run, you motherfuckers!” I call out to them as the tow truck pulls over, and Nerve rides up on

his bike, pulling up in front of me. He hops off as a door to the truck pushes open, and Ivy comes surging toward me.

Am I still tripping?

She drops to her knees beside me and places her hand on my cheek. The second she touches me, a spark shoots straight to my dick.

Is she really here?

“Jesus, Void, what have you done to yourself?”

I take her in. She’s glowing, my high making her seem like a real-life, fucking heaven-sent angel. I swear she even has a halo as I stare blankly up at her. Maybe this is it. Maybe I am dying. It’ll be worth it if only to have the angel’s touch, for hers to be the last face I see.

Nerve steps over with a thermos, demanding my attention. “Drink this, dickhead.” He shoves it at me, and I reach out to take it. I’m hit by the smell of coffee, and as I take a sip, the bitter hit instantly soothes the wrecking ball of my mind. My eyes dance over Ivy as she systematically checks my body, relaying the information to Nerve, while Brass loads my ride onto the flatbed.

Nerve drops to Ivy’s side as she presses my ribs. I jerk and groan, and her eyes shoot to Nerve. “Could be broken,” he grunts. “We need to get him back to the clubhouse quick, and sober his ass up before the heat catches wind of this.”

Ivy runs her hand over my arm in a soothing gesture. “Why the hell did you ride so out of it, Void? You could’ve killed yourself.”

I shake my head, unable to answer her. She’s simply too fucking gorgeous. She’s

rendered me utterly speechless. Or maybe I'm still too fucking smashed.

Nerve moves in to help hoist me up. As he does, pain sears through my body. A loud groan escapes me, and Nerve moves under one arm, Ivy under the other, so they can walk me to the cab of the truck. Once there, Nerve and Brass hoist me up inside.

Ivy sits beside me as Nerve and Brass talk outside, leaving Ivy and me alone.

I try to gather my rampant running thoughts, but I can't keep my stupid mouth from moving on its own. "You came for me..."

Ivy turns to face me, her brows scrunched together. "Of course, Void. No matter what weird stalemate we're in right now, I do care about you."

I bring my bloodied hand up to caress her gorgeous face. "You're beautiful."

Her eyes widen as Nerve steps up into the driver's side of the cab and hands me my cell. "I'm gonna drive. Keep an eye on him. Make sure he doesn't tank on the way home," he says to Ivy.

I lean my head back, tired as fuck, sore as hell, and completely the fuck out of it. I don't think I hit my head, so I doubt I have a concussion. Seems like a good time for a nap. It won't be as good as the nap I had this morning with Ivy, but she's right here, so maybe it might be as peaceful.

Closing my eyes, I move my hand out to link with hers. She doesn't hesitate to thread her fingers with mine.

There's my sweet thing.

VOID

My eyes flutter open. My head pounds, my body aches like a motherfucker, and I grimace when I try to move. Not to mention the hangover I'm now sporting, thanks to all the booze and weed I ingested.

Nice going, dickhead.

I glance down. My shirt is off, my ribs a shade of deep purple and red. I take in my forearms covered in dressings, and as I peer further down, my legs are bare. I'm wearing boxer briefs, and my shins are wrapped in bandages.

I groan and move to sit, but my head spins.

"Stop!" a concerned voice yells out, and it shocks the hell out of me, as well as making my head pound harder. I turn as Ivy moves from the desk chair opposite me to the edge of the bed.

I didn't even realize she was here.

Even now that my head is slightly clearer than it was earlier, she's still fucking perfect.

Ivy reaches out, gently easing me back onto the bed. "You need to rest. You have some serious road rash, and Nerve is pretty sure you've cracked a rib or two."

Exhaling, I sink back into the soft pillows and gaze up at her. "How long have I been

out?”

She touches my stomach, my muscles clenching beneath her electrifying touch, and I bite back a moan of pain. “Hours... I don’t know how many exactly. I fell asleep for a while, but I’ve spent the time making sure you came down okay.”

Goddamn!

“I didn’t mean for it to interact like that. I... I just didn’t care.”

She draws her bottom lip in with her teeth. “Because of me?”

“I can’t put the blame on you, Ivy. I drank too much, then ate two of Trixie’s macarons, and she warned me. It was my choice. This isn’t your fault.”

Ivy huffs, then stands back, confusion written over her face. “What are we doing, Void?”

My brow furrows in response. “I don’t know.”

“I’m gonna be straight with you...” My eyes widen, slightly taken aback. She’s always so assertive. It’s one of the many qualities I adore about her. “When I overheard Nerve taking your call and I thought you were hurt, I’ve never felt such panic in all my life.”

“You were worried about me?”

She scoffs. “I was petrified you were going to die, and things between us would be left in this weird limbo. I hate this, Void. This chasm you built between us. How did we get like this?”

I can't lie here for this talk, even though my body's screaming at me not to move. With a grimace, I attempt to sit, and Ivy's eyes widen as she tries to stop me. Pushing her hand away, I shift up the bed, my muscles pulling and burning every inch of me. I try to hold in a groan, but I'm not entirely successful.

Eventually, I find a more comfortable position, then look her in the eyes. "Ivy, this distance between us is all on me. It's nothing you've done. You're perfect. Actually, too fucking perfect."

"I don't understand. We're friends, aren't we?"

Friends? That word burns more than I thought it would.

"Yeah... friends."

She turns up her nose with an exhale. "Then why avoid me? Why not just talk to me, tell me what you're feeling?"

"I'm not sure what I'm feeling. All I do know is you, as you are, are the most beautiful fucking soul I have ever known. I don't want to be the one to ruin that."

Ivy's eyes begin to glisten, her bottom lip trembling as she moves slowly to climb onto the bed and slide in beside me. Her hand comes up to my face, forcing me to look at her. "Maybe I want to be ruined," she whispers, before gently pressing her lips to mine.

My eyes widen as my lips tingle. My muscles stiffen, and I try to recover from the shock of her tongue forcing its way into my mouth, but no... instead, I'm fucking done for. The second I taste her, I lose myself. My eyes clench tight as I try to keep myself under control, but I need to touch her. To feel her. My hand sweeps up into her chestnut hair, my fingers sweeping through the silky strands until they lock

around the tendrils, pushing her lips to me harder. Warmth infuses my skin, a tingling starting in my chest, then spreading outward all over my body. My chest squeezes tight, and my body reacts.

I feel fucking powerful, yet somehow rendered completely and utterly useless.

I moan softly into her mouth, and she pulls back dramatically, her eyes locking on mine. “Oh God, did I hurt you?”

“Don’t stop,” I murmur. “The pain is worth it.”

I draw her back to me, my lips taking possession of hers. It takes every ounce of strength in me to keep this kiss with Ivy tame. But the way her tongue caresses mine, the way a light whimper escapes her throat as she leans into me—fuck if she’s not the single sexiest woman on the face of this godforsaken earth.

I have no clue how the hell we’re going to calm this down.

Do I even want to calm it down?

The way Ivy’s kissing me isn’t how you think your typical virgin would kiss. Not an innocent shy girl, anyway. Ivy’s full of lust, ravenous for me, and I know I’m completely and utterly fucked.

My free hand slides down to her hip, my fingers digging in, the animal in me begging to be set free.

Suddenly, Ivy moves over the top to straddle me, her pussy sitting right on top of my aching cock as we continue the kiss, which is becoming more aggressive. That little move right there has my balls aching so fucking much right now, overriding the damn pain in my ribs. My cock was already hard, but it lengthens with that move, pressing

painfully against my boxer briefs and her pussy.

I slide my hands up her back, holding her to me, and her fingers thread through my hair as she grinds down on my cock.

I thought I was hard before.

Fuck.

I groan into her mouth, the sensation sending a wave of pleasure deep inside me. All I've thought about, all I dream about is having Ivy like this, and now, it's here.

She grinds down on my cock again. Somehow, it hardens even more, feeling like I might come just from her rocking on me this way. It makes me want to throw her on her back and bind her hands together.

My cock pulsates and becomes heavy at the image that flashes into my mind—Ivy on the bed, splayed out before me, naked, bound, and gagged. My eyes snap open, my breathing frantic as I gently pull back from our intense-as-fuck kiss.

She's practically beaming, her lips plump and red.

I stare into her gorgeous brown eyes, my hand moving to caress the side of her face as I pant for much-needed breaths. "I've wanted to kiss you for so fucking long."

Ivy lights up, smiling as if she can hardly contain herself. "It was worth the wait."

I lean in, pressing my forehead against hers. "I'm not sure if I'm the man you need, Ivy. The man you deserve."

She runs her hand along my chest, stopping just above my heart, the move gentle and

caring as her beautiful big doe eyes meet mine. “I’m only asking you to try...”

Unsure about how to proceed, I exhale. All I want is Ivy, but I know if I do this, I must proceed with caution. “The thing is, Ivy... your virtue... it’s an issue for me.”

She recoils as if offended. “You’re scared of this, of us? Because I’m a virgin?”

“I don’t know if I can give you the kind of experiences you deserve.”

“Void, I don’t need anything special... I simply want you.”

My body warms at her words, so I pull her off me to sit on the side of the bed. Having her on top of me is too distracting. “I can’t promise I’ll be gentle with you, and you need that. I’m older. More experienced. You should do this with someone your own age.”

She scoffs, scrunching up her face. “Says who? Why do you think I can’t handle who you are, Void? I’ve bricked a man up behind a wall, sealing him to his death. I grow crops of weed for a living right next to my bedroom. I live in an underground bunker with dead and decaying bodies hidden inside the walls. What makes you think for a single second I’m this sweet, innocent little flower?”

Like the degenerate I am, an image flashes through my mind—Ivy tied naked to a Saint Andrew’s cross, submitting to my every dark, depraved desire. I shake my head, ridding Ivy from intruding and mixing with images of my fucking past. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Then don’t. Stop pushing me away. Let. Me. In!”

“Spend less time with Dash.” It comes out more like a demand than a question.

“He’s a friend. Plus, we work together. How can I spend less time with him?”

“He likes you,” I reply.

“No, he doesn’t—”

“Yes, he does. How could he not?”

She narrows her eyes on me cheekily. “Are you saying you like me?”

“Don’t change the subject.”

“You’re avoiding the question, Void.”

I groan. “I think it’s clear that I like you. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t be worried about hurting you.”

She leans in, gently kissing my lips. “I like you too.”

I roll my eyes. It’s like we’re in fucking high school, but I can’t help but feel a sense of accomplishment that she has said that to me.

Ivy stands, then she moves for the door. “I’m going to get something for you to eat, okay?” I go to rise, intending to follow, but she throws her hands out. “Stop! You stay put and rest. I got this.”

I nod, slumping back on the bed. Then she opens the door and walks out, closing it behind her.

Did that just happen?

Or am I still tripping?

I press my hand against my hard cock. “Yeah, that just happened.”

The problem is, eventually, Ivy’s going to want to go further, so I’m going to need an action plan for that day to try to keep myself in check.

My door swings open with force, and my eyes shift up, expecting Ivy to walk in, but it’s Nycto. Frown lines mar his face as he strolls in. He slumps into the desk chair and rolls it over to the bed, then kicks his feet up onto the edge of the mattress, making himself perfectly at home. Folding his arms over his chest, he lets out a grumble of expletives under his breath as I wait for what I know is coming next.

“Can you even fathom... how damn stupid it was for you to ride with alcohol and drugs in your system? Riding buzzed is one thing, but riding trashed? You fucking idiot! You’re lucky there was no one around to witness that shit.”

Regret swarms through me as I release a long exhale. I have no answer for him. So, instead, I ask, “How’s my ride?”

“Totaled. A mangled wreck. It’s amazing you’ve come out of this so well and aren’t lying on a slab in the morgue. If you weren’t so fucking high and off with the fairies, you probably would have tensed and come out of this a hell of a lot worse. But you’re paying for it, and you fucked your bike in the process. What do you wanna do about a new one?”

“I’ll go shopping when I’m a little more... functional.”

Nycto rubs his hand over the back of his neck, a frustrated tell. “You and Ivy?”

“There’s nothing to report. We kissed, but as far as I’m concerned, we’re taking this

shit fucking slow. We need to.”

Nycto bobs his head in understanding. “I get it. Your past makes relationships difficult at the best of times. Ivy’s throwing a wrench into the mix, being the way she is.”

“You got that right.”

“How are you? You sore?”

My hand instinctively moves to my ribs. “Nerve thinks I might have broken a rib or two.”

“Good. Maybe it’ll remind you how much of a fucking idiot you were the next time you go to do something stupid. If you ever, and I mean ever, pull a stunt like this again—”

“I got it, Pres. You don’t need to tell me twice. I got lost in my own head. I wanted to... I dunno, disappear for a while. Not have to deal with shit. Real life, you know?”

“I know... we’ve all been there, but wasting ourselves isn’t the fucking answer. And sure as shit nearly killing yourself isn’t either. Without you, I’d have to promote Whiskey to VP, and fuck knows how that would go.”

I chuckle. “It’d be a party every night.”

“And every damn day.” Nycto takes a deep breath. “In all honesty, I’m happy you’re okay, brother. But you also know I can’t let this go unpunished. You’re on shine duty for the next month.”

I go to argue but quickly realize I deserve it. Cleaning everyone’s rides is a prospect’s

job, and with potentially broken ribs... fuck. I'll be hurting for a while. "Yeah, fair call."

"You start tomorrow. Take today to rest. You're lucky I'm in a good mood, this is a damn light punishment."

He's right. I could've been given something much, much worse. Then again, I'm sure my brothers' scrutiny as I shine their rides while the prospects stand back watching me do their dirty work is going to be fucking torture enough.

Maybe it is the perfect amount of punishment... or should I say fucking torment.

Nycto stands and turns to walk for the door. "By the way, Eva told me to give you a message."

I raise my brow.

"She said if you hurt Ivy, you'll have her to deal with. You upset Eva, you'll have me to deal with. So, mull that shit over in your mind a little before you lose control, VP."

Starting something with Ivy makes my stomach flip. If I fuck up and hurt her, it's not just Ivy on the line—it's my patch.

I can read between the lines.

I hear what my president is putting down.

If I fuck up, and it's too fucking big, Nycto won't hesitate to show me the door.

He'll choose his Old Lady's wishes over me, and Eva is a package deal with her sister.

Ivy has the power to destroy me.

She is this perfect, precious cargo, who came off a ship all beautifully gift wrapped. She was innocent, sweet, and yet, there's something so tantalizing about her that pulled me in, right from the start—a glimmer of darkness.

I can't tell what's going to happen between Ivy and me, but I do know, if it doesn't turn out just right, one of us is going to end up fighting for survival.

And I'm not sure anymore which one of us it will be.

IVY

Four Days Later

Void's stronger than I give him credit for. He took one day to recover from his accident, but since then, he's been up and about. Sure, he grimaces, his face contorted in pain, but he gets shit done.

Like cleaning the bikes... a lot.

I assume the brothers are making them extra dirty as punishment. I have to admit, standing back, watching him with his shirt off as he scrubs the shining chrome—his body lean, muscled, and covered in still-healing bruises—it does something for me.

While we've shared a few passionate kisses here and there over the last four days since our earth-shattering first kiss, he hasn't laid a single finger on me. Not in any way to move this along, at least. It's like he's scared, and I'm on the verge of losing my damn mind. All I want is for him to rip my clothes off and ravish me.

But he won't.

With a sigh, I sink further into my seat as I stare at his toned ass. He's standing at the bar talking to Nycto and my sister. I gnaw on my bottom lip, just thinking.

Pepper slides in beside me, sporting a giant smirk. "If you stare any harder, your eyes will fall out."

I giggle, blushing as I look away. “But he’s so nice to look at.”

Pepper turns, glancing at Void with a shrug. “True. But if you want things to progress, then maybe you need to make the first move. Void has certain... tastes... and if he’s scared to go there with you, the only way is to make him. If you’re ready to go there, that is.”

“The thing is, everyone keeps telling me about how he needs to take it slow... even Void. How he needs to be gentle with me. But no one will tell me why. What the hell is he so into that should have me running scared?”

“Running scared? Maybe not. But preparing yourself? Yeah, probably.”

With my brow furrowed, I turn to her, studying the longing expression in her eyes. “Have you and Void...”

Pepper snaps her head back to me, regret showing in her features. “Well... I mean, I’m a club girl. It’s what I’m here for, besides all the cooking, cleaning, and morale, but I haven’t for a while. Not since you’ve been here.” She pauses for a beat. “I don’t imagine Trixie or Stacey have either.”

“Great. So both of us have a chastity belt on right now.” I sink into my seat a little further.

Pepper chuckles. “He’s not doing it to punish you, Ivy. He’s doing it because he cares.”

“Well, unless he’s into killing girls and fucking their corpse, he needs to lighten the hell up. I mean, honestly. What could he possibly be into that’s so dark?”

Pepper bursts out laughing, making Void turn our way. “Shit, you’re funny. I didn’t

know that about you. And obviously, I'm still alive, so there's no necrophilia involved when it comes to Void." She lets out a laugh. "You're safe. Your body is, at least."

Void heads our way as I exhale a sexually frustrated huff. "Maybe I should knock him out and feed him a Viagra, then I could have my way and my first time over with."

Pepper shakes her head. "Uh... that would be illegal. Plus, he'd likely be so freaking mad at you th—"

"Who would be mad?" Void asks, stepping in front of us.

Pepper swallows hard, but I shrug. "You would be if I mounted you in your sleep."

Void rolls his eyes. "Not this a-fucking-gain. Now you're talking about us to other people?"

I huff. "Wouldn't have to if you just gave me your di—"

Reaching down, he grabs my arm and hoists me up, effectively cutting me off. "Okay, c'mon. Time to go."

Pepper gives me two thumbs up as Void drags me with him through the clubhouse toward the hall. My stomach flutters in excitement.

Is he taking me to his bedroom?

"Where are we going?" I whisper, my voice coming out all breathy.

Void's lips turn up at the corner. "Jesus, you sound sexy when you're worked up like

this. We have someplace we need to be.”

My brows scrunch as we walk past the entry to the hall, heading for the exit of the clubhouse. “We’re not going to your room?”

“Keep up, sweet thing. C’mon, let’s go.”

Disappointment flows through me, but the massive grin on Void’s face, which causes the dimple on his left cheek to pop, soon makes my frustration disappear. We rush outside to where Ominous is waiting for us in a cage, and I smile. “We’re going somewhere?”

“Now you’re catching on.” Void helps me into the rear of the cage, then walks to the front passenger side next to Ominous. He awkwardly stumbles in as I close my door.

He’s still sore, the poor guy.

Ominous starts the car, and we’re off—to where, I have no idea.

“Ominous, where are we going?”

He side-eyes Void.

Void nods, obviously giving the okay to tell me.

“To get my VP a new ride.”

My eyes widen. “We’re going bike shopping?”

Void turns back to me, wincing with the pain in his ribs, but gives me the brightest grin I’ve ever seen from him. “Yeah, and you’re helping me choose.”

I emit an audible gasp. “I am?”

“You are!”

Ho... ly... shit!

“I thought this is a sacred thing, a man choosing his bike?”

“It is, but you’re part of my life, Ivy, and I want you to be in it for a long time. So, you’re going to help me choose my next bike, seeing as you’ll be spending a lot of time on the back of it.”

Wow!

Here’s me complaining about not getting any, then he tells me something like that.

I lean forward, reaching out to caress the side of his face. “It would be my honor.” I move forward to plant a firm kiss on his lips, a tingle shooting through my soul.

“Ivy, you’re gonna need to sit back, I can’t see out the side of the cage,” Ominous grunts out like we’re annoying the shit out of him.

I giggle, regrettably pulling my lips from Void’s, and sit back in my seat while assessing Ominous. His light blond, short-back-and-sides hair makes him look like he’s just come out of the military. The trimmed beard gives him a masculine appearance. Ominous is hot, there’s no denying it, but there’s something mysterious about him as well. “Hey, Ominous, why aren’t you on the gate anymore?” I ask, throwing my legs up on the seat and getting comfortable.

“Now we gotta talk too?” Ominous grunts to Void. “I thought you said all I gotta do was drop you off?”

“Can’t stop her from asking questions,” Void replies.

I sit forward, placing my arms on each of their seats, my head popping through into the middle section. “That’s right, so you may as well talk to me, or I can get reaaally annoying.”

Ominous mumbles something under his breath. “Fine... fuck! Since Spark took off for California, I’m needed more inside, so West is manning the gate. We rotate it between the brothers.”

“Mmm... and you’re happy with not being on the gate?”

Ominous turns to look at me for the briefest of seconds before his eyes go back to the road, his body alert. “Why you so interested in my life all of a sudden?”

Void snorts. “C’mon, man, she’s not conspiring to take you out.”

“That’s what everyone thinks before they get a fucking bullet to the brain,” Ominous grunts out.

“Wow! You’re tense. I get why they call you Ominous now. It’s ’cause you’re so freaking foreboding.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” he says through gritted teeth, keeping his eyes focused firmly on the road.

“It wasn’t one,” I chime.

“I’ll take it anyway,” he snaps.

“You’re my kinda guy, Ominous. A no-holds-barred, take-no-shit, take-no-prisoners

type deal.” I smirk. “Why haven’t we talked before now?”

He groans. “Because we haven’t been locked in a cage together.”

“See, you’re just like me... a twisted sense of humor. I like you, Ominous. We’re gonna get along just fine.”

Void huffs. “While this is very enlightening, seeing a brother and my girl getting along...” Oh, holy hell, Void just called me his girl. “I need you to drive, and Ivy? You have to come up with a name.”

“A name?” I jerk my head in confusion.

“For my ride.”

“Oh, no way! I can’t name your bike till I see it. That shit has to come naturally. It can’t be premeditated, or it won’t fit properly.”

Ominous scoffs. “Shit, you are club material.”

I smile. “I am, aren’t I?”

“Jesus Christ!” Void groans. “You two having any sort of friendship is gonna cause me all kinds of fucking drama.”

Ominous and I both smirk as we share a look in the rearview mirror.

“Sooo much drama,” I reply.

“Fuck’s sake!” Void mumbles under his breath, and Ominous and I both laugh.

A short while later, Ominous arrives at the Harley Davidson dealership. Excitement bubbles up inside of me as we pull into the parking lot. Ominous turns off the engine and faces Void. “Need me to come in and wait?”

“Nah, brother, I’ll be riding home.”

My smile is as wide as it can be, while my insides clench in desire. The last time I rode with Void, I felt such an adrenaline rush I nearly passed out. This time, I’ll be riding knowing I helped him choose his bike.

I reach for the door handle but turn back. “Thanks for the ride, Ominous.”

He dips his chin but says nothing. I’d expect nothing less.

Jumping out of the car, Void is by my side in an instant. He reaches out for my hand, taking it in his. Gnawing on my lip, I peek through the giant front window at all the shiny bikes on display. “Is it frowned upon to squeal in here? I don’t know how I’ll contain myself.”

Void tilts his head toward the door. “Then let’s go in and see how you do.”

I bounce on my toes in excitement. As we walk inside the giant showroom, my eyes don’t know where to look. I want to learn how to ride a bike so I can come pick my own one day.

I wonder if Void will teach me?

“Will you show me... how to ride? So, I can get my own bike one day?”

“Ivy, you’re tiny. I’m not sure you’ll be able to handle a Harley.”

I fold my arms over my chest. “You’re constantly underestimating me. I may be small, but I can handle a lot more than you think.”

Void narrows his eyes. “Are we still talking about bikes here?”

“I’m just saying, give me a chance. I might surprise you.”

Void goes to say something, but a store employee steps over. “Anything I can help you with today?”

I look at his name tag. “Hi, Paul. I’d like to buy a bike.”

Void groans. “No, she doesn’t. I’d like to buy one. I called earlier, said I’d be in to check out the bikes on the floor. Defiance crew.”

Paul smiles hesitantly, obviously unsure how to take the tension between Void and me. Still, without question, he swings his arm through the air, gesturing to a different section. “Yes. Cade, wasn’t it?”

I jerk my head back in disbelief, knowing I’ve never asked Void about his real name. I guess I’ve been so entrenched in the biker lifestyle, I took the guys’ road names as their actual names.

Void side-eyes me, but then nods. “Yes, that’s me.”

“Right. Come this way.” Paul starts to walk, but I reach out for Void’s arm.

He peers at me, and I lean in and whisper, “Cade?”

He raises a brow. “Yes, Ivy?”

A slow smile creeps over my face. “What’s your last name?”

Void’s eyes soften as he tightens his hold on me. “Nixon. Cade Nixon.”

Warmth floods through me when he tells me his name. It’s smooth like honey, but also like bathing in a sea of whiskey—soothing, calming, overwhelmingly sweet to the ear. I don’t know what’s happening to my insides, but they’re like mush.

“Cade Nixon,” I whisper.

Void brings his hand up, brushing a stray strand of hair away from my face. “Ivy Pérez...” His voice is low and husky, like he’s in the moment with me. Like he knows he’s just shared something special with me. I lean up on my toes, pressing my lips to his in the middle of the showroom. My hand caresses the back of his head as Void’s slides around my waist, pulling my body in alignment with his. Our tongues dance together, my body tingling and sparking with such a rush I become lightheaded.

“Ahem.”

Pulling back from Void, I turn to see Paul looking at us knowingly.

Void clears his throat, letting me go. “Sorry, man. You know how it is.”

Paul chuckles. “Young love? Yeah, I get it. Been married for twenty-eight years. Me and Daphne were like you guys when we first started dating. Now, it’s spending time with our kids and grandkids, just being a family. Eventually, you realize family is all that matters.”

Void exhales. “Yeah, man... blood, or the family you choose.”

“Exactly. Anyway, I have a few ladies for you to check over. You ready?”

“Yes! So much yes!” I bounce on my toes.

Void takes my hand as we walk through to the adjoining showroom. Bikes sit on the display room floor, all shiny and new, pristine and perfect.

I want to test every single one.

But that would be stupid.

“Let me know if there’s one that catches your eye, or any type in particular you’re after?” Paul asks.

Void and I both notice one right in the corner. It’s designed sleek, black, with industrial gray finishes. It’s shiny without being in your face, just like Void. They’re both complex characters without being over the top. It’s appealing, rugged, but smooth at the same time, and completely addictive. I can’t wait to get a taste.

As I walk to it, my senses heighten. I run my hand over the gray gas tank, and the cold metal beneath my fingers sends an electrifying chill down my spine.

Void stands back, watching me look over the bike. “You look fucking good next to that bike, sweet thing.”

“I bet you’d look even better on it.” I tilt my head toward the seat. “See how she feels.”

Void inhales sharply as he moves toward me, throws his leg over, then takes a seat. Oh my God, hot doesn’t cover it. His strong hands grip the handlebars, his vast shoulders looking even more imposing as he takes up his rightful position, and I

gnaw on my bottom lip, hoping Paul doesn't notice my blush, or suspect where my thoughts are going.

My skin warms as I picture Void bending me over the seat, ramming into me from behind, but Paul's voice interrupts me from my sexy illusions.

"Softail Breakout, 1868cc engine, 155Nm torque, a custom slasher exhaust. She's custom-made, a job that fell through last minute, so ape hangers were added. It's why she's on the floor for immediate sale. She's a real beauty. Only one like her."

Void raises his chin to Paul. "Bitch seat can be installed?"

"Definitely. I have one in stock. It can be added before you leave."

Void turns back to me. "Wanna take her for a test drive?"

Jumping on my toes, I voice a small squeal. "Can we?"

"Of course. Let me get the second seat installed, then you can take her for a ride around the block," Paul states.

Void jumps off the bike, letting Paul do his thing. He kicks out the stand, then wheels it away.

I'm giddy like a freaking schoolgirl as I grab both of Void's hands. "I had no idea buying a bike could be this exciting!"

Void leans his forehead against mine. "Normally, it isn't. But with you here, it's fucking thrilling. Like I'm making plans... never thought I'd be that kind of guy."

I lean up on my tiptoes to kiss him again, but it's only a brief peck. Poor Paul doesn't

need to witness us making out any more than he has already had to put up with. Void and I slowly walk around the other bikes, casually strolling, but nothing takes our fancy like the Breakout. I hope it rides well for Void.

Eventually, Paul looks around the corner, motioning for us to follow, and we know the bike's ready to take for a spin. We head out the back, and it looks even better with the bitch seat attached. Paul hands the keys to Void, who moves over to the ride and throws his leg over the seat again, looking so fucking good on it. Then he holds his hand out for me. "You ready?"

I slide into position behind him, and Paul hands us helmets.

Void mumbles under his breath, but he places the helmet over his head anyway. I pull mine on as he starts the engine. It roars to life, sending a thrill straight through me. Vibrating even more than his old bike, it instantly has my panties wetter than I was anticipating. I cling to Void, my thighs clenching around him as he duck-walks the bike backward. "Hold on, sweet thing."

I grin so fucking wide as he pulls back on the throttle, the noise near deafening, and we're off. The wind whips at my hair, the sun shining down on us only making this even more fucking amazing. Void's handling the bike perfectly. It's like we're both in sync with this new machine, and I love every damn second of the ride. I just wish I could have a shot behind those glorious handlebars.

At the corner, we turn, and I catch a flash of a person in white watching us, but then Void takes my attention as he suddenly swerves as if he's pulling over. I crease my brows as he comes to a halt down an abandoned road. Void cuts power to the engine and taps my leg for me to get off. I have no idea what he wants, so I do as he says and jump off, then stand on the sidewalk as he slides off too.

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

He shakes his head. “I’ve been making a fucking hell of a lot of bad decisions lately.”

I relax my tense muscles, reaching out to grab his arm. “Hey, don’t be too hard on your—”

“No, what I’m saying is... I’m about to make another really fucking stupid decision.”

I drop my hand, fear creeping through me. “Void?”

He clenches his eyes shut like he’s debating something in his mind, then nods his head toward the bike. “Get on.”

“You have to first.”

He exhales. “Not if you’re riding, I don’t.”

“But I don’t have a valid US license...”

He shuffles awkwardly, putting his hands in his pockets. “I know.”

My grin grows. “But we’ll be breaking the law,” I whisper.

He looks at me with an intensity that takes my breath away. The muscle at the side of his jaw works as he clenches his teeth. “I know.”

“You’re still gonna let me ride?” I squeal like some mad woman, my hands flying out in excitement. I’ve ridden a bike before, but it was a much smaller one back in Cuba that belonged to a friend. So, I know a little something about riding, but not much, and certainly not on a powerful bike like this. Void is putting a lot of faith in me.

“There are conditions...” he says, and I nod frantically. “You let me keep my hand on

top of yours on the throttle at all times. You don't go too fucking fast. And if you get scared, or if you think you can't handle it, you tell me, and we pull over. And finally, if you ever tell anyone I rode bitch..."

I rush forward, wrapping my arms around his waist so fucking tight. "I don't know why you're doing this, but I really, really, really want to show you my appreciation."

Void chuckles, pulling me off him. "I don't need you talking about sex right now. I'm gonna need to concentrate real fucking hard so we don't crash a bike I haven't even bought yet."

I run my fingers up his chest while gnawing on my bottom lip. "You're a badass, you know that?"

He groans loudly as he rearranges his crotch. "Stop it or I'll fucking change my mind." I laugh, turning to move to the bike. "When you get to the end of this road, I'm gonna need you to pull over so we can swap back. And we're gonna do this slow."

"Okay."

I slide into position. Void makes it look easy to reach the handlebars, but it's a stretch for me, yet somehow, I manage. There's something so fucking powerful when you sit behind the handlebars on a ride like this.

Void moves in behind me, then presses up against me completely. I feel everything, including his huge erection poking me in the back. I wriggle on the seat, pretending to get comfortable, and he grips my hips tightly as he swallows back a groan. Then he rests his hands on top of mine, his mouth lining up with my ear before he leans right in and murmurs, "Okay, sweet thing, start her up. Nice and slow in your movements."

His heart hammers against my back... or maybe it's my heart pounding so freaking much I feel it all the way through my body.

The bike revs, and I close my eyes, letting the horsepower flow through me. I want to roll my neck, arch my back, and moan.

"Okay, we're good to go. Slowly ease into the throttle," Void yells into my ear.

Opening my eyes, I take in a long, deep breath, then pull back on the throttle. The bike lurches, and I widen my eyes as we take off. We wobble a little, but soon, we move together to correct it. I hold my breath as I pull back a little more, coasting off down the street. I know Void's doing a lot of the work, flicking gears and shit, even controlling the speed, but I'm riding a fucking powerful bike.

Adrenaline courses through my veins like nothing I've ever experienced before.

I get it now.

The high.

The flood of emotion.

The connection to the open road.

I definitely want my own bike, but in the meantime, Void can teach me to ride this one.

"Change gears," Void yells in my ear.

I beam wide, doing as he says after watching him do the first couple. The transition is smooth as we start to move faster down the long stretch of road. A wave of

excitement bubbles away inside of me. “Woo-hoo!” I call out, making Void chuckle behind me.

I open the throttle, going probably about a quarter of the speed Void normally reaches on the road, but to me, I’m fucking loving this. I can’t believe he’s let me ride his bike. Or maybe she’s our bike after this. Perhaps that’s why he brought me, because this bike is going to be a part of us both?

Once I near the end of the road, I drop the gears without Void even having to tell me. He chuckles as I edge the bike over to the side and, pull her to a stop, then turn off the engine. Void slides off, and I follow, yanking off my helmet as I throw myself at him.

My lips crash to his before he can even say anything, our tongues colliding in a flurry of passion. His hands drop to my ass as he hoists me up, my legs wrapping around his waist while he walks me back over to the bike and sits me on it. The erection in his jeans presses against my pussy under my leggings, and I whimper softly into his mouth. My hands run up and under his shirt, then my nails dig into his warm skin. He groans, pressing his cock into me harder, but it’s not enough.

My pussy tingles with need, with desire.

I need him.

Fuck, I wish he would take me right here, right now.

My hands slide down between us to his belt as I kiss him with everything I have. I start undoing it, but he pulls back, breaking our kiss, and I voice a cry of disappointment.

Void shakes his head, letting out a gravelly groan. “Fucking hell, Ivy, you’re gonna be the death of me.” He lets out a long exhale as he takes my hands in his, moving

them to his mouth and gently kissing my fingers. Then he lets them go and takes a step back to buckle his belt.

Sitting on the edge of the bike, I try to calm my breathing, but I desperately need him to touch me. “Void, please...” I beg.

His face droops as he moves in, lifting me from the bike and then placing my feet firmly back on solid ground. “We can’t, Ivy. Not here. Not now.”

I’ll plead if I have to. Beg. Fight. I’ll do anything.

“Why?”

“I’m not taking your virginity on the side of the road where anyone can watch us. You’re worth more than that.”

Okay, I guess that’s a good answer. Still, I can’t help but pout.

“Fine. But I’m not happy about it. And this isn’t the last time we discuss this.”

“I’m sure it isn’t... but let’s talk about your riding. You did amazing, sweet thing. I’m so fucking proud of you.”

“I get it now... the rush, the freedom. You have to teach me properly. This bike, Void, she’s perfect.”

“She is. She only needs a name.”

She sparkles in the sun. When I was in charge of her, she made me brighten like I’ve never felt before. She’s a star, a goddess even. “Reva. Her name is Reva.”

Void tilts his head like he's pondering. "Reva... yeah, I like it."

"She's definitely the one," I gush.

Void looks at me, his eyes meeting mine.

A pulse, a wave of something, flows right through me.

I'm not sure what it is, but I am sure Void feels it too, because his eyes become more intense as he stares at me.

"Yeah... she is."

IVY

The ride home on our new bike was exhilarating. Of course Void bought Reva, how could he not? We both love the way she felt beneath us, but more importantly, he loved the way she handled. It's something I didn't think I would ever experience in my lifetime—the feel of a powerful bike between my legs and me in command—but I have a feeling with Void as a part of my life, I'm going to experience many firsts.

When we arrived back at the clubhouse, all the brothers were eager to check out the new bike. Even Eva was excited. It's not until after we've shown off Reva that we are able to grab a moment to slip away.

Thankfully, we manage to find some quiet in the Cell. It's nice to be alone with Void and not have to worry about anyone else. We shared something together today while buying Reva, and it felt awesome.

We've come a long way from the first night we spent together, the night after Eva and I were taken from the boat. Void would hardly talk to me. Actually, I did all the talking. He truly lived up to his name. It took every ounce of cheerfulness in me to break down his walls. Once I finally got there, it only took a minute, a split-second decision for him to brick that tough exterior back up. I still don't know much about him, about his past or where he comes from. All I know is he doesn't like talking about it, and that's when he shuts down.

I get it. My past is screwed too. My parents dying when I was young, Eva having to take care of us both. And then we were stolen to be sold. Tony DeLuca, the man who purchased Eva and me, is actually a half-decent guy. He just goes about things in the

wrong way, but it's for the love of his family, and I get that now. Back when Andrés was threatening to hurt Eva, I would have done anything to protect her if Nycto hadn't stepped in.

When Eva was shot, it killed me inside, watching her bleeding out like that. That precise moment, I realized family is everything. For the people we love, the people who mean everything, I would do anything to keep them safe.

That's why, when I figured out the walls down here held people behind them—bad people—I knew we were going to be okay here.

Nycto would do anything to keep us safe.

As would Void, Ominous, Nerve... any of the brothers.

When I first arrived—when I was free to roam the Chamber—the man I heard moaning in the walls and I had a chat. Sure, he was delirious, but he told me what he'd done to the club. He told me why he was bricked up behind the wall. Why they were torturing him in that way.

Instantly, something inside of me clicked.

I felt the darkness take hold.

This man was bad.

Did he deserve to starve or suffocate to death for his sins? Maybe not, but if he was going to anyway, I sure as hell wanted to be there to hear it happen. To witness his reckoning.

I think I knew then that something inside me was fractured.

Broken.

Dark.

I might come across as bright and bubbly on the surface, but something is lurking, something that needs to be tamed. Controlled. Prevented from hurting people... or at least diverting that energy to those who truly deserve it. I got my first taste of it when I slammed that brick into Andrés's face. Watching his skin rip and tear, his blood running free by my hand, made me feel mighty powerful and strong, like I could do anything. Bricking him behind that wall made me feel unbreakable.

I got another taste of it when I rode Reva—a hint of the woman I'm supposed to be.

Having Void there observing me only made me want him more. The fact Void accepts I can be sweet Ivy and poisonous Ivy means more to me than I can even comprehend.

I wish he would open up to me about his past.

We've established we have a safe space when we're together, even if we sometimes fuck it up. I want to understand more about him. Void means the world to me. He's been my rock since I arrived, and I wish he would lean on me as I do him.

"You're deep in thought." Void sighs, looking across at me as we sit on the sofa watching Chicago P.D.

With a deep inhale, I blink a few times. "Am I?" My voice goes higher at the end.

Real convincing there, Ivy.

"You've been quiet since we got back."

I sit up taller and give him a small smile. “Just reliving riding your bike for the first time.”

“You sure that’s all? ’Cause I thought it would make you happy, but you look... pensive?”

“Pensive, hey? Didn’t think you’d know how to use a big word like that.” I try to hold in my laugh, but when he scowls, it hits me, along with the soft plush of a cushion. I giggle, deflecting it, then lay my head on his lap. “I’m good. Just thinking about things.”

Void’s fingers come out to tenderly stroke my hair. “Like what?”

I sigh. “My place in this club.”

His fingers stop in my hair, his body tensing under me. “What do you mean?”

“I dunno... maybe I’m coasting.”

He doesn’t reply, but he inhales sharply. I turn to peek up at him, his complexion turning pale.

I bolt upright, frowning at him. “Void?”

“Y-you wanna leave the club?”

I gasp. “No! Shit, no! I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like that.”

He lets out the breath he was holding. “Shit, Ivy! Then what the hell do you mean?”

I smile weakly. Void wraps his arm around me, his cheek resting on my head.

“I mean, I feel like I should be doing more. I want to be more a part of the club. Do more for it. Riding Reva today made me so freaking happy, so damn excited, that I felt like a part of myself was forming. Hell, I can’t tell if I’m making any kind of sense right now.”

Void pulls me closer. “I understand completely. I know the feeling all too well. The first time I rode a bike, something clicked inside me too.” He pauses to press a kiss to the top of my head. “Let me talk to Nycto. You’re already running the crops and maintaining the Chamber. I’m not sure what else we can have you do when you’re not a patched member, but I will try.”

I gnaw on my bottom lip, warmth flooding through me. I’ve never been more excited at the prospect of finding my place here. I thought I’d found it, but I want more. I don’t exactly know what “more” is, but after taking that next step and riding today, I have a buzz, a thrill for this life. I want to live like Defiance does. I want to feel the rush of everything they conquer. I just don’t know how that can even happen.

As I snuggle into Void, loving the fact he’s going to check into it for me, I hear footsteps pounding outside the Cell. I peek up as Dash walks in. His eyes are bright when he spots me, but they dim when he sees me wrapped up in Void. He clears his throat, glancing at the television as if to appear uninterested. “It’s time to cultivate, if you’re up for it?”

Void groans as I detach from him. I plant a small kiss on Void’s cheek, then stand, walk out of the Cell toward Dash, and we head for the crops. Contentment swarms through me when Void stays put in my room, obviously waiting for me to come back later.

“So, is this a new thing? You and Void?” Dash asks, his voice sounding somewhat forlorn as we enter the crop area.

“Kind of... the kissing is new.”

Dash scrunches up his face, and he’s definitely coming across a little jealous. Still, I don’t know what to say to alleviate his concerns.

We get to work, starting the process of harvesting the mature plants. I keep to myself while pondering Dash’s actions. I can’t understand why he’s envious of Void. Before coming to the club, I’ve never had a guy jealous over me before. Yet I can’t ignore the definite tension in the air as Dash keeps to himself on the other side of the room.

Actually, I’m a little deflated that my friend is keeping me at arm’s length when we’ve been nothing but good pals up to this point.

The tension in the air is almost palpable and doesn’t lessen, but we’ve gathered and prepared what we need to take to Whiskey, who will ship it to Trixie’s café.

I box the items up and turn to Dash. “Are we okay? I don’t like this...” I wave my hands around. “Us not talking.”

Dash exhales, puts down his clipboard, and turns to me. “You know what, Ivy... no, we’re not okay.”

My eyes widen as I stand taller. “Okay... talk to me.”

Dash moves in, stepping right into my space, and takes my hand in his. The move shocks me, and my brows scrunch together. “Why him, Ivy? Why Void?”

I jerk my head back. “I... I don’t see how that’s any of your business.”

“Okay, let me rephrase... why not me? We have such good chemistry together.”

I gasp, jerk my hand away from his, and take a step back. “Dash, no... we’re friends—”

Dash is quick to step into my space again, cutting me off, and now the desperation is clear in his eyes. “But we don’t have to be. Please, Ivy, don’t you feel this?” He grabs my hand and places it over his chest.

Tears well in my eyes while my bottom lip trembles.

I shake my head. “It’s him, Dash. It’s always been him.”

His face pales, and his breathing shallows. He drops my hand from his chest, and I back away again. “I... I’m sorry. I’m still your friend. I’ll always be your friend. But that’s all we will ever be.”

Dash turns, his shoulders slumping as he lets out a heavy breath. Then he simply walks away, leaving me in the lab to deal with his revelation.

Now I have to try to figure out whether I tell Void, or just let this—whatever the hell that was—fizzle out on its own.

The Next Day

Eva’s gone all out.

The decorations are entirely over the top. From what I’ve read about Labor Day, it isn’t even a big holiday here—people mainly just enjoy the long weekend—so why we’re celebrating it, I don’t know. Still, if there’s one thing I know about Eva, it’s that she won’t just throw a party, she’ll tiro la casa por la ventana.

The Miami brothers are here, causing a ruckus. I wanted to stay downstairs, but Void

told me it could be seen as rude, and we should stay upstairs until we have at least eaten. Then I can go back to my cell and be the recluse I enjoy. Plus, I'm trying to avoid Dash, but no one else knows that.

Hawk, Doom, and Nycto are playing pool. Don't even ask me how three men can play pool, I have no fricking clue how that works. Stella, Eva, and our club girls are hanging out around the kitchen as the music blasts loudly through the main bunker.

I stand back, people watching and sipping on a Cuba Libre. Stacey makes them so freaking good, I can't stop at one.

Still, more than anything, I really want to go for a ride. Let my hair down, open the throttle, be one with the open road. I have an itch. I need Void to teach me. I'm dying for it.

He notices me from across the room, his posture changing as he does. His muscles relax, and his face softens as he turns to walk over to me. "What are you doing standing over here by yourself? You should be out there enjoying the party."

"Yes, Labor Day. It isn't even something you celebrate massively, is it?"

He chuckles. "What's got you all tied in knots?"

My eyes meet his. Dash told me he has feelings for me. The feelings inside me, the churning discomfort... esto no tiene nombre. Instead, I say, "I want to learn to ride."

His lips turn up, and his eyes sparkle. "You've caught it."

"Huh?"

"The bug. The need to ride. To feel the adrenaline coursing through your veins.

C'mon." He grabs my drink and places it on a nearby table, then takes my hand, leading me outside.

"Where are we—"

"You wanna learn to ride, you're gonna learn to ride."

My veins pump full of excitement as I bound quickly behind him. "Now? But everyone's here—"

"No one will even notice we're gone. They're too busy drinking and socializing with the Miami chapter."

He's not wrong.

"Okay, let's do this."

He walks me over to a smaller motorbike than Reva, pulls the keys from his pocket, and dangles them in front of my face. "Do as I say. You ride slow, don't draw any attention, and don't do anything fucking stupid. Got it?"

I nod in complete understanding, then jump on.

Void grabs a helmet from the fence, pops it over my head, and straps it on. He opens the ignition switch, spins the key clockwise, then flicks the cover back over, turning it to ignition. The green light shines in neutral, then he moves back. "First thing you gotta learn is how to reverse. Kick up the stand, pull the bike upright, and walk back with your feet."

I do as he says. It's heavy, but not so heavy I can't do it. I sit properly on the bike, duck-walking it backward. The surge of power roaring through me is second to none.

I've never felt more alive than I do right now.

"Okay, now you're in position, move to the right handlebar. The right button reads 'run.' Click it to on."

I gnaw on my bottom lip as I push it down.

"Now, the fun part. Right next to it is the start button. Check you're still in neutral, then when you're good to go, press down on start."

I bounce on the seat a little, then calm my excitement. Looking down, the N is still green, so I move my finger to the start button and press down on it.

The bike roars to life, and I unleash a happy squeal, bouncing on my toes as much as the bike will allow.

Void shakes his head. "Keep your cool, Ivy."

I nod, pulling my shit together. I take in a deep breath as I let the bike warm, release it, then turn to Void. "I can't believe you're letting me ride solo."

"I trust you." He doesn't hesitate, or flinch, or waver. He says it so openly and that it fills me with nothing but confidence. "You ready, sweet thing?"

I bob my head. "Yep!"

"Then pull back on the throttle, ease into it, and take the corners slowly. Don't go too fast, okay?" he calls out, but I have already ridden off and am halfway across the raised concrete section. I'm not going anywhere near fast enough for the wind to whip at my hair, but it's enough for me to get a feel of the bike and to get even more of a taste of what riding is like. It's smooth, almost effortless. I have no clue how I'm

adapting to this so damn easy, but it's like this is the only thing I'm meant to do with my life. I want West to open the gates and let me out, let me ride open and free with the wind, but Void absolutely won't let me do that, so I turn back toward him. The smile on his face is so fucking wide.

Being on a bike is helping significantly with the tension I'm holding onto inside about Dash's confession. So, I'm just going to let it go and ride. I can't help but notice Nycto, Eva, and Hawk from Miami standing out with Void, all of them now watching me. I thought having an audience would terrify me, but all it does is spur me on. I want to show them I can do this. I might be little, I might be a virgin, but those things don't define my character. I'm stronger than they all give me credit for. Right now, it's like I can do anything.

I ride past them, and Eva laughs and calls out as I go. "Woo-hoo... go, Ivy! You show these guys how it's done."

As I turn and head back the way I came, I grin like the Cheshire cat. I wish I could ride forever, but I know I can't. I have to go back inside at some point, and I shouldn't waste the gas. Eventually, and hesitantly, I pull to a stop right next to them.

Eva claps loudly as Void comes to my side. He winks at me but continues his lesson. "Okay, to shut her down, hit the run switch to off."

I move to the right-hand switch and regrettably flick it off. The bike shuts down, the vibration coming to a halt as I inhale sharply.

Void's eyes connect with mine. "You did great. Well done! Even changed gears at the right time. You're a natural."

"That's my sister, constantly surprising us. You're amazing, Ivy," Eva boasts as Nycto stands back with his arms crossed.

“Pretty badass for a small thing like you to ride a bike like that, Ivy. I’m impressed. A little turned on, even—”

“Go get another drink, Hawk.” Void glares at him as I giggle to myself.

“Yep,” Hawk agrees, spinning around and walking back down the ramp to head inside the bunker, stumbling as he goes. He’s already had quite a few, by the looks of it.

“You ride well, Ivy. Void’s doing the right thing teaching you,” Nycto states.

“You think?” I ask excitedly.

“Just don’t get too complacent. Otherwise, you’ll end up like Void. How are your ribs, VP?” Nycto jabs, raising his brow.

Eva elbows Nycto in the side, so he turns to walk back down the ramp.

Eva lets out an exasperated huff. “Sorry. He’s worried you’ll hurt yourself. He’s only snapping out of concern. That’s all.”

I exhale. “I get it. But Eva, I felt good. I know I can handle this.”

“Yeah, you can,” Void insists. “Nycto’s angry at me, not you.”

“Okay. I’m going to park it, then we’ll get back to the party,” I state.

“Good fucking idea. I need a drink,” Void adds.

I wince as I watch Eva run off after Nycto.

“It’ll be okay,” I say to Void. “Everything will work out. You’ll see.”

“You always have such enthusiasm about everything, but not everything works out.”

While parking the bike, I contemplate just how right Void might be.

This party sucks!

Everyone is wasted, while I sit back, watching them all make fools of themselves and wishing I were downstairs in my own little bubble. Instead, I’m trying to keep an eye on Void because it seems like whatever happened between him and Nycto outside has gotten to him. Now, he’s at the bar drinking. I don’t want him to hurt himself. He’s still recovering from the crash and taking painkillers, and mixing them with alcohol can’t be good for him.

I just wish I knew how to help Void when he gets lost in his own head like this. I have gone from such a high, to now sitting on my own on the sofa behind the pool table, like a loser.

I’m glad everyone else is having a great time, I think sarcastically.

As I sip on my second Cuba Libre for the night, Dash strides over with a wobble in his step. Oh shit! He flashes his pearly whites at me and flops on the sofa beside me, his arm instantly wrapping around my shoulders. “Hey, good lookin’. Heard you went for a solo ride tonight.”

“Are you drunk?” I tease, trying to keep things light.

Dash pouts, and his eyes shift to the ceiling. “Hmm... maybe a smidge.” His free

hand comes up, indicating a small gap between his thumb and pointer finger.

My hand taps his knee as I chuckle. “You need to remember how you’re gonna feel in the morning, when you’re up bright and early doing all your prospect duties.”

A blank expression crosses his face. “Shiiit! You’re right. So, so right. How can you be so fucking perfect all the time?”

I furrow my brows. “Is that meant to be a compliment or an insult?”

His eyes widen so much I’m scared his eyeballs might pop right out of his head. “No. Shit no. It’s a compliment, Ivy. You amaze me... all the time, like, fucking constantly.”

“I’m nothing special, Dash. Just a girl who likes to hide away in the Cell.”

Dash’s irises darken as he focuses on me. “You’re a woman, Ivy. A woman who has me completely torn up inside.” His eyes glisten as his hand behind me moves into the back of my hair.

I gasp in panic as he leans in, his lips puckered.

My hands move to shove him off me, but I don’t make it in time.

VOID

Dash wobbles on his feet as I yank him up by his cut before Ivy can push him off her.

He's wasted, but it doesn't give him the right to kiss her if she doesn't want it. And I can see she doesn't want it—her eyes were wide as she slapped and pushed at him.

“Oh, hey, Voi—”

My fist slamming straight into Dash's eye socket makes him spin and fly face-first into the pool table. My knuckles hurt like a bitch, but it's nothing compared to the pain searing through my side. I need to be careful, but right now, when I look at Dash, all I see is fucking red.

I reach out and grab him by the collar of his shirt, but as I do, he turns and pushes forward with all of his energy, ramming me back. I unleash a groan as the agony in my ribs becomes blinding. So much so, I can't fucking breathe as he slams me down to the floor. I can't function for even a second through the pain before his fist comes back, slamming straight into my jaw. The drunken assholes all cheer, enjoying the brawl rather than moving in to end it.

“Stop it!” Ivy screams, but Dash doesn't let up, slamming me with another fist into my eye socket.

Suddenly, Dash is knocked away from me, and when I look up, Ivy's standing there, shaking out her hand while Dash gawks at her, rubbing his face.

Did she just hit him?

“That’s enough! You two are fucking ridiculous. And Dash, hitting Void in the ribs? What were you thinking?” Ivy berates.

Nycto walks over, rubbing his chin in disapproval. “Prospect, you attacked the VP. There will be consequences. Chapel, now. Void, go to your room and sleep it off. Party’s over for both of you.”

I try to stand and cough, still finding it hard to breathe.

Ivy moves into my side, helping me up. “You’re a damn idiot... but thank you,” she whispers in my ear as she leads me through the drunken bikers to the hall.

“I know Dash wanted you to choose him, Ivy. I overheard him in the lab last night. Then seeing him try to kiss you just now... fuck.”

Ivy grimaces as we enter my room, but she takes me over to my bed and lays me down. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. It’s not because I felt bad for him or anything. It’s because you’re hurt, and I just... I didn’t want this to happen. I didn’t want you to get worked up and get yourself hurt even more trying to knock him out.”

I exhale, shaking my head. “I don’t care how fucking hurt I get, Ivy. I will always fight for what’s mine.”

She huffs, then leans in and grabs the hem of my shirt angrily. “For the record, I’m mine. I don’t care if Nycto ‘bought’ me, I don’t belong to anyone. Now, take off your shirt. I need to check your ribs.”

I help her pull my shirt off, and she winces. “Shit, Void! Dammit! The bruising’s worse. Maybe I should get Nerve in here?”

I wave my hand through the air dismissively. “He’s drunk. He’ll be no help.”

Ivy slowly sits on the bed beside me. “Can you take a deep breath for me?”

I somehow find the strength to smirk. “You going all ‘medical Ivy’ on me now?”

She rolls her eyes. “Just appease me, will you?”

I inhale as deep as I can. It hurts like hell, but I’m able to do it. I have to admit, it does relieve me, as I was concerned when I was winded out there that my fractured rib might have punctured my lung. It hurt that fucking much, and I couldn’t draw a breath.

“Good. Now stay here, I need to get some ice for your fucking... everything.”

She stands, and I reach out, grabbing her arm. She turns back to me, and I stare into her eyes. “Thank you...”

“It’s not him I want, Void.” She leans down to place an extremely gentle kiss on my lips.

I guess she’s trying not to hurt me.

Then she pulls back, heading out to grab some ice. I have to admit, it’s good hearing her say the words.

But having a fight with Dash with everyone watching?

Yeah, that was not my finest hour.

What a clusterfuck.

The Next Morning

There's a pressure on my legs, or is it my groin? I can't be sure, but I'm hungover and not awake enough to comprehend what's going on.

My body—it's sore all over.

Memories of fighting with Dash fly through my mind, and my lips turn up in the corners as I imagine Nycto kicking him out of the club for going to town on the VP.

I definitely feel like a damn pussy for having Ivy be the one to stop him. Something grinds down on my cock, making it harden instantly, and my eyes shoot open. Ivy's straddling me, wearing only a bra and her panties.

Jesus. Fucking. Christ.

She has a stethoscope around her neck, and I cock my brow. "You're not ready to play doctors and nurses with me just yet, Ivy."

She smirks and leans down to kiss me. My hands slide up the silky-smooth skin of her back as she places something against my temple. I furrow my brow, and it beeps. "Ninety-nine degrees. You're a touch high, but it could be the alcohol." She places the stethoscope into her ears and presses the cold circle to my chest. "Now inhale."

I grin, inhale deeply, and she moves the scope around my chest. "Exhale..." I release a breath. "Inhale one more time." I chuckle, then breathe in. She moves it to the side where most of the bruising is located, and I wince. She mouths sorry but continues. "And out." I exhale.

Ivy pulls the earpieces from her ears and wraps it around her neck. "You sound good. I'm pretty sure your lungs are fine. Of course, I didn't finish my medical training, so

we need Nerve to double-check, but if there was a problem with your lung, you'd be in deep shit by now, so I'm pretty sure you're good."

My hands move to her thighs sitting either side of mine. I can't help but admire her and how fucking sexy she is like this. "Fuck, you're gorgeous."

She rolls her eyes. "I've tried telling you, but—"

"Don't even joke about that, Ivy. You know I want you. I just..." I pause, trying to find the right words, but they don't come easily.

Her hands rest on my chest. "It's fine. Now's not the time anyway. You're hurt."

I glance down at her left knuckles, which are grazed, bruised, and battered. "You hit Dash with a mean left hook... for me?"

Ivy grimaces. "I feel like shit for hitting him, but he gave me no damn choice." She leans down to press her lips to mine again. I love the wave that crashes through me when I kiss her. It's like everything calms down, like all the shit that's going on melts away, and it's just this world where Ivy and I belong. Our bubble is the only place where I feel whole, and if she's the one coming in to rescue me every now and then, then I'm totally okay with it. Because if there's one thing I know about Ivy, it's that she has the heart of a lion and the tenacity of a bull. If she wants something, she's going to fight for it, and she'll fucking get it.

I can only hope, in the end, she wants to fight for me.

I'm sore as shit.

My face is swollen like I've gone ten rounds with Mike Tyson. It makes me feel inferior. I only went half a round with a fucking prospect, and the cunt laid me out. Admittedly, he had an advantage. That bastard went for my weak spot, disabling me right away, but the point remains, he took me out in front of everyone, including Ivy. And that shit doesn't sit right with me.

I've had it in for Dash for a while now.

I can't see a way through this, so I need to talk to Nycto.

Ivy's already left for the morning after doing her little nurse routine on me, which I have to say was fucking tempting as hell. But now, I have a score to settle.

As I pull on a shirt, my torso screams at me, and I grimace. Nerve came in and wrapped me up tight with a compression bandage, so now the constriction around my ribs hurts more than I want to let on. I should wear my cut, but I'm not going anywhere other than to see Nycto, and to be honest, I am not sure I can move my arms enough to get it over my shoulders. The pain's excruciating enough to pull on this much clothing. Nycto is just going to have to deal with me wearing civvies.

As I traipse out of my room, brothers take in the state of me. I'm sure they're wondering what it means, but they shouldn't read anything into it. I need to find Nycto, so I head for the kitchen, where Eva and Trixie are inside.

"Eva, where's your man?" I call out to her.

She spins with a bright smile on her face, then it falls as she takes me in. "You okay, Void?"

"Yeah. Hurts to put clothes on is all."

Her intense expression softens, and she relaxes. “Phew! Thought you were making a statement. He’s in the Chapel making some business calls. Head on in.”

I nod, turning to leave.

“And Void?” I turn back, raising a brow. “Thanks for looking out for Ivy last night. I’m sorry you got hurt in the process.”

“I’ll always look out for Ivy.”

“I know you will.”

I dip my chin, then turn to head for the Chapel. When I finally make it to the door, I knock twice. If Nycto’s in meetings, I figure I better not interrupt if it’s something important.

“What?”

I smirk and think, typical asshole answer.

Opening the door, I pop my head inside. “Can I chat with you for a second?”

Nycto waves his hand through the air. “I think that’s a damn good idea.”

I walk in, closing the door behind me, and as I turn, he’s staring at my shirt. “You not wearing your cut for a reason, brother?”

I sit in my seat. “Fucking hurt just to put my shirt on. Fucking hurts to walk. Figured I’m in the clubhouse, but if I go outside, I’ll put it on, even if the prospects have to help me dress.”

Nycto turns up his lip in a smirk. “Don’t be a pussy. You got in a fight... a damn pointless fight, I might add. You’re the VP of this club, and you will show the club what it means to be Defiance. You’ll wear your fucking cut wherever you damn well go. I don’t care if your cock’s falling off, your cut stays on. Got it?”

“Yeah, yeah, fair call. I’ll put it on after we have words.”

“You bet your ass you will. You’re walking around without one, it’ll have brothers thinking you’re leaving or some shit. Evaluate what you’re doing, Void. You’re a walking fucking disaster right now.”

Tensing, my mind flashes back to last night.

Dash made a mockery of me.

Every-fucking-thing always comes back to Dash.

“That’s what I’m here about.”

Nycto sits back in his chair and brings his cigarette to his lips, taking a drag. “Mm-hmm. This should be interesting.”

“The prospect. He’s caused nothing but trouble. He’s a damn issue. I’m not sure if the kid can be a part of the club when he so blatantly disrespects the hierarchy.”

Nycto blows out a perfect ring of smoke, then leans forward and butts out the cigarette. “It’s not the damn hierarchy, Void. It’s you.” He exhales. “Nevertheless, I agree. I’ve sent Dash away for a while to clear his head. To consider what the club means to him, what he’s willing to do for the club.”

“You’re giving him a second chance? What the fuck, Nycto?”

He glares at me. “The kid nearly died for Defiance. I have to take that into consideration. He’s put his life on the line, not just for Tampa, but also Miami. You might not like him, Void, but he is a valued member of this club. I gotta try to find a way through this.”

Running my hand through my hair, I scoff. “Fine. I’m happy I’ll have time with Ivy without him interrupting.”

Nycto pounds his closed fists on the table in front of him with a loud bang. “I know what it’s like to lose yourself over a woman, Void. Fuck, I did it with Eva. Just don’t lose yourself so much you end up losing your patch too.”

My veins run ice cold.

This club means everything to me.

It means a hell of a lot to Ivy too.

If I were tossed out, I’m not sure if she would follow me.

If I lost my patch, I would lose it all.

I have to reel myself in.

Keep my shit under control.

I have to do this for Ivy.

Everything I do is for Ivy.

Actually, there’s something else I need to do while I’m here. “Pres, I’ve been

thinking about something, and I wanna run it by you.”

He exhales, letting out a groan. “Can’t fucking wait to hear this...”

I don’t miss the sarcasm but push forward anyway. “What are your thoughts on gaining a new prospect?”

After discussing my idea with Nycto, he’s on board with it. Now, I just have to get all the moving puzzle pieces into place, and I need to figure out how I’m going to do that.

I’m sitting at the bar, casually sipping on a whiskey, letting my thought processes flow, trying to work everything out, when Stacey walks over with an envelope. “Hey, VP, mail for you,” she relays, handing me the long, orange envelope.

“Thanks, Stace.” Placing it on the bar, I rip open the ends and pull out some glossy pictures.

My eyes widen.

The picture is of me, sitting on the side of Van Dyke Road, entirely out of my freaking mind—my bike totaled in the background—and I’m staring into the trees, with the picture coming from that direction.

I spin around to face Stacey behind the bar. “Who delivered this?” I bark out at her.

She jumps at my tone. “Just the usual mailman.”

I turn over the envelope to study the postage stamp. It doesn’t give anything away,

just that it was sent from somewhere inside Tampa. My eyes shoot up, looking around the clubhouse to check if anyone else is seeing this—but of course, they're not.

I'm confused.

I was alone on that road.

Wasn't I?

I try to think back to what happened that day. Black shadows flashing through the trees. White-clothed figures. Familiar faces...

Maybe what I was hallucinating wasn't in my mind at all? I glance down at the picture again, studying it closer. My pupils were huge—my eyes virtually black. Someone definitely took them while I was out of it.

My stomach churns as my mouth goes dry. I start to feel light-headed.

Fuck! I'm not sure what to do.

Should I go to Nycto with this? No.

Standing, I grab the photographs and race toward Atomic's tech hub. If anyone can find out anything about these pictures, it's Atomic.

After knocking on his door, I turn the handle and pop my head around the corner. He's deep into coding, doing some nerd shit I don't understand and don't want to. I wait for him to stop what he's doing, and he dips his chin. "What's up, VP?"

"I've received something... Wanna know if you can check it out for me."

Atomic pulls his headphones off and slides his keyboard further up his desk. “Hit me.”

I place the picture on the desk in front of him, and his brow furrows. “Is this of you when you totaled your ride?”

“Yeah.”

“I thought no one was out there with you?”

“So did I.”

Recognition registers on Atomic’s face as he picks up the picture, shining a light with a magnifying glass down over the top of it. “Can’t find a tracking ID. Could try to check for fingerprints, but ours are all over it now. What about the envelope?”

“Came from around the Tampa area, which means nothing to anyone.”

Atomic hums under his breath. “Leave it with me to check into it further, but as you said, we don’t have much to go on. Looks like a dead end. Are you going to talk to Nycto about this?”

I think it through for a moment, then say, “I’ll let it play out for now.” I don’t want this to blow out of proportion, but I do have to admit I feel fucking weird.

Like someone’s watching me.

First someone taking pictures of me and Ivy, now this? That fact is really damn unsettling.

IVY

A Week Later

It's been a weird freaking week. With Dash mysteriously gone and Void acting all weird, I know something's up.

Void's been jumpy, agitated—almost like he's afraid of his own shadow. Sure, we've been carrying on with our daily routines. He's even taken me for professional riding lessons. It's the first time I've had to use my fake ID, and I have to say, I got a kick out of that. You'd think doing something illegal would scare me, but all it did was ignite a fire inside me. Made me burn to be this badass woman I'm positive I could be if only Void would let me free in this world.

He's scared.

I get that.

Of me blossoming.

Of people hunting me down.

But this past week, there's been a shift in him, since the morning after his fight with Dash. I have no clue what happened, or where Dash has gone. No one will tell me. The thought has crossed my mind that someone killed him for beating up Void. Dash took it too far, I understand that, but surely he didn't deserve to die for it.

The man was drunk!

But I can't think like that.

I know these guys. Yes, they're killers. Yes, they're what Americans call "1%ers." But I don't believe Nycto would do anything to Dash like that. I have to believe he wouldn't.

In the meantime, I have Void to worry about, and why he's so bent out of shape. He's put his walls back up, and they're firmly in place. He's hardly talking, hardly touching me. He's kissed me twice since the fight. I'm not sure if it's me. Have I done something, or did a problem occur I don't know about? So, I've decided to try and make him feel better. Whatever's troubling him, whether he wants to tell me or not is up to him, but I want to help him unwind and relax.

When I place the last candle out in my room, the Cell comes across as more of a calming meditation suite than a place Defiance uses to lock people up in. The scented lavender, ylang-ylang, and chamomile candles make light flicker off the walls, and the place smells amazing. I want Void to relax, let him know this is a safe space for him to let go.

I take a last peek around, liking the ambiance of the room, then head upstairs to find Void, who's slouched on the sofa, sipping on a whiskey. I sigh as I walk over to him. He eyes me up and down, and a brief light gleams on his face before it's all but extinguished.

I reach down, grab his arm, and yank. "Come with me. I want to show you something."

He doesn't budge. "I'm comfortable."

“Don’t be a cunt. Come with me.”

“Ivy! I’ve never heard you say that word.” A small smirk touches his lips as he stands and starts walking with me.

I loop my arm with his. “Well, if you’d stop acting like one, then I wouldn’t need to say it.”

He exhales as we traipse down the stairs to the Cell. Void stops, his eyes focusing on the flickering lights of the candles sporadically placed around the room. His muscles tense as he side-eyes me. “What’s this?”

I let go of him as we walk inside, then turn back to him. “Surprise!”

Drinking down the rest of his whiskey in one swallow, he narrows his eyes in on me. “You tryin’ to be romantic?”

I jerk my head back at his tone. “I’m attempting to help you relax. Let me give you a massage, help you unwind. You’re so freaking tense.”

“You’re gonna do that for me?”

With a small laugh, I wave my hand through the air. “I’m already doing it. Now, stop being your usual asshole self and come sit on the bed. Take your shirt off, and I’ll rub your shoulders for you.”

Void hesitates, but I pat the bed, which makes a slow smile creep up onto his face. “I’ve been a prick to you this last week,” he states, taking off his cut and placing it carefully on the desk.

I shrug. “I’m not going to pretend I understand what’s going on, because I don’t.”

He nods, pulling off his shirt.

I will never get sick of seeing him shirtless. Even with the bruising still smattered over his ribcage, those chiseled abs, his perfect V, not to mention those black and gray tattoos—he looks perfect to me.

Void rests his shirt beside his cut, then sits in front of me. It's the first time I've seen his back clearly. The muscles on this man are simply breathtaking, but it's the Defiance logo covering his entire back that really makes my insides quiver with desire. Void is pure sexual torment right now, but I need to keep myself focused.

I kneel in behind him, my thumbs pressing into his incredibly tight shoulders. “But, in saying that, if you don't want to talk to me about whatever it is that's going on, then I won't push you, either.”

“You're far too understanding, Ivy. Any normal woman would've given up on an asshole like me a long time ago.”

I knead his muscles, feeling them begin to loosen with my touch, and see his body starting to relax beneath my grasp. “The thing is, Void, I'm no quitter. I don't give up unless there's a one-hundred-percent reason for me to do so. You haven't given me a reason to quit, yet.”

He snorts. “You must have your scorecard set quite high, because I can name a dozen reasons why you should've given up on me by now.”

I lean down against his ear. “And that's why you're not me.” I press my lips to his cheek, giving him a quick kiss before pulling back and continuing with my massage of his shoulders.

“I've never had anyone take care of me the way you do.”

My chest squeezes as his walls come down again. This is the Void I'm falling for.

"You need to let me do it all the time. Don't put your walls up around me. I see you, and I happen to like you... the real you, Cade."

Void inhales like he's having trouble trying to keep his shit together. His chin drops to his chest, but I keep massaging him anyway. I'm sure we're making progress.

He clears his throat, and his voice comes out low, almost a whisper. "I grew up in a cult."

Everything stops as I take a second to let that tidbit of information sink in.

That explains some things.

My head spins as I think of all the possible shit he's witnessed or been put through. My breathing quickens, a cold sweat racing over my skin.

"Ivy?" Void's concerned voice breaks through my rising panic as he turns to me, and that's enough to bring me back to earth.

He grounds me.

He's my rock.

I put on a calming smile and keep massaging his shoulders. "Keep going... tell me everything."

"My father ran it. He was known as the Redeemer..." He pauses. "That man was anything but."

I continue to listen as Void hesitantly tells me his story.

“I grew up with many siblings. Some older, some younger. Some male, some female. But none of us knew who our mothers were. It’s just how it went. The women in the cult shared the duties and responsibilities of taking care of the children and serving the men. They were all our mothers, I suppose.”

An ache forms deep in my chest as I think about my mother. I grew up loving her, but she was taken from me far too soon. I can’t imagine growing up not knowing who she was. It must have been terrible for Void.

“You say you have siblings. Do you ever see them?”

“No. I have no clue where they are. Some went to jail, others to foster homes. I was lucky when I got out.”

“How did you? Get out, I mean?”

He takes a few deep, steadying breaths. “I started to realize something wasn’t right—that maybe this way of life that was ingrained into me wasn’t the right way. When my dad started bringing in outsiders and they wouldn’t assimilate, they wouldn’t change to our way, I started listening. They kept telling me it was wrong. We were immoral for doing what we were doing. That what I was doing was evil.”

My fingers stop on his shoulders. “What were you doing?”

His chin drops to his chest again, like he’s ashamed. “I was only young, sixteen at the time, but my father was trying to initiate me to become like him and my older brothers who were running the farm. I didn’t know any better. I was raised this way from birth. It’s all I ever saw growing up. When the children turned five, we were taken to a party to see the elders doing all kinds of fucked-up things. That was our

initiation into the farm. From that age, it's so entrenched into you that it all becomes second nature."

I need something to relieve my tense muscles now.

"Void... what were you doing?" I repeat, an edge of hesitation bleeding through.

He turns to face me. His eyes meet mine, and they're so full of regret, it smacks me right in the chest. "My job was to tie women to the wooden crosses, naked, and make sure they were prepared for the elders." He grimaces the second he says it, and his whole face screws up in pain.

"It was a sex cult?"

"Yeah... everything my father and brothers did was in aid of pleasing the human form. The women who were there were willing participants, but then he started bringing in outsiders, and they... they were not willing. That's when I knew that maybe this life I'd been living wasn't the right kind of life for me."

"So, you got out?"

"The farm was raided by the heat. My father and older brothers were taken into custody, and the rest of us sent to foster homes. I struggled for a long time, fighting between the urges my father taught me to embrace, and the life the real world taught me was the right way. It's why I struggle with you. Because I don't want to be that guy with you."

I shuffle, moving around to sit next to him. "I get it now."

"You do?"

I breathe out faintly. “Yeah. Growing up like that is rough. It made you think, made you act differently.”

“Yeah, exactly. It’s why I can’t rush this with you, Ivy. We both have to be ready.”

After hearing his story, all he’s been through, plus the fact he’s finally opened up to me, I can’t imagine a better time than right now. I sit up on my knees, grab the hem of my shirt, and slide it over my head, then throw it to the floor, leaving me in my black lacy bra.

Void widens his eyes like he has no clue what the fuck I’m doing, and my heart begins to race. “I am ready, Void. You won’t hurt me. Trust yourself like I trust you.” I reach out to grab his hand and move it to the top of my breast. He squeezes, just enough to send a wave of excitement through me. “Don’t hold back, Void. Please. Just let go.”

A low growl reverberates through him as he lunges forward, taking me with him as he falls to the bed. I let out an excited squeal as his lips press against mine. His tongue slips in, rough and hot, and my hands slide up his back and into his hair, pulling him closer. Void’s body presses down between my legs, applying pressure against my aching pussy.

I can’t help but whimper into his mouth.

He pulls back from me, and for a second, I think he’s going to stop, but his hands move either side of my bra, and with brute strength, he rips it apart at the seams. I giggle as I throw it to the floor, and his eyes take in my ample mounds.

He shakes his head. “Fucking hell. I’m going to go easy on you this first time, Ivy, but next time, I can’t make any damn promises.”

Hearing him talk like that does something to me. I squirm on the spot as his fingers make quick work of my leggings, yanking them down the same time as my panties, leaving me completely bare in front of him.

Void sits back on his knees between my legs, spreading them wide. He closes his eyes for a moment, just taking in a few deep breaths before he opens them again. “You’re so fucking sexy like this, Ivy.”

I gnaw down on my bottom lip while waiting patiently for him to touch me. “Void, please,” I beg.

He grins, the sight almost making me orgasm on the spot, then his head ducks down between my legs. Anticipation builds inside me until his tongue hits my clit, and I gasp at the warmth. I’ve never felt anything like it before. Sure, I’ve double-clicked my mouse more times than I can count, but this? This takes it to a whole new level. “Shit...” I pant as his tongue caresses me in the best possible way.

A tingle moves from my toes to my scalp as my heavy breaths echo around us. My fingers move down to thread through his hair and hold him to me. He slowly slides a finger inside me while his tongue annihilates my senses. My back arches off the bed as a throaty cry erupts from me. I’ve never had a man touch me before, and hell, am I glad Void is the first, because he’s amazing.

His finger moves in and out while his tongue flicks my clit. Beads of sweat top my brow, and goose bumps cover my skin. My breathing quickens so fast, I can hardly catch it. My fingers grasp his hair, holding him to me harder, grinding his face against me as I gnaw on my bottom lip so intensely it hurts, but I love the pain. Everything’s so damn fucking good.

“Holy shit, Void!”

He pushes his finger higher and adds another, making my entire body shudder and shake as he flicks his tongue one more time. My muscles tense so fucking tight it's like they might burst from the tension, and lights flash behind my eyes. Then, I hold my breath as a wave of pure ecstasy slams over my body. I orgasm so fucking intensely that I find it hard to breathe, but once I remember how to inhale, my muscles fully relax, and everything turns to jelly. "Jesus Christ."

Void chuckles as he slides his fingers out, and I have to hiss—a combination of being too sensitive and wanting more making my body shiver. He quickly stands from the bed, but I'm too zoned out to focus. His belt buckle clangs, then there's the ruffle of his pants falling to the floor, followed by two thuds of what I assume are his boots.

Suddenly, I'm being hoisted up, and my jelly-like body is moving through the air with his strong arms.

Void sits naked on the bed and pulls me to kneel over the top of him. "You have more control this way," he says breathily. "You're able to guide how deep you wanna go, and if it hurts, you can slow down or stop."

"If it feels anything like that just did, I'll never want to stop."

Void's soft lips stretch, but his smile doesn't quite reach his hooded eyes. His hand shifts up to caress my cheek, then pulls my face to his. Our lips connect, and I kiss him with every damn thing I have in me. All I've wanted for so damn long is to fuck Void, and now the moment is here. I thought I'd be nervous, a hint of anxiety about this, but all I feel is ready. So ready. More than ready.

My hand moves down, and my fingers barely wrap around the width of his cock. Despite my trepidation, I pull it into place beneath me. I line my pussy up as I continue to kiss Void with everything I have, then edge the tip of his cock to my opening, my heart racing in anticipation as I slowly, very slowly, slide partway onto

him.

I gasp.

He's huge.

I break our kiss and rest my forehead against his, letting myself become accustomed to his size before I go any further.

His hands slide up my back, helping to keep me relaxed and in place against him as we sit together. "I've got you," he whispers.

My eyes meet his, and nothing but adoration shines back at me. "Yeah, you do." I lean my lips against his again, keeping my eyes on his as I kiss him, then continue pressing down. A pinch hits me deep inside, but it's not unbearable—more like an ache in the pit of my stomach. Certainly not enough to stop me from moving. If anything, it spurs me on more. Suddenly, the pressure gives, and I groan.

I'm not a virgin anymore.

Void rubs my back soothingly as I begin to slide up and down. His cock inside me is like nothing I've ever felt before. It's filling, intense, and I have the overwhelming feeling of him surrounding me.

His cock is so fucking big, I'm not even down on him the entire way, and he's stretching me so damn much. It's a mixture of uncomfortableness teamed with pleasure as I continue to work myself on him.

"You're so fucking tight, Ivy, I can hardly stand it," he groans out, his voice husky and full of lust.

I pant, my walls loosening a little, enjoying each movement more and more, pushing deeper and deeper, as he keeps an even pace with me. It's not frantic, not animalistic, but it's certainly not slow and tender either as a wave of pleasure rolls over me.

Eventually, I lower myself fully onto him, and we both let out a deep moan. My nails dig in to his back as I try to adjust to the pressure and the feeling of fullness. "Fuck!" His cock pulses inside me as his thrusts meet mine. No wonder people go crazy over sex—it's the best feeling in the world!

I move a little faster, a rhythm building, the pleasure rolling through me as I ride him. My head falls back as I start to pick up the pace and grind down against him, the ache seemingly gone, only desire and enjoyment flooding me. My fingers run through Void's hair as his lips move to my neck, his teeth grazing my skin, his tongue darting out to soothe the sting.

I pant for breaths as the pleasure rises inside me. "Fuck, this feels so good," I whimper.

Void groans. "Can you handle a little more?"

"Yes. All of it. I want everything." The words come out all breathy.

Void's hands move to my hips, and he starts to move me. My eyes widen as he rotates his hips in time with the movements, then thrusts deeper. My fingers thread through his hair, gripping tightly as I ride him.

"Oh shit! Oh, shit!" The intensity picks up dramatically as I clench my eyes tight. A tingle shoots all the way through my body, my back arching while lights dance behind my eyes again. "Oooh, fuck!" My orgasm slams into me deep inside, making me shudder all over as I clench around him. My body falls forward, my arms looping around his neck, and I grip hold of him, trying to bring the intensity under control.

“Hold on, sweet thing. I’m not done yet.”

Hearing him call me sweet thing wakes me. I sit back, continuing to ride him, my arms resting on his shoulders. His hand snakes down between us to press on my clit. My eyes all but roll back into my head as I pant, frantically riding out this crazy wave of pleasure. “Void...” I plead.

“I know, we’re almost there.” His voice comes out as a breathy groan. “Are you ready?”

I whimper, not sure what he has in store for me next. “Yes.”

Void grabs my hips, pulls me up, then slams in me so deeply I see stars. My breath catches as something inside me clicks. The power of his thrust, the pleasure he’s triggering, unleashes something dark inside of me—a woman I didn’t know I was until right this very second. I guess I had an inkling. I knew something dark was inside me, but now poison Ivy is coming to the surface, and I can’t control her. If my virtue was the key to poison Ivy’s chastity belt, consider the cage wide-fucking-open.

With bared teeth, I growl and push him back down onto the mattress. His eyes widen as one of my hands moves to the side of his head, the other to his throat. My eyes meet his, an understanding in them as I tighten my fingers around his neck. A light explodes behind his eyes, and his hands move to my ass, moving me on and off his cock faster and harder to reach our mutual climax. Void’s mouth opens noiselessly like he’s in fucking heaven, and I squeeze harder on his neck, the skin around my fingers starting to turn red as I ride him.

The tingles in my body ignite again, bursting through me, this time in an explosion. I release a guttural moan as I ride him through the biggest fucking climax I’ve ever had. Void’s cock throbs inside me, and I think he’s getting close, so I tighten my grip even more. My body slickens in a sheen of sweat, goose bumps lining my skin as I

clench my eyes, the explosion overtaking me at full force.

I let go of Void's neck and, bringing my palm up, slap him hard across his face. His head snaps to the side, and a throaty moan escapes him as he grabs my hips, spins me, and flops me down onto the bed on my back. He pumps a couple more times inside of me, then pulls out to release all over my stomach, his hot cum coating me from the tip of my pussy to below my breasts.

"Fuuuck!" He collapses over me, fighting hard for breath.

I exhale and let out a contented chuckle as he drops onto the bed beside me, panting for air. At the same time, I stare up at the ceiling, feeling like a completely different woman.

Holy shit.

Void turns his head from the pillow to look at me. "I've been calling you sweet thing. Maybe I've been reading you wrong all this time... after that, I should be kneeling at your feet and calling you mistress."

Smirking, I giggle. "Too much?" I ask.

He flips over onto his back, throwing his hands under his head. "Fuck no. That was perfect. Not what I was expecting, but fucking perfect. That slap at the end... Fuck! I've never come so fucking hard in my life."

I smile, glancing down at the mess on my stomach. "You'd better clean this up, cabrón."

"Asshole, hey?" He snorts out a laugh. "Gimmie five to recover. You cut off my airway."

“You can handle it.”

Void leans in and plants a kiss on my lips, a small smirk on his face. “Seems you can too. I don’t know why I delayed this for so fucking long.”

“I did try to tell you.”

He shifts onto his side, moving a strand of hair away from my face in a gentler gesture. “I know I treated you like you weren’t ready for this, and as it turns out, I did keep myself in check, but you’re the one who unleashed.”

My palm moves to his reddened cheek, still displaying my handprint, caressing it as his eyes stare into mine. “Maybe now you’ll stop treating me like some innocent little girl?”

He chuckles. “Yeah.”

“Now, clean me up! ándale!”

Void shifts off the bed. “Yes, ma’am.”

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:08 pm

VOID

The Next Day

Fucking Ivy was everything I didn't expect it to be.

It was her first time, so I held back and kept my past where it belonged, buried under years of psychotherapy. But in an instant, she had it all creeping back and bubbling under the surface.

Oh, the things I want to do to her now.

Ivy is always surprising me, but that was on a whole nother level. The choking I thought maybe she was doing to appease me, but when she drew back and slapped me, the playful twinkle in her eye and the cocky smirk on her face both let me know she's all about the kink.

How the hell could I be so lucky?

It's like I brought something out in Ivy, something maybe even she wasn't sure was there. But she's brought something out in me too, because I stayed with her after we fucked. Usually, I would fuck and flee. I'm not used to sticking around after I bed a woman, so staying, having a conversation, showering together, then falling asleep with her in my arms, yeah, that never happens.

It's all new to me.

I'm feeling things for her I am not sure I ever thought I could feel. And to be honest, I like it.

The idea Ivy and I could fall into this pattern together feels damn good.

It feels right.

But I do need to figure out what the hell I'm going to do about those photographs that are making me more anxious than I care to admit, especially since I still have no damn leads. I have no clue what they mean. I've got nothing. No idea if it's a threat or not, but I'm sure I need to take it as one.

Ivy's with the crop, doing her thing. Unfortunately, now that Dash isn't around, she has to work twice as hard. I feel bad about that, but at the same time, I'm relieved he's not here. It's made life with Ivy so much fucking easier.

Sitting at the bar as my brothers fuck about around me, I feel like maybe I can relax a little.

Until Stacey walks in with the mail and hands me an envelope.

"Another one for you, VP."

So much for kicking back and taking a load off. My muscles tense as I grab the orange envelope from her hand, which is stamped the same as the last one. Taking a deep breath, I slide it open. No pictures—it's practically empty—so I turn the envelope upside down, and a key slides out with a tag attached. Rolling my shoulders, I turn the tag over.

You've unlocked her chastity belt.

Now she's ready.

My eyes shoot open as I grip the key tightly in my hand.

A cold shudder runs down my spine.

I haven't told anyone about what happened with Ivy and me yesterday. Not a single soul knows, and unless she's told someone, we have a big problem.

I can't keep this to myself.

Now's the time to tell Nycto.

After returning to my room to grab the envelope with the photographs, I walk to the Chapel to find my president. I knock on the door, hear a grumble, then turn the handle. He's buried deep in paperwork as I walk in. "What's happening?" I ask.

"Just getting shit dealt with paying back Hawk for Eva and Ivy."

"I should offer you some cash. You put everything up to keep them here, and I'm profiting out of the arrangement. Let me offer some greenbacks to help."

Nycto lets out a laugh. "Holy shit! Who are you, and what have you done with Void?"

I scowl. "The fuck you talking about?"

"I believe you just admitted you care about Ivy."

"Yeah, I do. I know... I'm Void, I don't care about anyone... but I do care about her. Can we drop it?"

Nycto fights his smile. “You owe me nothing, VP. Just seeing she’s affecting that cold, dead heart of yours is payment enough for me. I made this financial mess, I’ll clean it up. Anyway, you after something?”

I walk over and slide the two envelopes across the table. “I received these in the clubhouse mail. The photos a week ago, the key just now.”

Nycto hesitates, his eyes lingering on me like he’s aware this isn’t going to be good. He exhales, his lips a thin line as he picks up both envelopes. He opens the first one, and the key drops onto the table. Then he flicks open the other and pulls the pictures out. He studies one. “This is from when you wrecked a couple of weeks back?” I nod. “Hmm...” He picks up the key, assessing what’s written on the tag. His eyes shoot to me. “This true?”

“Yeah. Yesterday.”

Nycto lets out a surprised chuckle. “Well, shit! Congrats? Is that even what you say in this situation?”

I groan. “Pres, concentrate. Nobody knows but Ivy and me, and now you.” I gesture to the envelopes. “I don’t know how the fuck they, whoever they are, found out.”

Nycto looks back down at the photographs in front of him. “You see anyone while you were out of your head?”

“Hard to say... I saw a lot of shit while I was tripping.”

“You have any clue who it could be?”

“I have a couple of ideas. My main one right now, though, is the DeLucas, seeing as on the key it’s brought Ivy into it, and they already had someone tail us taking

pictures. Maybe they're seeking out some kind of sick form of revenge for us taking Ivy, even though they got what they needed in the end. You know the saying..."

"Never trust a DeLuca," Nycto finishes. "Okay, we need to check it out before this gets out of hand. We'll ride out there to see what Tony has to say."

"Thanks, Pres. Appreciate it."

There is something different about riding Reva. I can't explain why. Maybe because I bought this ride with Ivy, I have more of a connection to her. There's something about it which makes everything disappear, and all my troubles seem so far away. Though in the back of my mind, I know when we arrive at Tony's house in Miami, trouble is going to be the first thing I find.

We ride up to the large, white driveway, then pull to the front of the house. Guards walk down the path, a six-man gun salute waiting for us as we park. I side-eye Nycto, who doesn't even bat an eyelid. Nycto, Whiskey, Ominous, and I jump off and start the walk toward the front door, but the guards halt us.

"What the fuck do you want... rebels?"

The other guards cackle as if that was some sort of insult.

I roll my eyes at the cunt. If we had a dollar for every asshole who thought calling us rebels instead of Defiance was an insult, we'd be rich. Dickhead!

"Need to speak to Tony. It's important," Nycto grunts out, obviously as unimpressed as I am.

“He’s had his fill of you. He has no need to speak to you again.” They snicker once more, and I groan.

“Okay, that’s gonna get old real fucking fast. Tell Tony we’re here, or I start shooting,” I demand, pulling out my gun and aiming it at the idiot.

They all point their guns at me as the front door opens, and Tony steps out. “Abbastanza!” Tony snaps at his men. “Defiance are our guests. Treat. Them. As. Such!”

They lower their weapons while I do the same.

Tony assesses the four of us. “Dash isn’t with you?”

Nycto hesitates. “Ah, no. He’s... indisposed.”

“Pity. Mia would love to see him again.”

“Children do love playing with other children,” I mumble.

Nycto glares at me as Tony waves his hand through the air. “Come. Obviously, we have business to discuss.”

We follow Tony, but Nycto pulls me aside. “Behave your-fucking-self. No exceptions!”

I nod, and we continue. We walk through to an open living room—the place is enormous. Tony gestures for everyone to take a seat, so I move to the giant chesterfield armchair at the end of the leather sofas. Everyone widens their eyes, shaking their heads as I go to sit.

Tony sneers. "It appears your VP does not know protocol, Nycto."

Everyone stares at me. "What?"

Tony purses his lips. "I sit first. I also sit in the same chair every time."

I scoff. "Well, Tony, you're dealing with Defiance. And from what I've been told, we're at a truce. You're no better than us, we're no better than you. That custom doesn't stand if we're supposed to be equals."

Tony glances at Nycto, but he shrugs. "He's got a point, Tony."

Tony shudders but walks to the leather sofa sitting next to his chesterfield armchair. I am sure it's taking everything in him not to pull out his gun and shoot me. "You're strong-willed, Void. It's either going to get you far, or get you killed. I haven't decided which yet."

I shrug. "Hopefully both, just one a little later than the other."

Tony chuckles. "Now, what is it I can do you for?"

Nycto nods for me to explain. I sit forward in Tony's chair, my hands on my knees as I exhale. "We had a threat come through to the club toward me and Ivy. I need to make sure it wasn't you."

Tony stands abruptly, running his fingers through his hair, sheer panic crossing his features. "You need to keep Ivy protected. If you can't, then bring her here. I need her, Void. I need her blood for Mia. It's too valuable. I'll likely need her again in the future. You must protect her!"

I scoff at the righteous asshole. "You're only concerned about the blood Ivy contains,

not her as a person. Great.”

Tony shakes his head. “That came out wrong. My main concern is always my Mia. If you’ve ever loved someone, Void, you’ll understand the lengths you would go to, to protect them.”

“So, this threat wasn’t you or your men, Tony?” Nycto confirms.

“No. Ivy’s too important. But my offer stands. You need somewhere for her, my home is her haven. No one would get to her here.”

“Not happening. But we will keep you updated on what’s going on,” I tell him.

“Please do. And Void?”

I stand, turning to face him. “Yeah?”

“You’ve shown your hand, now make sure you look after her. A strong woman deserves a strong man.”

I dip my chin at him as I turn with my brothers in tow, and we head for the door to make the long journey back to Tampa. Now, I just need to figure out if we tell Eva and Ivy about what’s going down, or whether we continue to keep it quiet.

One thing I know for sure—blocking Ivy out and building a wall hasn’t done me any good so far, but telling her someone’s watching us is going to scare her unnecessarily.

I don’t want that, not now she’s finally starting to blossom.

I have to play this cool.

Try to see what I can figure out before I go to her with the information.

First things first, I need Atomic to sweep the Cell and my room for bugs.

IVY

Void is off on some job with Nycto. He thinks I haven't clicked that something's up, but the man has been tense for days. Sure, he loosened up a little after we fucked, but it didn't take him long to go back to being apprehensive as hell.

Me, though? Since we had sex, I feel different. Not because I lost my virginity—that's a cliché—but because it is finally like a part of me has been unlocked. I let myself go with Void during sex. I let myself be free. I let poison Ivy out. I tried to hide her back in Cuba, wanted to fight her off by being this extroverted young woman who had so many friends. I was always the life of the party. Because I was hiding the fact that deep down, I wanted to tear the bitchy girl's hair out by the roots until her bleached-blond hair was drowning in blood, or slice the popular guy's balls off for slapping my ass one too many times, then post them to his unsuspecting girlfriend.

There was something in me I knew wasn't right, but I kept fighting it.

However, here, at the club, that part of me can be completely embraced.

I don't have to hide.

I don't have to feel ashamed for thinking that way.

Plus, if I want to slice a guy's balls off for being an asshole to me, I know Void and the club would happily let me. Hell, they'll be by my side, cheering me on.

Taking a breath, I stand in the Chamber, right in front of the section of brick where I enclosed Andrés in the wall, sealing him to his death.

My life has changed so much since I was taken from Cuba. That night, I was terrified, and Eva was the one keeping me together, but being drugged and taken from Cuba to Tampa, then Nycto stealing us... it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. For Eva too.

Meeting Void has filled an emptiness inside me. Now I'm able to be who I want to be because of him, which is a slightly messed-up introvert who loves the darkness.

I stare at the wall blankly.

Is Andrés decaying under there?

What does his body look like by now?

I wonder if Nycto would let me set up some experiments to study decomposition.

Am I completely fucked-up for wondering about these kinds of morbid things?

Footsteps trample down the stairs, but I don't look to see who's coming. I already know from the sound of the thump of the boots that it's Void. He makes his way over to me, standing by my side. I casually glance at him, and his face softens. "You reflecting on what happened to Andrés?"

I shrug. "I'm glad he's in there. I just... there's something inside me, and I question if I should be scared of it or not."

Void reaches out and pulls me to him in a tight embrace, a move not often shown. I wrap my arms around him, cuddling into him completely. "That little bit of darkness

in you, Ivy, is what scares me. Not the fact that it's bad, but because it's so fucking good. Your darkness matches mine. I'm fucked in the head, but I don't want to drag you down with me."

I pull back, peeking up at him. "If you're going down, Void, then I want to come along for the ride. Bricking Andrés behind this wall made me feel more alive than anything I can ever think of... beside you being inside me, of course."

Void's eyes meet mine, and adoration shines back at me. "And that right there is how I know you belong at this club... that you belong with me."

I lean up on my toes to kiss him. My lips pop and tingle as they always do when I kiss Void. Wrapping my arms around him, I push him up against the bricks holding Andrés's corpse, and his fingers move straight to my ass to grasp and knead at my flesh. My clit throbs as I press my body against Void's, needing friction. His cock grows hard as we kiss frantically, our hands going everywhere.

Is it wrong that I'm turned on by the fact we're making out right next to the body of the man I killed?

Yeah, we're both fucked in the head.

But I love every messed-up second of my life right now.

A Week Later

Void's been a little better with his moods. He's still tense, but with us basically fucking like rabbits, I'm sure it relieves some of the tension he's feeling. I only wish he would trust me enough to share whatever it is that's eating him up.

Dash is still not back, and it makes me a little more anxious about his whereabouts.

I've tried calling him, but it continues to go to voicemail, and my texts are going unread. I want to talk to Nycto about it, but I'm worried if Void found out, it could be misconstrued as something that's just not there.

As I sit in the main bunker and eat my lunch at a table, Stacey walks in, happy as ever. She's carrying a parcel, and she slides it across the table toward me. "Delivery for you, Ivy."

"For me?"

"You not expecting anything?"

"Don't think so. But I was online shopping the other night, maybe I ended up buying something in my sleepy haze."

"Ah, the old sleep-shopping trick. Done it many a time. I gotta get back to the bar, but I hope it's something good, at least."

I snort out a laugh. "Probably something completely useless," I tell her as she walks off.

After pulling the tape off, I crack open the lid. A red rose sits on top of some sexy black lingerie. My eyes widen, and I try but fail to stop my lips from turning upward in approval. Taking out the rose, I bring it to my nose and smell it.

I had no idea Void had a romantic side.

I grab the string of the lacy top and pull it out of the box. My brow furrows as something wet coats my fingers. Looking at my skin, I see a pattern of red liquid. "What in the..."

I lift the piece of lingerie out, then scream, shoving the box away from me. It falls off the end of the table and drops to the floor, the bloodied heart landing with a sickening thump, then rolling a few times before coming to a stop.

My hands... there's still blood on them.

I stand, wiping my bloodied hands on my leggings in an attempt to get the liquid off me as Void, Atomic, Ominous, and Nycto rush over.

Void hurries to my side, but I throw the rose at him, then shove him in the chest. "Why? Why would you send me this? Whose heart is that? Is that Dash?" I scream at him, pushing him again and gaining everyone's attention.

Frown lines crease Void's forehead, but he doesn't say anything. Instead, he simply looks from me to the heart on the floor.

"Fuck you, Void! I get we're both twisted, but killing Dash is not okay. He was my friend." I storm off, tears streaming down my face.

I need to get away from him. Now.

I can't believe he did this.

I make my way to my room, but the tears won't stop falling. I know Void and I are in this discovery phase of our relationship, but that? That shit's taking it too damn far.

Dash was my friend—the best friend I had here, aside from my sister—and Void killed him.

Because of me.

I'm not sure I can ever forgive Void for this.

And though I didn't wield the blade, I'm not sure I'll ever forgive myself for this.

VOID

Adrenaline spikes, not only because Ivy has taken off, believing this is from me, but because it's obviously another package from the same assholes who are targeting me. Now, they're coming for Ivy.

"Atomic, grab the heart and do some testing," Nycto calls out. "You and Nerve do whatever you need to do to figure out who or what it belongs to. Could be a fucking pig for all we know." He turns to me. "Void, you need to get your head in the game. Snap out of it, now."

"This is from the same people who are targeting me. I'm sure of it," I grunt out.

"It's a threat... a warning. You need to take Ivy and go to a safe house. Talk to Hurricane from NOLA, use theirs. It's far enough away to get you out of town for a while. And Destin is halfway between the NOLA clubhouse and Tampa, so if you meet any shit, either of the clubs can come to you. You and Ivy are obviously not safe here."

I roll my shoulders. "Yeah. First, I gotta convince Ivy."

"First step is telling her you didn't send it. After that, it should be easy, brother. And if not, throw her over your shoulder and put her in the trunk. Better she's alive and hissin' like a rattlesnake than dead."

I grip his shoulder, then spin, taking off for the stairs.

“Someone get Dash on the line, make sure he’s okay,” I hear Nycto call out as I run toward the Cell.

Ivy’s sobs echo through the Chamber as I enter, and it rips my heart apart because she assumes I could betray her like that, but also because she’s that bent up over Dash.

It stings.

But I have to accept that, in some way, she cares about him.

As I walk into her room, her eyes lift to meet mine, and her lip curls. Instantly, she launches one of her “calming” candles at me, spewing a tirade that I only half understand. I swerve out of the way as she unleashes.

“Bastardo, no te metas conmigo!” “Dash was my friend! I get you’re jealous that he has feelings for me, but killing him and sending me his heart? What in the actual fuck were you thinking, you hijo de puta!” “You egotistical, maniacal, fucked-up coward! Urgh!” She throws another candle my way, this one barely missing, then she flops on the bed in a huff.

As she sobs into her pillow, I walk over and sit beside her to pull her into my arms. She tries to pull away, but I won’t let her.

“It wasn’t me, Ivy,” I whisper.

She sniffles, stopping her aggressive movements as she glimpses up at me. Wiping under her eyes, recognition clicks over her features. “The box wasn’t from you?”

I shake my head. “It was a threat.”

She pulls back, her eyes widen as she gasps. “Shit! What does it mean?”

“It means we need to leave. Go somewhere safe.”

“But won’t whoever sent it just find us?”

I tense but try not to give myself away. “Hopefully not.”

Her eyes begin to water again, her bottom lip trembling. “But Dash... Was the heart...”

I reach out for her hand. “We aren’t sure whose it is. Atomic and Nerve are checking it out now. It might not be Dash.”

She closes her eyes and lets out a long exhale. “Fucking hell!” She sniffles again, then looks right at me. “I’m sorry I blamed you. The lingerie, the rose... I thought—”

“It’s okay. I’m not mad, but I do need you to pack some shit. We’ll get on the road as soon as we can.”

“How long will we be gone?”

My muscles seize. “Sweet thing, I have no idea. I’m kinda winging this.”

A pained expression crosses her face. “I’ve only ever been apart from Eva when I went to Tony’s, and I don’t want to be away from her again.”

“Ivy... the threat is to you and me. I don’t know who it is, but the targets are clear. We need to get out of here. For your safety, and for Eva’s. We need to leave.”

She wipes under her eyes. “What do you mean? How do you know it’s for us both?”

“I received some packages as well. This last one was obviously aimed at you.”

Rolling my shoulders, I exhale. “Seeing as whoever this is came for us both, we need to make the move and leave, for everyone’s safety.”

She scrunches up her face like this saddens her, but nods. “Okay. Can I at least say goodbye?”

I lean in, planting a kiss on her forehead. “We’re leaving in fifteen. You need to pack and be ready. You can say goodbye then.”

“Okay,” she whispers, her voice barely audible.

“I’m gonna go pack. I’ll meet you upstairs once you’re done.” I lean in, pressing my lips to hers gently, then pull back.

She bobs her head in agreement, then stands and starts moving around her room. I rush to the stairs, making my way to my bedroom to grab my go-bag and some essential shit I know we’re going to need, including the small zipper-pouch of cash I have stashed behind my dresser.

I can’t help but think of what Ivy said. She hasn’t really been apart from Eva before.

I’m going to need to be a rock for Ivy through this.

I know I can do that.

I will always be a rock for Ivy.

Her cornerstone.

She may struggle with this, but my top priority is keeping her safe.

This threat, whatever it is, is coming for us both. I need to do whatever I can to keep her protected. Because if anything happened to her, I wouldn't be able to forgive myself.

After packing my shit and placing a call to Hurricane at NOLA, I head out into the main bunker to see Ivy and Eva locked together in a tight embrace, tears streaming down both their faces.

Nycto stands by, ready to catch his Old Lady if she breaks.

I need to be there for Ivy if she does too.

Hoisting my duffle over my shoulder, I walk to them and place my hand on Ivy's back to comfort her. "You ready to go?"

She cries, shaking her head. "Just another few minutes?"

Nycto reaches out, grabs Eva, and slowly pulls her away from Ivy.

Eva sobs so hard she can hardly control herself as she clings to Nycto like he's her lifeline. "You fucking look after her, Void," Eva warns. "You hear me? You fucking protect her!"

I wrap my arm around Ivy, and she cuddles into my side. "With my life," I reply.

"You know the drill," Nycto states.

"I do. I'll signal when we arrive."

"Take some cash. You can't use any plastic in your travels."

“Already packed.”

Nycto holds Eva tighter and nods, giving me the go-ahead. “C’mon, sweet thing, time to go.” With my arm around Ivy’s shoulders, I turn us and walk for the exit.

“One more thing!” she calls over her shoulder. “Make sure Ominous looks after my crop. If he kills it, I’ll kill him!” Ivy calls out to Nycto, making him chuckle.

“I’ll make sure he’s fully aware.”

Ivy peers over her shoulder, keeping eye contact with her sister as we walk out of the clubhouse. “Te amo, Eva!” she calls, failing to hold back more tears.

“Te amo también! Muchísimo!” Eva calls back.

I lean in and plant a kiss on Ivy’s head as I lead us to a pickup truck. After throwing my duffle in the rear of the cage, I grab Ivy’s and throw it in too, then exhale. “I’m so fucking sorry you have to leave her, Ivy, but it’s the only way.”

She sniffles as she opens the passenger side door and slides in. “I know.” She slams the door shut, making me tense with the sheer brute force she used. But I inhale a deep breath, then slide into the driver’s side. Ivy stares blankly out the window as Nycto comes out with Whiskey to see us off. I nod at him, reverse out, then head for the gate. West lets us straight through, and we’re off, heading for Destin, just over halfway between Tampa and New Orleans—to the NOLA Defiance safe house.

Ivy’s checked out, a coldness in her demeanor. She’s angry—not necessarily at me, but at the situation. I’ll let her calm down, but when we get to the safe house, she’ll have to pep herself up, because we’re going to have company.

Whether she likes it or not.

VOID

Ivy's quiet. She has been for the six-and-a-half-hour drive to Okaloosa County. Leaving the clubhouse and her sister is hard, I get that—it's all she really knows of America—but we have no choice. The safe house is our best option right now. I haven't been to Hurricane's safe house, but I've heard good things. It sits buried in dense brush, with a bayou running along the back as another layer of escape if you need it... so long as you don't run into any gators.

As we pull to the very back of the row of estates, a medium-sized house comes into view. A long driveway leads down to the main building, separate from the other houses along this row. I turn off the road and head toward the bungalow.

A small stoop leads up to the front entry, with a modest porch out the front and a couple of rocking chairs. To be honest, this looks more like Grandma Mavis's retirement home than a biker hideout.

But I guess that's the entire point, isn't it?

Ivy sits higher in her seat, taking it all in. The trees sway gently in the breeze of the afternoon Florida sunshine. It's humid today, and I wipe sweat from my brow.

"This is not what I expected. Especially pulling into Destin. It looked upmarket, but this is..." Ivy murmurs something in Spanish under her breath, leaving the sentence unfinished.

I pull the truck up next to two bikes in the drive, relieved she's finally talking to me.

“Gotta keep a low profile. That’s the trick.”

She slowly nods her head, then turns back to the window. “We have company?”

As if they heard her, Hurricane and City pop their heads out of the bungalow to check on us. I raise my hand in greeting. “Hurricane’s the pres of NOLA,” I explain to Ivy. “And City’s their VP. This is their place, so they’re here to check us in.”

She turns to me, fighting the corner of her lips turning up. “Our very own biker motel.”

“C’mon, let’s not be rude to our hosts.”

Reaching out, I grab her fingers, lift them to my lips, and kiss the back of her hand. Her soft lips finally stretch upward, the smile not quite reaching her eyes, which are still dull with sadness. My chest aches for her as I turn to slide out of the car.

Hurricane and City stomp down the stoop toward us, City’s bald head looking a little shinier than usual today. “Took your sweet-ass time getting here. We’ve been waiting for hours, Void,” City calls out, but he’s sporting a smirk.

I roll my eyes. “It takes longer to get here in a cage than on a bike, asswipe. You know that. Cut me some slack.”

“All I’m saying is you need to push the accelerator pedal a little harder next time. I got places I need to be. My Old Lady needs a hand with something back home—”

“City, calm the fuck down. We need to show them around the bungalow. And Izzy can wait. I know what you’re talking about, and it more likely means you want your Old Lady’s hands on you.” Hurricane slaps his VP on the back. City grins like he’s been caught out, saying nothing in response as Hurricane raises his chin to me.

“Void... got yourself into some shit, I see?”

Ivy steps to my side, and I wrap my arm around her protectively. “Apparently. Seems more like shit found us. We don’t know who’s targeting us yet.”

Hurricane grumbles under his breath. “That old chestnut, hey? Well, you’re welcome here for as long as you need. Just don’t mess up the place too much, yeah?”

City’s eyes shift to Ivy, and he raises a brow. “You the one with that special blood?” he asks, out of nowhere.

“Yeah, that’s me. Fuck! Word travels fast.”

Hurricane shakes his head. “Can’t even imagine the shit that has brought down on the club.”

Shaking my head, I exhale. “It’s been interesting, hasn’t it, Ivy?”

She snorts out a laugh. “You have no idea. Don’t even get me started on the events with Dash and the DeLucas.”

“As in Tony DeLuca?”

Ivy nods. “Yeah. He’s the one who initially ordered my sister and I be brought over from Cuba. It’s a whole thing. But basically, his daughter is sick, and my blood and hers is a match, and they needed me to donate, so they bought us and had us trafficked over here. And while we were there, our prospect, Dash, had to keep Tony’s daughter, Mia, entertained... it was hilarious. Let’s just say I have never looked at makeup the same again.”

I smirk as Hurricane and City share a look between them, then look to Void.

“Prospects, huh?” he says. “The shit they get themselves into.”

Ivy giggles. “I wish you all could have been there to see it. You would have laughed your asses off.”

“Don’t usually find human trafficking funny, sweetheart, but I’m glad it seems to have all worked out for you.” Hurricane gestures toward the bungalow. “All right, you two wanna come inside? I’ll show you ’round before we need to head off. Wanna make it back home before nightfall.”

“You got it, and thanks again for this, Hurricane. We owe you,” I tell him.

Hurricane dips his chin at me while walking us up the stoop, then inside the bungalow. I keep my arm wrapped around Ivy as we enter. It’s outdated, and the cream carpet is kind of a dull off-brown in places. The floral sofa has a red velvet throw over the top, making it appear even more like Grandma Mavis’s home. The television is one of those old-style square sets—it’s not even a Smart TV. The walls are lined with wood paneling, and little figurines litter every goddamn surface.

I’m in a damn nightmare.

Hurricane leads us into the kitchen, where the countertop is a green Formica, the wallpaper on the wall patterned in yellow florals, and I grimace. “Goddamn.”

“Gotta love the decor, right?” City chuckles.

“Better than a bullet to the head,” Hurricane adds.

I examine the floral lace curtains over the kitchen window, and my nose wrinkles. “To be determined.”

Ivy shrugs. “It has an old-world vibe. Like stepping into the past. Untouched, you know? There’s something unique in that.”

Hurricane snorts. “I don’t know what kind of fucking style you’re into, sweetheart, but you need better taste. This place is a disaster zone. We only keep it this way ’cause it’s low profile and fuckin’ low maintenance.”

“Well, I like it. It’s not pompous or overstated. It’s comfortable. Reminds me of home a little. My old home... in Cuba, I mean.”

“You have family back there?” Hurricane asks.

Ivy shakes her head. “No, just me and Eva. She’s in Tampa. How about you, do you have a family?”

Hurricane smiles wide. “Yeah, sure do. An Old Lady, kids, a twin brother, stepsiblings, a stepmother, the list keeps going... I know there are brothers out there who have no one. I’ve been real fuckin’ lucky.”

Ivy places her hand on Hurricane’s forearm, and a mournful smile touches her lips. “I lost my parents back in Cuba... I’m one of those unlucky ones. But I do have my sister, and that is a blessing.”

He places his hand on top of hers. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

Ivy inhales sharply, shrugging her shoulders. “Enough of this sappy shit. How about you give us that tour you were talking about.”

Hurricane grins, then turns and walks toward the refrigerator. “The fridge is stocked, pantry’s full. You should have everythin’ you need for a prolonged stay. The club’s just under four hours away. If shit hits the fan, press this button...” he points to a

button underneath the kitchen counter, "... and we'll come," he explains.

"Got it. Thanks again for the digs, brother. Really fucking appreciate it," I tell Hurricane as he reaches out for City, pulling him by his shirt sleeve toward the door.

"The front door has extra locks... use 'em! And in the back of the library, there's a panic room. I'll text you the combination to the gun safe."

"There's a library?" Ivy gasps.

"Have a good time, you two. You're in lockdown as of now. No venturing off anywhere," Hurricane instructs.

I pull Ivy to me tightly, and we watch the two large men stomp to their rides, then take off, kicking up stones and leaving us alone—truly alone—for the first time since we met that night I stole her from the boat.

Now, it's just Ivy and me, and no one to interrupt our time together.

Not Nycto.

Not Eva.

Certainly not Dash.

We might be here because we're in danger, but at least we're together.

The roar of the Harleys drift off into the distance, and I walk over to the door, then dead-bolt it.

Can't be too safe.

Ivy slowly strolls around the living room, her fingers gently stroking all the little trinkets. “Why is this happening, Void?”

“I’m not sure.” I sigh. “At first, I thought it might have been Tony, trying to get one over on us. But he assures us it’s not him. When we went to chat with him, he was pretty convincing. So, it got me to thinking who else it could be.”

She turns to face me, her eyes hopeful. “And?”

“When I totaled my ride when I was tripping, hallucinating, I thought I was seeing shit.”

Ivy moves over to stand in front of me. “You’re not making any sense. What does this have to do with anything?”

I reach out, grabbing her hand. “When I was tripping, I thought I saw someone from my past.”

Ivy jerks her head back in shock. “But aren’t they all in jail?”

Pulling her with me, I walk with her over to the floral sofa, then sit us down. There’s a laptop on the coffee table, so I open the lid. “Let’s find out.”

We both sit on the excessively soft sofa, sinking too far into it. I adjust my position and start typing into the search engine for my father’s jail records. I scroll until I find what I need. “Fuck.” I groan under my breath.

“What?” Ivy asks, leaning in closer to try and see.

“His records indicate he’s been let out. Reduced sentence for good behavior.”

Ivy draws her bottom lip in by her teeth while I run my fingers through my hair. My pulse quickens as my mind flashes back to the statue in the trees. “Jesus. Maybe when I saw my father in the woods, I wasn’t tripping. Maybe he was actually there.”

Ivy wraps her arms around mine for comfort. “What would your father want with you now?”

“I’m not sure. I was taken from him. Maybe he doesn’t realize I want nothing to do with that life anymore.”

“You believe he’s starting the cult back up?”

“Absolutely. He’d be quiet about it, though. But a man like him? He’s smart. He’d play the judicial system so easily. He would do his time, be a good boy, get out early, and start up all over again. I’m sure he’ll want his disciples by his side.”

“And he sees you as one of his disciples?”

My lip curls, my stomach swirling with nausea. “Not only a disciple, but a legacy. He not only would want me there, but he also needs me.”

“So, he’s targeting me to get to you?”

“I think so.”

“But why wouldn’t he just come straight for you?”

“This is how he works. It’s called mind manipulation. Mess with you so you think you’re losing yourself, until your only option is to turn to him for help.”

Ivy scoffs. “What, so he expects you to just go off and join another cult with him?”

Anger swirls through me. “Oh no, sweet thing. He expects me to run it with him.”

“Mierda.”

“I’m not going to. We’re going to stop him, Ivy. The things he does to women, the things he makes them do... it’s not right.”

She reaches out, grabbing both my hands in hers. “At least you understand the difference. You’re a good man, Void.”

Regret swarms through me like a raging tornado. “Not always.”

“Not everyone can be good all the time. But the majority of the time, you do the right thing. You’re always looking out for my best interests, even if they don’t match yours.”

“You’re important to me, Ivy. I might not be great at showing it, but I... I care about you.”

She leans in and kisses me. The second her lips touch mine, calm washes over me, like all the stress I was feeling is washed away for a brief instant.

How can she be both my calm and my storm?

Ivy pulls slowly away from me, pressing her forehead against mine. “How about we go check out that library?”

I chuckle. “Yeah, baby. Let’s go check out the library.”

Here she comes, my calm against the raging storm in my mind.

VOID

A Few Days Later

Even though I like having Ivy to myself, she's starting to go stir-crazy in the bungalow. There's only so much daytime television you can watch and walks around the backyard you can take before it all starts to get a little monotonous. Sure, we've passed the time by fucking on every surface of the house, but again, there's a limit to how often you can do it with someone inexperienced. The last thing I want to do is hurt her.

Going without news from home, my palms are twitchy, and I need an update. Hell, I want to find out whose heart that was. So, I pick up my burner to call Nycto, and he answers on the third ring. "What's wrong?"

I huff. "We're going fucking crazy out here, man. Need to know what's happening."

Nycto grumbles down the line. "I told you to call only if there was a problem."

"There is a problem. Ivy's stressed about Dash. I gotta tell her something."

Nycto huffs. "Fine. The DNA came back... it wasn't Dash. In fact, it wasn't even human. Pig, just like I thought."

"You're fucking kidding me?"

"Nerve confirmed when he dissected it. Said while it's similar in anatomy, it's not the

same as a human heart.”

“Well, fuck,” I murmur, running my hand through my hair. “Any word from Dash?”

“Yeah, he’s fine. Still working off his punishment. Tell Ivy he’s safe.”

Rolling my shoulders, I try to ease the tension around my neck. I hate myself, because for some warped, selfish reason, I wished it was Dash. I know he’s always going to be a part of Ivy’s life, and I can’t control myself. I’m a jealous cunt. It’s simple. I don’t want any guy taking space in Ivy’s mind but me.

“Void?”

I shake my head, coming back to the conversation. “Yeah?”

“There’s something you should know,” Nycto states.

“Tell me.”

“Another package was delivered to the clubhouse...” I wait for the blow. “We opened it. This time, it was a timer. It has a countdown. Three days. Everyone here is on high alert. The clubhouse is on full lockdown while we figure out whether to leave or wait it out.”

Attempting to calm the now-raging headache blasting my skull, I pinch the bridge of my nose. “Fuck, brother. I should be there helping, considering it’s my fault. I’m sure this is my father.”

“Figured as much. When Tony swore it wasn’t him, I knew straight away some asshole was coming after you. So, I did some digging and saw your father’s been released, but obviously, you’ve done your own research. I knew how you’d react to

hearing the news, so that's why I tried to keep it from you as long as I could, till I could figure out what the fuck to do about him."

I glance over at Ivy in the kitchen, who's oblivious to our conversation. She's got her headphones on and is dancing away as she bakes something that smells fantastic. How she can be so carefree, while I sit here panicking about how this is all going to end, astounds me.

"I feel fucking useless sitting here doing nothing."

"You're keeping Ivy safe. That's what matters right now. The rest is noise. Let us handle anything coming the club's way."

"Keep me in the loop. I want updates."

"You got it. For now, spend time with your woman."

I glimpse back at her. She now has her headphones off and is walking over with a tray of something I can't quite make out.

"Nycto, be careful. You hear me?"

"You too, brother. You too." He ends the call.

As I slide the cell across the table, Ivy places a tray in front of me. My eyes widen as cookies with something that looks like caramel in the middle come into view. Some are a little browner on the edges than the others. They're not picture-perfect like Trixie would bake, but hell, they're fucking good enough for me. "You made these... from scratch?"

She nods, wiping her hands down her pants. "They're alfajores... Dulce de Leche

Sandwich Cookies.”

“Dulce de what now?” I tilt my head.

She giggles, then picks one up and hands it to me. “Just try it.”

I take it from her, then pat the sofa next to me. “I just spoke to Nycto.”

Her eyes widen. “Oh?”

I take a bite, and the flavor explodes in my mouth.

Shit, my girl can cook.

“Fuck, Ivy, these are aweso—”

“Don’t change the subject. Tell me what’s going on.”

“The heart...” Ivy’s muscles tense, her hand moving to her chest like she’s preparing for the worst. “It wasn’t Dash.”

She clenches her eyes, letting out a long exhale. “Is he okay?”

I wrap my arm around her shoulder, pulling her to me, then kiss the top of her head.

“Yeah. Nycto’s had contact with him. He’s fine.”

“But who...”

“The heart wasn’t even human.”

“Thank God.” She pulls back, searching my eyes. “There’s strain in your voice.

You're not telling me something."

I hesitate, and she fully withdraws from me, stands, and folds her arms across her chest. "Void, what the hell is going on? Don't hide shit from me. Not here. Not now."

I rub the back of my neck, my muscles tense as fuck. She isn't going to like this.

"Another package was delivered to the clubhouse."

She's trying to remain stoic, but one look and I can see her walls are crumbling. "Another heart?" she says, her voice straining.

"A timer."

"A timer? What for?"

"A countdown. Apparently, it has three days left on it."

She lets out a heavy exhale, then starts pacing. "Three days? Three days till what?"

Here comes the storm.

"Nycto is assessing whether to keep everyone locked down or get them the hell out of the clubhouse."

Ivy's head snaps to me, her eyes wide in terror. "They're going to attack the club looking for us... in three days? But Eva... Eva's there!"

I stand to go to her, but she turns, heading for the door. "Where do you think you're going?"

She spins, glaring at me. “I have to go back. I must help Eva.”

“And what are you gonna do that the entire club isn’t already doing? Think this through, Ivy. You’re one woman. The club is better off with us here. Then they don’t have to be concerned about protecting us as well. They will be better able to defend themselves if we stay away. After all, whatever this is... it’s leveled at us.”

She lets out a low growl and throws her hands in the air. “This is bullshit!” she says, then turns, heading for the back door.

“Ivy, it’s for the best.”

She scowls at me. “What would you know? You took me away from my sister, and now she could die. I might never see her again. This is all your fault!”

Her words hit like a sucker punch straight to the gut.

She heads for the door, and I move to follow her out, but she puts her hand up in a stop signal. “Don’t you dare follow me. I don’t want to see you right now. ?Déjame en paz!”

I’m glued to the spot as she walks out the door, slamming it in my face. Usually, I’d yell right back, tell her not to talk to me like that. Show her who the man is in this relationship.

But she has me by the balls.

Why?

Because she’s right.

This is my fault.

We are here and not helping those back home because of me and my fucked-up family.

And because of that, Ivy might not get to say goodbye to hers.

With a deep inhale, I turn, make my way back to the sofa, and slump down on it with an overexaggerated huff. She needs to cool off. Chasing after Ivy won't accomplish anything right now.

I have to let her come to me.

And she will, once she realizes we've got to stay here to protect those back home.

It's the only way.

Having us at the clubhouse would be more of a distraction, and the boys don't need that. They have enough to worry about with protecting everyone else who's there right now.

Reaching forward, I grab another of Ivy's sugar cookies and shove it into my mouth. No time like the present to eat my feelings. As I sit pondering what the hell the next three days is going to look like for Ivy and me, I slowly swallow down another four cookies, taking my time, my mind racing all over the place. The rush of sugar hits me hard, so I slide the tray away, because I need to get up and move. I start pacing the living room, my fingers running through my hair as my eyes shift to the rear door.

She's not back.

It's been at least fifteen minutes, and she's outside, doing God only knows what.

This is fucked.

Ivy can't stay mad at me forever.

I should go find her.

My feet pound against the floor as I make my way to the rear door. I yank it wide open, expecting her to be on the back porch. But, of course, she's not fucking there. A sinking feeling creeps through my veins as I edge out of the house, looking through the trees of the backyard.

"Ivy?" I call out.

Nothing.

Racing out the door and down the stairs, I turn left, my chest squeezing with anxiety as I rush around to the front of the house.

The pickup is still here.

She hasn't taken off back to Tampa.

She's not stupid enough to try to get there on foot, or hitchhike.

So, where the fuck is she?

"Ivy!" I scream louder, racing faster around the back as I head toward the tree line of the bayou.

My adrenaline spikes, my head twisting from side to side with every snapping twig, every singing bird.

My mind starts going places I don't want it to.

What if my father found us while I was too fucking busy on the phone?

What if he's aware the one thing holding me back from joining him is Ivy?

What would he do to get her out of my way?

"Fuck's sake, Ivy, this isn't a damn game!" I yell, causing a flock of birds to flurry out of the trees above me. I duck and pull out my gun, my anxiety becoming too much to bear. I pant for breath as I turn and spot the bayou in the distance.

I pause.

Take a second to gather my thoughts.

If my father is here, that's where he would take her.

Each step I take is harder than the last. My breaths are short and shallow as I enter the clearing, and the sight almost knocks me to my knees.

Ivy, floating on top of the water, her eyes closed.

Her arms out like a starfish as she drifts aimlessly.

Her usually tanned face a little paler against the murky water.

I can't tell if she's alive or something much, much worse.

My stomach lurches in my throat when suddenly, I see something moving in the trees on the other side of the bayou. I stop dead still, watching, my head snapping up to see

a flash of white, then Ivy's eyes shoot wide open. She turns her head in the water, looking right at me, then shifts to standing, fully clothed, in the water, watching me while I practically fall apart on the bank of the bayou. "What's wrong?" she asks, confused.

I take off into the cold, murky water. Fully clothed, boots, fucking everything as I rush toward her in frantic movements. She scrunches her eyebrows when I finally reach her and pull her to me in the tightest of fucking embraces I've ever given anyone in my whole damn life.

She holds me, water running down our bodies as her hands smooth down my back.

"Don't you ever... ever scare me like that again. What the hell are you doing out here?"

"Just recharging my energy." She holds on while I try to soothe my racing heart. "I get this is stressful for you... but it is for me too, Void."

I pull back, and my hand comes up to caress her face. Leaning in, I kiss her like I fucking mean it. My tongue collides with hers, desperate to let her know how much I care about her. Even though the water's cold, I'm heating up like a raging inferno.

Pulling back, I lean my forehead against hers, staring into her eyes. "I've never been as petrified as I was when I saw you floating. I thought you were dead. For fuck's sake, I swear a piece of me broke seeing you like that, Ivy."

Her concerned expression falls as she exhales. "I'm sorry. I'm trying to process this the only way I know how."

"You could've talked to me—"

“Can we not talk right now?” She moves in, wrapping her legs around my waist, her body floating in the water. I understand what she’s asking for. She wants me to take her emotional pain away.

I don’t know what the hell I saw, but my mind was obviously playing tricks on me from being so fucking torn up at seeing Ivy lying motionless on the water, not to mention the threat of fucking gators. She’s completely oblivious. I need to get her out of the water, now. And with the way my heart is pounding, adrenaline racing through me...

I fucking need her right now.

So, I move my hands to support her ass. My cock grows hard against her as Ivy presses her lips to mine again. With her wrapped around me and my hands gripping hold, I walk us out of the water and over to the grassy patch a fair way back toward the house. I kneel on the greenery, lowering Ivy to the ground, my lips never leaving hers as I tower over her.

My fingers move to her button-up blouse, ripping it apart with ease. Buttons pop off in all directions, but the wet fabric sticks to her gorgeous skin. My lips slide down over the black lace bra where her nipples are so pert and ready. I bite through the fabric, my cock so fucking hard I can hardly bear the feeling. Ivy’s back arches off the grass with a slight moan as my hands slide under her back to release the clasp. I pull it off, leaving her topless, her ample breasts heaving as her hooded eyes look up at me through her lashes.

Making my way to her leggings, I slide them off at the same time as her panties. She’s so fucking beautiful, panting like this, in wait for me. “You don’t know the effect you have on me, do you, sweet thing?”

She draws her bottom lip in with her teeth, the move sexy as fuck. A single water

locust leaf sits on the ground next to me. It's perfect for what I need right now. She shows me who's boss in the bedroom all the time.

I've been holding back, but now, it's time for Master Cade to come out to play.

"Put your arms above your head and lock your fingers together. Don't move them, or I will punish you."

A wicked glint twinkles in her eyes as she wriggles on the spot, rubbing her thighs together, but I grab her ankles, pulling her legs wide apart.

Leaning in over her, I stare into her eyes, full of lust. "Do. Not. Move."

She grins mischievously. "Okay."

Bringing the leaf up, I gently edge the lengthy tip of leaves down in between her breasts. Her body shudders when she feels the tickling of the flora against her.

She's reacting exactly how I planned.

"Keep still, sweet thing."

Her fingers wriggle against each other as I slide the leaf down the center of her body. Beads of water run down her skin from being in the bayou, and it makes her body look so fucking tempting as she writhes about. Having the leaf gently grazing her skin will bring all her nerve endings alive, awakening her entire body, and make her feel everything more powerfully.

I run the leaf slowly over her pussy, and she gasps out, "Void, please."

"We're only at the beginning, Ivy. Patience." I shift further as her body wriggles

again. “Don’t move,” I warn her.

She groans, and her hands release, one moving to her breast so she can massage it herself.

“I warned you.” I sit back on my knees, smirking widely. Her eyes fly open as I grab her and hoist her to sit. “Get on your knees,” I say, and her eyes widen. “This time, you’re submitting to me. Now... on your hands and knees, facing me.”

She tries to hide her grin, but she scurries to her knees before me as I stand. I move to my belt buckle, undoing it, and lower my jeans to my ankles, my cock jerking free from the tight restraints.

She reaches out to grab hold, and I seize her wrist. “You are not in control here, Ivy. I am. I tell you what to do.”

Her hooded eyes look up at me like she’s having trouble holding herself together. “Yes, Sir.” Her voice is so low and husky, it nearly does me fucking in.

My hand wraps through her wet hair. “Open your mouth, Ivy. I’m going to fuck it like I mean it. You couldn’t stay still before, and this is your punishment. You won’t want to find out what happens if you pull away.”

“Yes, Sir.” She licks her lips.

A low growl rumbles through me as she opens her supple, fuckable mouth so damn wide, and I ram my cock straight past her lips, giving her no time to prepare.

She broke the rules, she pays the price.

Ivy’s eyes widen as I push my cock to the back of her throat. Her eyes glisten as her

warmth envelops me and I huff out a deep, guttural groan.

“Damn, Ivy, you feel so fucking good.”

I slide her mouth halfway off me, then pull her back down. She doesn't resist. In fact, I see the light in her eyes—or should I say hellfire. She loves this, revels in it as I fuck her dirty little mouth. For her first time doing this, she's sucking like a pro. Her tongue glides around my cock, her lips sheathing her teeth as she does her best to take all of me, but her mouth is only so deep. Warmth and tingles radiate from the depths inside, but I can't let go just yet. I can't let the leaf play go to waste, even if this is her punishment for moving.

“Ivy, I want you to touch yourself,” I demand.

She looks so fucking gorgeous wrapped around my cock like this, but I want her pleasure too. Ivy edges her hand down between her legs, her fingers searching for her clit. The moment she touches herself, her eyes close in delight.

“Eyes on me, beautiful.”

Her eyes fling open as I use my grip on the roots of her hair to pull her on and off my cock, my hips thrusting to push deeper. A light whimper vibrates through her mouth, making me tense. She flicks her clit, and a wave of pleasure rolls through me as she sucks my head down her throat a little. I groan at the feeling of us being in this moment together.

To be honest, I thought I had to hide Cade from Ivy, but the truth of the matter is, Ivy and Cade belong together. She's as fucked-up as I am. This is nothing compared to what I used to do, so I can't wait to take this up a notch with her when she's ready. And knowing she is more than capable of handling that side of me has my cock twitching.

The deep moaning against my cock as she works herself up only makes this all the more fucking hot for me. She doesn't waver, sucking on me as if her life depends on it, not even gagging as she swallows the crown.

I grip her head harder, thrust deeper, and slide my cock further down her throat. Finally, she gags on my length, and the tightness wraps around me like nothing I've ever experienced before. Letting out a loud groan as my balls pull up, I throw my head back, a tingle fluttering down my spine as my skin slickens in a sheen of sweat.

I'm so fucking close. Just a little more.

Ivy begins to squirm—she's obviously close too, but we can't have that. I look down to look at her. "Open your eyes, Ivy. Stare at me. Don't look away," I demand, as she draws me right down her throat again.

I groan, my fingers wrapped in her hair tight as hell as I hold her mouth to my pubic bone. It must be hurting her, but my girl likes it rough—my fucking amazing girl. My gaze bores into hers, and my muscles tense so fucking tight, I could be mistaken for a statue. My balls pull up as the pressure builds inside of me, and I gasp as the intensity hits me. Using my grip on the back of her neck, I continue to thrust shallowly, deep in her throat. Her eyes are streaming now, spit running out of the side of her mouth, and I free a hand to stroke my thumb along where her lips meet, the skin pulled tight. Her nostrils flare, her face redder than red, and I realize my dick is blocking her airway—she can't breathe.

Will have to make this quick, then.

With that realization, my balls pull up, and I explode like a fucking typhoon washes over me. I come so damn hard while she gags, trying to suck down air but only managing to suck the cum out of me. It's like I'm being wrung dry as I empty my seed deep down past the back of her throat. With one last gentle thrust, I pull out,

leaving a trail of cum over her tongue, and she heaves in air, her lips plump and her mouth slack.

After a few breaths, her eyes widen as she realizes she still has the taste of me in her mouth. She licks her lips, wiping them a little, then sucks her fingers clean and swallows it down like a good little soldier.

“Good fucking girl,” I pant out.

Within a second, her hand moves between her legs to finish herself off.

“Uh-uh, sweet thing. You don’t get to come yet. You think I’m going to allow that? You climax when I say you can.”

Her brow furrows, and she whimpers. “But I’m so close.”

“Don’t talk back. Turn around, get on all fours.”

She waggles her eyebrows. “Yes, Sir!” she replies as she moves onto all fours, this time facing away from me.

Moving into position, I slide my hand up into her wet hair, my fingers wrapping around the long chestnut locks, and I hold tight, then yank her head back. She lets out a yelp, but I know the sound. It’s not from pain—it’s a satisfied moan. My cock is thick and ready again, and my free hand slides over her supple ass, caressing.

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you, sweet thing?”

“Yes, Sir,” she says, then I slap her cheek, hard. She jolts forward, but my hand holding her hair keeps her head where it is, so her back is forced into an exaggerated arch. Returning to position, she pants as I line the tip of my throbbing cock up with

her slickened pussy.

You're so ready for me, my dirty girl.

"Say my name, Ivy," I growl out.

"Void," she says huskily.

My palm twitches, and I slap her ass again. "Wrong. Say my name, Ivy."

She pushes back and wriggles her hips, the tip of my cock breaching the lips of her pussy.

Greedy little bitch.

"Cade!" she gushes with much more gusto.

Hearing her call my name like that sparks something inside me. I yank her head back and thrust inside her. Her warm pussy envelops me so fucking tight, squeezing me for all I have. I stop for a second to gather myself. Still, I can't wait for long, because she starts to move, like the eager fucking bitch she is.

I grip her tighter and slap her ass again and again, adding to the collection of red handprints decorating her delectable cheeks. "Don't move, Ivy. I control this, not you."

She whimpers in disagreement. She likes to control our sex, so letting me take over is hard for her.

My free hand moves to her waist to help pull her on and off me. She feels so fucking good as my fingers in her hair keep her head pulled back, her hands off the ground,

unable to move anything but her hips.

After this build-up, I don't think it's going to last too long for either of us. So, I thrust deep inside of her, pull back, rotate a little, then thrust back in.

“Fuck, Cade!”

A slow smile crosses my face. I've been trying to keep this part of me hidden from her, but she's accepting me so openly and freely now. The further we delve into my sexual expectations, the more it confirms she can take all of me. She's made for me.

Her walls clamp around my cock, and I know she's close, so I pump into her harder.

“You want to come, Ivy?”

“Mm-hmm.”

I yank on her hair, which elicits a pleasure-filled moan. “That's not how you answer me.”

“Yes, Sir.”

My free hand slides down to find her clit. She writhes and thrusts against me as I circle, bringing her closer to her climax. As I feel her tighten around me, my balls pull up again, readying for another release. Ivy pants, her skin slickening, her breaths more frantic, and the tingle starts in my spine.

I'm so fucking close.

“Don't you come until I tell you to.”

Ivy pants as I feel the pressure build from the tips of my toes all the way to my balls. She's writhing, bucking like a damn bronco to get her release. "Please!" she cries. "Please!"

My balls pull up, and I throw my head back and let out a guttural groan. "Now, Ivy!"

Her pussy clenches around my cock, draining me for all I'm worth, and she gushes—actually gushes—around me. My cock throbs, tensing as my muscles constrict, then my entire body erupts as I come so fucking hard my vision whites out, and I can barely contain myself. "Fuuuck!" My dirty fucking girl.

Everything in me is completely spent as I pull out and drop to the ground beside her.

She flops next to me, and we both look up at the sky, panting for breath.

"That... was... amazing."

I turn my head to take in the look of awe that crosses her features. "I didn't hurt you?" I ask, while caressing her hair.

"Hurt me? You hurt me real good, Void."

She knew. She knew that at this moment, I needed to be me again.

Not Cade from moments ago.

That's why I can never let her go.

I don't think my heart could take it.

"I fucked up," I admit. "I came inside you."

She smiles. “A few weeks before we left, Eva gave me a packet of her contraceptive pills. I’ve been taking them.”

I lean in, pressing my forehead to hers. “I need to thank Eva. But right now, let’s go inside and shower. We’ve both had a big day, and I think we need to unwind... together.”

Ivy rolls on her side, facing me. “I’m sorry I scared you... in the water. I don’t know why, but I wanted to float in it. Everything got a little too much for a moment there.”

“When shit gets hard, when your mind can’t take the load, talk to me. We’re a team. We’re in this together. I don’t ever want to see something like that again. It scared the living hell out of me, Ivy.”

“I know. And it won’t happen again. I promise I’ll come to you. It’s you and me against the world.”

“Yeah, baby. Just you, me... and the gators.”

Her brow furrows, but then her eyes widen as the realization hits. “Gators?” she whispers. “There’s alligators in there? You didn’t tell me there were alligators!” She slaps at my chest. “You’re kidding, right?”

With a laugh, I lean in, pressing my lips to hers until she melts against me again.

This woman gives me peace, but I can’t help my mind drifting to the flashes of white I saw before Ivy came back to me. I don’t know if my head is playing tricks on me, or if this is something I need to talk to Nycto about.

But right now, while I’m holding Ivy, it’s not the time to think about this shit.

So I let the white vision drift from my mind.

Void

After showering and getting ourselves warm, we're all snuggled up on the sofa. Ivy has her legs over mine and her body draped against me. I swear I've never been the type of man who was into affection. It was drilled into me from an early age that tenderness wasn't even a thing. It was all about sex, doing what had to be done, then leaving. So, needless to say, cuddling with a woman is new territory for me. I might have been a lot of Ivy's firsts, but fuck if she isn't getting a few of mine as well.

My fingers play with her hair as I release a contented sigh.

Ivy glances up at me. "That sounded contemplative."

"I was thinking about how you're changing me."

Raising her brow, she smiles. "In a good way, I hope."

"I've never been the type of guy to admit when I like someone. Hell, I've never been the type of guy to even like someone, so this..." I wave my hand around to encompass us, "... is all new to me."

"In case you've forgotten, this is kind of new to me too, but I'm glad we're experiencing it together."

Leaning in, I kiss her, and my hand runs through her hair, holding her to me.

For so long—actually, most of my life—I've been a void. Completely empty inside,

lacking empathy and emotion for anyone or anything. Until Ivy.

I had no clue how the world could change, how colors could seem brighter, how sounds could be clearer. Everything is simply better with someone in your life who means fucking everything to you.

The problem with that is... it also means you have something to lose.

And that makes you weak.

Ivy gives me strength, but she's also my greatest weakness.

Three Days Later

It's nice to be back in Ivy's good graces. For a second, I thought we were going to be spending the rest of our stay here with her angry at me, but with us fucking on the bank of the bayou, it pulled us back to each other. It's what we needed. We have got to be united in this. We work better as a team.

Today, though, has me on edge. I've had no word from Nycto. For all I know, the club could be fending off an attack right now. So, I'm doing my best to keep Ivy occupied. We're on the sofa, watching television. I'm wrapped around her, trying to keep her as calm as possible, when the floorboards on the porch outside creek.

Our eyes shoot to the front door.

I ease Ivy off me slowly, not making any sudden movements. "Go to the panic room," I whisper. "Don't come out until I come get you." We both stand silently, and I draw out my gun as she turns with nothing but fear in her eyes. "Go!" I mouth.

Ivy grimaces, then starts running.

Before I even make it to the front door, it bursts open. Men wearing the same white slacks and white shirts my father used to make us wear surge inside, all with guns aimed directly at me. I point mine back, but there's nothing I can do. There's way too fucking many of them.

A disciple signals to the others, and they rush me. I grit my teeth as one of them surges forward. I clench my fist and punch him in the face while another yanks my gun from my hand. The others jump me, pulling me over to the kitchen chair. I struggle, trying like hell to fend them off, but they slam me down. I try to fight, but they pull wire ties out of their pockets. I manage to yank one hand free and sock another guy in the face, but he doesn't even budge—he simply grips my hand, wrenches it behind my back, and ties my wrists together while I growl low.

“Whatever you want, you won't find it here!” I grunt.

The ringleader chuckles. “We already have.” He waves his hand through the air, and another disciple comes from down the hall, dragging a gagged and bound Ivy behind him. Her eyes are fraught with fear as she tries to fight them off. I thrash about on the chair in an attempt to get to her, but the disciple holds me in place.

She didn't make it to the panic room.

“Ivy! Get your fucking hands off me. Ivy! Let her go, you fucking brainwashed pieces of shit.” I pummel about, fighting harder than ever, but all it does is make my wrists burn against the tension of the ties. Two men hold me down with every ounce of strength they have, while the disciples laugh.

But everyone stops as a man walks into the bungalow.

All eyes turn.

And I take in the tall figure.

He hasn't changed at all.

Maybe his hair's a little grayer.

His wavy hair is to his shoulders. The pronounced mustache over a slightly smaller beard makes him seem like a guy from an old seventies porno movie, but I'm sure the gray hair would make ladies view him as a silver fox. He's not some ugly fuck, that's for sure. He has an aura about him that draws people in, and that's why he's so fucking deadly.

"Hello, son."

Scowling, I shake my head. "You stopped being my father the day you tried to turn me into you."

He walks inside and views the bungalow, his gaze taking everything in. "You mean the day I freed you from your virtue... from your innocence. You need to see, Cade... life is made up of moments, of choices. They define us. You chose that day to be a man. You chose to become... like me. Like all of us. It helped shape who you are now—"

"I'm nothing like you."

"Nothing? You don't think women should submit to us? Let me get this straight, son. Out there, in the woods... you didn't make Ivy submit to you?"

My eyes shift to Ivy. Tears well, then slowly fall over her bottom lids.

Hell. Maybe I am just like him?

“What Ivy and I do is none of your damn business!”

“What Ivy and you had might be none of my business, but it’s over now. Ivy belongs to me. I’m taking her as my offering. She’s young, virile, hardly broken in. Her children will be part of the next generation, seeing as the last was useless at keeping the family tradition going.”

Anger blooms inside me so strong I can barely contain it. I wrestle in my chair again. It moves from side to side on its legs so much that it almost topples over as they start to drag Ivy outside.

“Ivy!” My chest squeezes tight as panic rips through me. “Ivy!”

She tries to fight them too, but there’s too fucking many of them as they drag her out, kicking and screaming under her gag.

“Fuck!” I scream out as I struggle in my restraints.

They exit the bungalow, causing my anxiety to reach a critical level.

Get to Ivy.

I must get to Ivy.

So, I jump on the seat, trying to break it, but all it does is topple to the side, and I slam to the floor with a massive thud, a deep pain rippling through me. My ribs cause my breath to catch as my nose crinkles and my eyes burn from a strange smell. My gaze shoots up as smoke begins to waft in under the front door.

“Shit!” I spin my head around to see it’s coming in the back door too.

The haze wafts in, heading directly for me as I wrestle with the fucking chair. Smoke floods the floor of the bungalow, making me cough. My eyes sting as I fight harder to free myself, but they have me tied up pretty fucking tight. Adrenaline spikes through my veins as orange and yellow flickers through the living room window. That sight kicks me up a notch, but I am still not making any headway. Coughing and spluttering, I start to become dizzy. All I'm really doing is turning in fucking circles.

I'm not getting anywhere.

Shifting, I attempt to sit up. My plan is to drop onto the chair and break it, but my body is weakening with all the strenuous effort I've put in so far. I manage to stand and drop to the floor, but the chair doesn't budge.

Not knowing what to do next, I lie still, taking a couple of shallow breaths while trying not to breathe in too much smoke. Right in the nick of fucking time, someone breaks down the front door, woodgrain splintering off in all directions. I lift my head as a vision of Dash enters the flaming bungalow.

What the fuck!

Am I hallucinating?

Dash rushes to me, pulls out a knife, and cuts me free. "C'mon, fucker, up you get," he urges, then lifts me from the chair, half carrying me toward the entry of the house. As we get out onto the front porch, a section of roof slams down in front of us, completely alight.

Dash grabs the rocking chair to the right of us and uses it to push the debris out of the way enough for us to pass through. We rush out to the front area and both fall onto the freshly cut grass, gasping and coughing frantically. Dash pats my back, trying to help me breathe as we both watch the quaint little bungalow go up in a fiery inferno,

and with it, the last of my strength.

I move to stand, but instantly fall back to the ground, panting for breath. “We need to find Ivy,” I croak out.

“No, we need to call for help. We’re too far away from either club to get backup in time, but Ivy did tell me of someone nearby who might be able to help.”

I cough, narrowing my eyes in on him. “Back the fuck up. Why are you even here? Weren’t you supposed to be off taking a break or some shit?”

Another section of the roof caves in with a giant thud, which makes us both jump, but Dash shakes his head in confusion.

“Is that what Nycto told you?”

I shrug, clearing my throat, trying to take in a deep, centering breath, but I can’t seem to get one.

“No. He sent me out here in secret as surveillance. I was told to be your backup, but to keep my distance. Said I needed to learn to respect my VP again... and your relationship with Ivy. I’m sorry, man. Ivy’s amazing, we both know that. Watching you guys together hasn’t been easy, but I get it. I get what Nycto was laying down. As long as you make her happy, which, from what I have seen over the last few days, you do, then I’m happy.”

“So Nycto punished you by making you watch us together, huh? Clever, sadistic man. I appreciate you taking a step back, brother. But this is all shit talk, ’cause we gotta get her back.”

“Let’s make a call and go get your girl.”

IVY

As I'm ushered down a long, winding road, the scenery could be seen as beautiful, if it weren't for the fucked-up situation. The hill we're walking along the top of spreads down, opening up into an open field with a deep blue lake at the bottom. Quaint little homes line the area, giving this place a real homey vibe.

Void's father—Wyatt, he calls himself, but I call him asshole—mumbles away about some shit, but I've blocked his muttering out.

We walk past a large home on top of the hill overlooking the splendor below. It even has a little sty out the front with pigs being tended to by a woman, but she doesn't make eye contact as we stroll past.

The thing is, I should be taking this all in. I should be paying attention to my surroundings, taking notes about how to make an exit strategy...

But I can't.

I can't think.

I'm finding it hard to simply breathe.

I saw these assholes light the bungalow on fire with Void inside, and now I'm sure he's nothing but a pile of ash.

When they dragged me away, kicking and screaming, I've never felt so much pain in

my life.

Splintered.

Now, I've grown numb.

I completely understand Void and how he got his name, because right now, that's exactly how I feel.

Like a void.

Emotionless.

Unfeeling.

Not willing to fight for anything, because now, there's nothing left to fight for.

"So, you see, we'd been tracking Cade for a while using his cell."

My ears click into what he's finally telling me, and my head snaps to the side. "Wait, what? You were following us?"

Wyatt lets out a huff. "Have you not been listening? Yes, from the moment I got out of jail, I had my tech guys hunt him down. Then we tracked his movements. When I saw he was stationary on Van Dyke Road, we went to check it out. Needless to say, that accident helped us in so many ways."

I tilt my head. "The photos?"

A devilish glint lights up his face. "Not just that, darling Ivy. Cade was so off his face he had no idea my disciples were on his side of the road. He called for backup, then

threw his cell on the ground and spaced out. We had the accident planned, but he made it so much easier being so out of it. It gave us ample time for my guys to move in and put all the software we needed on his cell.”

My muscles tense as I stare at him. “Like what?”

“We could hear everything. Track everything. And from that, we knew everything. And we also got lucky. Just once, darling Ivy, you turned on your phone, leading us directly to the safe house.”

“Jesucristo!” I whimper. This is all my fault!

“He won’t help you here, darling Ivy. I’m disappointed Cade never continued my work while I was wrongfully incarcerated, but I’m out now. We’ll get the plan back on track.”

This guy actually believes he was wrongfully jailed. Douche!

“I taught Cade everything he knows, so I know he will be perfect for running our farm.”

I can’t hide my scoff. “You’re delusional. Void isn’t like you at all. You’re a sex-crazed lunático!”

Wyatt stops walking and turns me to look at him. “It’s not about sex, Ivy. It’s about control. I want to hold power over women. They submit so beautifully. You’ll understand once you’re cleansed.”

I jerk my head back in confusion. “The fuck are you talking about?”

Wyatt’s eyes dance with a sinister glint, his lips turning up with an air of evil. A look

he must have mastered well over the years—a sight to send the blood in your veins shattering into shards of ice. My adrenaline spikes as I swallow hard.

His hand moves to my lower back as he leads me toward the door of the main house. “You’ll see. It will all become clear in time, darling Ivy.”

Everything in me screams to not go inside the fucking house, but all fight has left me. Before I know what I’m doing, I’m being led up a giant circular staircase by three women. It’s like I’m blacking out and losing spaces of time. I can only put it down to the stress I’m feeling over losing Void after everything we fought so hard for.

I take in the beautiful women—all blonde—of various ages. The one who’s probably in her forties ushers me up the stairs. She could be the leader, for all I fricking know. There’s another in her twenties, and the youngest has to be barely sixteen.

I turn to the sixteen-year-old while shaking my head. “Why are you here?”

She beams like she’s so freaking happy it astounds me as we take the last step and begin walking down a hall. “We follow his path. The only path.”

I roll my shoulders as they lead me into a massive bedroom. “And what path is that?”

They all turn to me simultaneously, smiling as if they’ve just stepped out of *The Stepford Wives*, and answer in unison, “Enlightenment.”

My eyes widen as they pull me inside the room, and the youngest closes the door behind us. I take them in carefully.

It’s fucking weird as hell.

They’re all wearing the same matching light blue dresses.

The older one sits me in a chair while the middle woman stands in front of me.

Those flight instincts are starting to kick back in.

“You give yourself over to him. Mind, body, and soul. It’s so freeing to surrender to someone else’s will.” She slides down the material covering her left breast, and right there, marring her skin, is a scar—a symbol etched deep into her flesh. My eyes widen as the other two slide their dresses down to reveal the same symbol on their left breast as well.

I scoff loudly. “The fuck it is! Be your own person. Sure, there are times to let someone in and take charge, but not to control your whole life. That’s fucking madness.”

They stand back, ignoring me as the older woman walks over, carrying a white dress. “You need to rid yourself of the clothes you currently possess and let us celebrate your rebirth.”

I snort out a laugh. “You’re joking, right?”

They say nothing. The younger one shifts, then reaches for the hem of my shirt.

I slap at her hand. “Get the fuck away from me!”

The middle-aged one lunges forward. I shriek before she pulls my arms behind my body. I try to fling my head back to headbutt her as the older woman begins some incantation. The younger one slides back into my sight, holding a syringe.

My eyes widen, and I gasp. “Come near me with that thing, and I will make it my personal mission to hunt you down.”

Her eyes flick to the asshole who's holding me captive, and I feel them nod excessively behind me. I jerk my body, trying like hell to get out of her grip, and kick forward as the young one steps closer. She moves to my side, jabbing me in the bicep, and I cry out at the sharp sting. "You will be with us soon, Ivy. Rest now, and while you do that, we will get you ready."

Warmth floods through my veins, but I try to fight. I keep resisting. Soon, my body weakens to the point I can't control it. My eyelids become heavy, and they flutter, becoming harder and harder to peel back open.

Nooo!

The older woman comes into view as the other one lets me go, and they sit me back on the chair.

My head is heavy.

The last thing I remember is them pulling my shirt over my head.

Then everything goes black.

It's like I'm floating, but not on a bed of clouds.

On something much, much harder.

Something uncomfortable poking into my body.

I try to gain my bearings.

My heart beats weirdly in my ears. No, not my heart... drums. The low rumbling seems to vibrate in a steady rhythm in the distance. My eyelids slowly flutter open, and that's when I realize I'm being lifted through the air on a stretcher of twigs laden with vines and flowers.

I try to sit up, but I'm still a little too out of it to gain enough strength to do much. All the bobbing with the movement of the disciples carrying me is making me nauseous. I look down and notice I'm dressed in a flowing white dress. I have no shoes on, no bra, and I'm way too fucking scared to feel if I have my panties on still.

The disciples are carrying me down the hill toward the lake, a guard of honor lining us on either side.

It starts with women, all wearing wreaths of flowers around their heads. They're holding pottery jugs, for some stupid fucking reason.

As I get closer to the water, there are men, and they're wearing ram's heads with the same symbol the women have etched into their chests. The fuck is this craziness?

My hands begin to shake, my breathing shallow as a rush of adrenaline shoots through my veins, waking me up a little more. I manage to sit up on the bed of twigs and vines as the disciples reach the edge of the lake, lowering my bed to the ground.

I try to make a run for it, but my legs are unsteady, and I end up running straight into a disciple. He grabs me and hauls me down into the water where Wyatt is waiting. Bringing my fist up, I slam it into the disciple's stomach as hard as I can. His stupid ram's head falls off him and into the water with a mighty splash. Ha! He lets me go, and again, I move to run, but two more men stride through the water, grabbing me around the upper arms so tight I know it's going to bruise.

A whimper escapes me.

I should have fought harder when I had the chance.

They drag me back over to Wyatt and make me stand in front of him. My head scrambles, trying to figure out what all this madness is about. Wyatt holds a sharp-looking knife in his hand, that same devilish glint in his eye as before. My heart slams rapidly against my chest as the cold water laps at my thighs.

“Ivy, you will be cleansed by the blood of fellow farm members, then branded to show you belong to the family.”

Tears glisten in my eyes as I hear the word family.

I think of Eva.

I have no idea if she is okay, or if I will ever see her again.

I think of Wyatt’s family. His son, Void. How he died so I could live.

But I don’t want to be here.

I don’t want to live in this world without Void.

I can’t help but sob, my body hunching over in grief.

Wyatt steps forward right into my space, and his hand moves to my chin, lifting until my eyes meet his. “There you are, cleansing yourself already of all that pain you feel. Let it out, Ivy. Let it out while I free you.” His other hand moves to the top of my dress and rips the material apart. I let out another sob as my left breast is exposed to everyone here, including Void’s father.

He lets out a low growl as he signals to the three women who drugged me. They walk

over with their stupid headwear and potted-fucking-jugs while I stand, sobbing, exposed, and shaking as they surround me.

“Be one with the family, Ivy,” Wyatt calls out.

“Welcome to the farm,” everyone replies, as the three bitches bring their jugs up and pour the contents over my head. The red liquid slides over my face, the feeling unlike anything I have experienced before. I clench my eyes and mouth shut as the warm, copper-smelling liquid floods over me, viscous and pungent. I shudder and swallow down a gag, feeling completely enveloped in whatever this horror is. If they don’t get this crap off me soon, I’m going to vomit all over their stupid ritual.

“You’re part of the family now, Ivy. All that’s left is to cleanse you,” Wyatt informs me, wiping the liquid from my face.

Finally, I take a deep breath, and open my eyes to blood running in rivulets down my body. I release a blood-curdling scream as I try to wipe the liquid off me in a panic, my heart hammering in my chest so fucking hard I don’t know if I can stand it.

I’m so terrified right now, I can’t breathe.

Oh God, I really can’t breathe.

Wyatt brings the knife to my breast as I try to catch myself, but my head is swirling, and I can’t function enough to stop him. “When the wound opens, your blood will mix with that of the family, and we will be as one.”

“You’re fucking crazy!” I yell as he pushes the tip of the blade into my skin.

I shriek with the pain, but as I do, a massive blast sends debris raining down over us from up the hill. The main house goes up in a fireball, causing everyone to scramble.

Wyatt drops the knife into the murky depths of the water. “Fuck! Go check it out. Now.” He turns back to me as I pant, trying to catch my breath. “We’re not letting this go, Ivy. You will be cleansed.”

“Not on my watch,” Void calls out from behind a tree, drawing his gun, and aiming it at his father.

As fast as a blink, Wyatt reaches out and pulls me in front of him as a shield.

Void’s alive!

Suddenly, bullets start firing as the women scream out in fear. Everyone runs off, trying to take shelter as hellfire rains down upon us all.

Wyatt’s grip on me tightens as my eyes snap around, trying to figure out where the hell all the shooting is coming from. It takes me a second, but then I see Mafia soldiers in their flawlessly tailored suits racing around, shooting anything in a ridiculous ram mask.

Void sprints across the perfectly manicured lawns toward me, Dash flanked at his side. My eyes widen when I realize they’re working together as they gun down disciples on their way to me. Ram-head masks splinter, shattering apart as they shoot them in the face. Blood runs down their white shirts as they flop to the grass, dead.

Wyatt grips hold of me tighter, keeping me as leverage as we stand in the water, watching everything unfold in front of us.

The disciples had no hope.

Tony pulls out a semi-automatic and mows a bunch of them down, their stomachs exploding apart.

And here I stand, covered in their blood.

I revel in their destruction.

I want to be a part of it.

I need to take a stand.

So, I reach up, grab Wyatt's arm, and bite down as hard as I fucking can, ripping to take out a big chunk of flesh. He yelps in pain as I spit, then elbow him in the stomach. This forces the asshole to let me go. So, I turn, bring my leg up through the water, and knee him as hard as possible in the balls.

The asshole hunches over, his eyes nearly bursting out of his head as he glares at me. "I thought you were sweet, innocent..."

My laugh is mocking. I can't help it. I say, "You don't know shit, co?o!" then tighten my left fist and sucker punch him right in the kisser. The asshole falls backward into the water, then floats to the top, completely knocked out.

I take a deep breath, glance down, and try to fix my dress as best I can. I don't need Dash or Tony and his men witnessing my breast on full display—that would be enough for Void to have a coronary.

I manage to put myself away as Void surges forward in the water. Once he reaches me, he assesses me all over. His eyes tell a thousand stories, and right now, all I want to do is kiss the living hell out of him.

"I thought you were dead!" Tears well in my eyes, but I blink them away as best I can.

“I’m fine. A little smoke inhalation...” He runs his hands over me, as though assessing for any damage, or making sure I am really here. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine now you’re here.” My trembling body would disagree, but I know we’ll be okay. “I just want you to hold me.”

He looks me up and down again. “Let’s get this shit off you first, then I’m never letting you go.”

With a teary chuckle, I reply, “Gladly.”

Void moves in and turns me into a gripping hold. His front is to my back as I dip down under the water, using my hands to wash all the fucking blood off me. I gasp as I come back up, but his hands never leave me as I wipe my face, the water around us going crimson in color.

“This is disgusting... get me out of here.”

Dash jumps into the water and grabs Wyatt, dragging him ashore. I smile at Dash, and he dips his chin at me, then I turn to Void as the roaring of gunfire slows down. I’m fucking freezing, my body shivering as Tony’s men head over to us. I have to admit, I’m a little shocked to see Tony and his soldiers here, including Matteo, but I’m happy Void and Dash had backup.

Everyone congregates around us.

“H-how did you find me?” I ask.

Void runs his hands up and down my arms to try and keep me warm. “Dash called Tony, like you told him to, if the club ever needed help. Because the DeLucas were in Panama on business, they were real fucking close, and we all know Tony has

resources.”

Dash takes a step closer. “I figured Tony might have an idea where to start looking. With Tony’s tech guru on the hunt and Void knowing they would want a farm with a lake or some kind of body of water, we were able to narrow the search down pretty easy. This was the only hit, so we took it.”

Warmth floods me that I have so many men willing to fight for me. “I’m glad you did. Thank you, Tony, for putting your men on the line for this... for me.”

“If it weren’t for Dash, we wouldn’t even be here,” Tony replies.

I cuddle into Void. “I thought you were dead. I was so scared when I saw those assholes lighting up the bungalow, knowing you were inside, and I couldn’t do anything about it.”

“We owe Dash for that too.” Void turns to Tony. “We owe you a debt.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Tony replies. “For now, get your woman home. Never know if we might need her again.”

Home.

So much, yes.

VOID

Seeing Ivy covered in blood scared the shit out of me. Knowing my father had her and was so close to carving that fucking symbol into her skin is eating at me. Having her branded in that way, I'm just not sure if I would be able to look at her the same. Not because she would be any different, but because every time I saw it, I would see my father. I would see myself—my old self—and I know it would haunt me. It would have ruined us, and that's precisely what my father wanted.

For me not to be able to be near Ivy.

For her to be out of the way of him bringing me back into the fold.

Luckily, his plan backfired.

Thank fuck I got there in time, and now, we're almost home.

We called ahead to tell Nycto we're incoming, and I can only imagine what Eva's going to be like when we arrive.

I'm happy to know now my father is away from the farm, that the place won't run without him. All his followers will leave and head back to wherever it is they came from. After all, a cult is nothing without its leader.

Or, as Ivy said, "Muerto el perro, se acabó la rabia."

Dash is behind us on his ride as we pull up to the clubhouse gates. West pulls them

open, throwing his hands in the air. He hoots out some kind of hoorah as we enter, making Ivy chuckle, though I don't miss the way her body is shuddering at the deep cold seeping into her bones.

We should've stopped for a blanket.

Eva and Nycto barrel toward us as we pull in. The pickup doesn't even stop before Eva yanks open Ivy's door and pulls her out of the cage. "Hermana, I was so scared I was going to lose you." Eva pulls Ivy into the biggest hug, and Ivy wraps herself into her embrace.

Ivy pulls back with a small laugh. "I'm fine. Wet and cold, but fine."

A slow smile creeps up my face as I step out of the pickup, then walk around to greet my pres and his Old Lady. Nycto raises his head to me. "You good?"

I dip my chin.

I may not be completely okay, but I will be. Ivy is here. Alive. That's all that matters.

Nycto steps forward and glances over the back of the pickup, where my father is bound and gagged in the back, his beady eyes wide in fear as he struggles about.

"What do you wanna do, Ivy? It's your call."

Ivy glances at me. I shrug. I don't give a fuck what happens to the cunt.

Darkness spreads over her features. An intoxicating smile appears on her face, and she begins to bounce on her feet. She doesn't need to say a word. Nycto chuckles. "I'll go prepare the mortar."

Taking a deep breath, I pull Ivy aside. “You don’t have to be there if this is too much.”

“Are you kidding? He cut into my skin to brand me. I’m laying the fucking bricks myself.”

“Only if you’re sure.”

“Stop trying to protect my virtue, Void. I’m in this. I’m part of this club. I brick bad men behind walls, sealing them to their deaths. If you give me a gun, I’d shoot him in his cock too. I’m no princess. I’m not innocent, so stop making me out to be.”

I brighten at her words. They’re exactly what I needed to hear. I always thought I had to preserve her, to stop her from crossing into the dark with me, but why does being in the dark have to be so bad? She has this brightness about her, but maybe it’s the fires of hell burning so fucking intensely that I can see the same fire that burns inside of me.

We’re the same.

It’s why we work.

Deep down, we’re both tainted, depraved souls, striving to be good, when all we really need is another dark soul to embrace the shadows left by the light.

Dash had my father brought down to the Cell. Nerve gave him a sedative and he is out of it, tied up, propped up, and hooked against the bricks, ready for us to do our thing. I thought Nycto would be down here with us, seeing as this whole “bricking people behind a wall” thing was his first, but he decided to let Ivy have this one. She

will be his protégé, where bricking is concerned.

That should scare me.

It should terrify me.

But all it does is electrify me.

Because it lets me know anything this club throws Ivy's way, she can handle.

There's an energy in the air, a spark between the two of us because we're doing this together. I move in, holding my father's body back against the wall as Ivy opens the mortar bucket and stirs the contents. Her eyes light up as she picks up the trowel and lathers the first row of mortar at his feet. I don't even need to tell her where or how far out to do it.

She's a natural.

Ivy lays the first row of bricks perfectly. Right now, seeing her in her element, I swear my cock is aching. Watching Ivy turn from a virtuous saint into this rebellious devil has been the highlight of my time here at this club. Hell, it's been the highlight of my damn life.

Who knew when she stepped off that boat from Cuba, she would fall into my arms and change not only herself, but me in the process?

The bricks continue to be built into a wall, entombing my father behind them. It's not like I can say I haven't thought about this very moment for years. About getting my vengeance on him for all the torment he put me through when I was growing up. But with him behind bars, it was never something I thought would come to pass.

Now, with Ivy's help, we're making my dream happen, and we're doing it as a team.

Because together, we're unbreakable.

I would walk over hot fucking coals for her. Put my life on the line time and time again. And she'd brick people in a wall for me. My crazy, sexy, psycho girl. My mistress of pain.

Her eyes shift to me as I step back, taking my hand away from my father's chest as she bricks up in front of his torso. I can't help but feel like this has all come full circle. My father tried to make me be like him. In a way, I suppose I am, just not in the way he thought. He would bend people to his will, make them submit to him, make them do utterly indescribable shit. The man's pure fucking evil.

I'd never make Ivy do anything she didn't want to. She's a free spirit and has her own mind. I couldn't make her submit to me in that way if I tried. She is far too alpha for that. But my father's blood runs through my veins. That evilness inside him is inside me too. Thank God I choose to use mine differently.

Ivy bricks up to his chin. The adrenaline surging through me right now pumps so hard it's like I'm high. Ivy tries to fight back her excitement as well as she moves in to place another brick, but then hesitates. "Shall we entomb him completely? Or leave it open so we can watch him waste away over a few weeks?"

A slow grin slides over my face. This woman!

"Leave three bricks free so we can watch the fucker dwindle. You're a twisted fucker, sweet thing!"

She giggles, but not in a cute way. It's more sadistic, and it makes my cock rock hard.

Fuck, I love her! My eyes widen at the realization, but I don't give anything away.

“What's even more twisted is the fact he's right outside my bedroom. I'll be able to hear his screams for days... I love it!”

I grin, shaking my head. “One more thing,” I state, pointing to the cage on the floor.

She chuckles. “I can't believe I nearly forgot. This is the best part!”

Ivy picks up the small rodent cage from the ground and lines it up with the opening, the giant rat inside itching to get free. “In you go, little guy. Cause as much havoc as you can.”

The evil glint in her eye turns me on even more as the rat lets out a little squeal and drops to the bottom of the entombment.

She places the cage back on the ground, then pulls out the mesh screen to block the hole, trapping the rat inside. I grin, helping her fit it in place, all while my father is still out cold. I pull Ivy to me, pressing my lips to hers.

She is intoxicating.

She might be fucking insane, but I adore her brand of crazy, and right now, I wouldn't want to be anywhere fucking else than right here, sharing this moment with her.

We took my father down together, and in the end, we're still here fighting.

Fighting for each other.

My tongue collides with hers as a deep groan echoes from inside the wall beside us.

“What the hell? Cade? Why am I in the fucking wall? You can’t leave me here! What the fuck? Is there something in here with me? Ouch, fuck! It bit me! Cade? Cade,” my father yells, but we don’t break our kiss. All it does is spur us on, my tongue colliding frantically with hers as I push her up against the wall Andrés is interred behind.

She whimpers in my mouth.

My hands tingle as I run them along her still damp, silky skin.

I’m one lucky sonofabitch.

It’s been a few days, and everything is finally settling back to normal. After the chaos of having Tony come after Ivy, then my father’s bullshit as well, it’s good to kick back and have a breather.

Sitting in the Chapel with my brothers is like the most normal thing in the world to me. Though I’m not sure what this meeting is about exactly. I’m hoping there’s no more shit hitting the fan right now. I want some time out—a fucking holiday.

Nycto takes a drag of his cigarette, then exhales, a plume of smoke filling the medium-sized room. “So, there are a couple of reasons I dragged you all in here toda—”

“If the club’s in trouble again, I’m out. I’ve had enough drama over the last few days,” I say jokingly.

Everyone chuckles, while Nycto grins. “You’ve got Ivy hanging off your arm. You’re constantly gonna be in trouble, VP.”

“Here, here,” resounds around the room.

I fold my arms over my chest, trying to appear angry, but I can’t hold in my laughter.

“Fuckers!”

“Anyway, first call of business... Atomic, you need to up the security on our cells as a preventative measure to ensure they don’t get tracked again.”

Atomic dips his chin. “I’ve done a full wipe of everyone’s cells. They’re clean of any software and I’ve encrypted them. Also, I added a commercial software firewall, but I’m looking into other avenues of defense... something I will program personally.” He exhales. “I let the club down, Pres. It won’t happen again.”

Nycto hums under his breath, seemingly unimpressed. “Moving on... let’s discuss Dash.” Nycto’s eyes meet mine, and I sit up taller, listening. “The prospect has done a fucking lot for this club. Not just his bravery in helping rescue Ivy, but also in helping with Stella in that bar brawl. He was a good kid when going through his recovery. Never batted an eyelid when one of us asked for something until shit got weird with Void and Ivy. Pussy will make men go crazy, and he’s learned his place where Ivy’s concerned.”

I raise my chin. “What are you saying?”

Nycto slides the club logo patch across the table.

Raising my brow, I exhale. “You wanna patch him in?”

Nycto glances around the table at my other brothers. “We need to vote, and it’s gotta be unanimous.”

Whiskey places his closed fist on the table. “Aye.”

We're doing this now?

Ominous slams his fist down. "Aye."

"Aye," Nerve chimes in next.

"Aye," Brass and Atomic say simultaneously, leaving me sitting here with everyone looking at me.

"Aye," Nycto adds for good measure.

One vote left.

It only takes one vote.

One single vote for Dash not to patch in, then he'll be gone from the club for good.

It would be so simple for me to rid him from our lives.

To get him the hell away from Ivy forever.

But if she found out it was me who sent him packing, I'm not stupid enough to know she will never forgive me.

Plus, he did save my damn ass.

I owe him.

Maybe he isn't such an asshole after all.

"He's gonna need a mentor," I grunt out.

Nycto hums under his breath. “Yeah, he will.”

All eyes are turned my way, waiting. Running a hand through my hair, I groan as I sink into my seat. “Fine, I’ll do it. He did save my ass. He deserves a patch... as much as I fucking hate it.”

Everyone dips their chins at me.

“He gets the patch, but you got the girl. Remember that,” Nycto reminds me.

“Mmm,” I mumble under my breath.

There’s only one way to make sure.

“Now, there’s one more item of business. The thing you came and talked to me about a while back, Void. I spoke to our brothers while you and Ivy were away. We’re gonna have another vote on it now, if you’re sure.”

My eyes widen. “Really?”

Nycto tilts his head. “Yeah, brother. We’ve seen enough to warrant it.”

“Well, then, let’s vote!”

We walk out of the Chapel, and there’s a pep in my step.

Dash’s patching-in ceremony is going to be in a couple of days, but right now, I need to tell my woman something. In front of everyone. As we all enter the main room, Eva and Ivy are sitting on the sofa. Dash and West are at the bar, drinking, while

Stacey's behind, serving them. A fantastic aroma is wafting out from the kitchen, so I'm sure Trixie's in there, and Pepper's wiping down the small tables to get ready for dinner.

All eyes fall to us as I walk over to the pool table, sending out a whistle to grab everyone's attention. They all turn to face me as my brothers fan out around me in a semi-circle.

"I have news."

Ivy and Eva both jump up from the sofa, fear etched across their faces.

"Oh God," Eva mumbles, grabbing Ivy's hand for support.

"Ivy, can you come here?"

She glances at her sister, giving her a supportive nod. Eva is hesitant to let her go, but Ivy detaches from her, then slowly walks my way. I reach out, taking her hand in mine with a slow smile creeping up on my face.

Ivy scowls, throwing a punch into my pec. Hard. "Fuck you, asshole. I thought something was wrong." But she can't fight the corner of her lips turning up.

Everyone chuckles as I shake my head. "Always fighting. You're so fucking strong, Ivy. Your inner strength is what astounds me, time and time again. I made the mistake of thinking because you didn't have the same life experiences as the rest of us, it meant you were meek and mild. Yeah, I was so goddamn wrong."

She tilts her head as if she's mocking me. "True story."

I gesture to Nycto as he moves in behind me. "You, Ivy Pérez, are tougher than some

of the men I've met. Your fire, your fight, your will to outdo is intoxicating—"

"Void... what is this?" she asks, looking around.

"You have a dark side, Ivy. It flows inside you. Like a delicious poison. But I'm willing to take every last drop of your crazy, even if it kills me."

She tilts her head. "It's strange you say that, because in my mind I've been thinking I have poison running through my veins... but, all that aside I'm not following. Void... what's going on?"

I tilt my head at Nycto, and he steps forward with a club cut.

Ivy raises her brow at me. "You're claiming me? This is my property patch?"

I give a small laugh. "Yes and no... I am claiming you, Ivy, but this isn't your property patch."

She scrunches up her face in clear confusion.

Nycto turns it around and points to the prospect patch on the front. "This is a club cut, Ivy. Tampa has never had a female prospect in our ranks, to be honest, Defiance has never had a female club member. But we put in a call to the National Charter President, Torque, and he said considering the circumstances, that if there was ever a time to initiate the first female Defiance member, you should be it..." Ivy gasps, her hand slamming to her chest in shock before Nycto continues, "So, as a club, Tampa voted. With the strength, determination, and courage you've shown, you'd make a fucking incredible Defiance prospect... if you wanna join us?"

Ivy's eyes widen so fucking huge it's like she can't even think, let alone speak. "So, wait, let me get this right... I'm prospecting in, and I'm an Old Lady right now?"

My hands grip tighter on hers. “You’ll be known as Toxin. Generally, we don’t give road names until you officially patch in, but seeing as you’re being claimed as well, we agreed to having your name known early.”

She lets out a loud laugh as she races forward and threads her arms through the club cut.

Damn, it looks good on her.

Everyone cheers as she turns then hurtles herself at me, her lips pressing against mine. I wrap my arms around her, my fingers creasing against the leather of her cut. Fuck! I can’t help it. My damn cock begins to harden.

She’s perfect.

We pull apart, and my eyes lock onto hers.

“Thank you, Void. Thank you for doing this. I’m sure it was you who suggested I join the club and is sponsoring me. I can’t imagine not being part of it. It’s like this is where I belong. Like this is what I’m meant to be doing. Mi familia.”

I bring my hand up to caress the side of her face. “I know. From the second I saw you bricking Andrés up behind that wall, I knew you were born for this club. And now, you’re my Old Lady, so every-fucking-thing is perfect.”

She grins at me. “Toxin, huh?”

I shrug. “Thought you’d like it.”

“I love it.”

I lean in to kiss her again.

Dash walks out of the clubhouse. A few moments later, the telltale roar of a Harley booms outside. It takes off so fucking fast I wonder if he's had time to change gears.

Dash has feelings for Ivy, and I know that.

But maybe now I've claimed Toxin, he can finally let her go.

IVY

Elation flows through me. I had no idea this was coming. Prospecting in and being claimed at the same time, I was not expecting it at all. Everyone surrounds Void and me, giving their congratulations, when all I want to do is rip Void's clothes off.

I should be out there celebrating with the guys.

And I will.

Fucking hell, I will.

But I'm also an Old Lady, and right now, I need to let my Old Man know how much I appreciate what he's done for me here today.

Eva bounces up and down, her hands gripping mine as she smiles at me. "I'm so excited for you. This is exactly what you need, Ivy! An outlet. Being part of the club is going to be amazing for you."

"I was already part of the club, they just needed to accept it," I tease.

"With the way you handle the crop, not to mention Andrés and Wyatt, yeah. I agree, Toxin. That's why it was such an easy vote for us," Nycto insists.

I spin back to Eva. "I'm so glad we're here."

"This is the best place for the both of us," Eva agrees.

I grip hold of Void's hand. "I couldn't agree more, but I need to go celebrate all this with my Old Man. If you'll excuse us..."

Everyone chuckles as Void waggles his eyebrows at me. I take off, leading him toward the hall for his room. I practically break the door down in my impatience to get inside. I need to show Void how much I care about him.

He slams it shut behind me, and I shove him up against the door. His eyes widen as my lips slam to his. That spark, that undeniable chemistry that ignites when we touch, illuminates my body as my tongue dances with his, fighting for dominance. Void's hands slide up under my shirt and along my skin, his fingers heading toward my bra. He unclips it before I can even take my cut and shirt off.

My cut...

An involuntary shiver runs through me, my nipples hardening at the thought.

I chuckle against his lips as I pull back, shrug out of my cut, fold it, and place it on his desk. He quickly does the same as I yank my shirt over my head, my bra immediately dropping to the floor.

Void's eyes fall to my taut buds, and he groans. "I'll never get sick of looking at you." His voice is low as he pulls his shirt over his head.

I step back, letting him have a good view as I thread my thumbs into my jeans and pull them down, leaving me in my red lace panties. He rearranges his cock in his pants as I tilt my head toward him. "C'mon, Void, keep up."

He smirks, and his hands fall to his buckle, quickly undressing. I kick my flats off while watching his cock standing tall, hard as a fucking rock against his belly button. I haven't seen any other cocks in my life to compare with Void's, but I know that his

is fucking glorious, and I can't wait to have it inside me again.

He stalks toward me, a devilish glint in his eyes. Excitement bubbles inside me before he reaches me, his hands moving to my panties. With brute strength, he tears them to shreds, and they fall like lifeless scraps to the floor while I run my hands up his tattooed pecs.

“There you are. Hello, Sir.”

He rolls his shoulders. “I think Sir and Toxin can both play tonight. You game?”

My hand slides up from his pec, and I quickly grip his throat, staring into his eyes. I tighten as excitement flows through me like never before. His nostrils flare as he tries to suck in air. I grin so fucking wide as my other hand moves to his cock, wrapping around it, and I begin to stroke. “I'm game. The question is, are you?”

His hands move up, gripping my shoulders so firmly I'm sure it will bruise, and he spins me, breaking my hold and pushing my front down over the bed as he picks up a paddle from under his bed—one I didn't even know he possessed. My eyes widen as my pussy tingles.

“Let's play.” He groans as he slams the paddle against the apex of my pussy and ass.

I jerk forward on the bed as the vibration filters through me. Closing my eyes, I revel in the pleasurable pain.

He slams the paddle down again, harder this time, my pussy clenching so tight I need some friction.

Toxin decides she needs to play, so I kick into gear. Just as he's about to slap me again, I flip myself over and slide my legs out, wrapping them around his waist and

pulling him closer to me. He loses his balance, and I fling him onto the bed. He growls as I flip him onto his back, straddling him, my hands pushing into his chest and forcing his back to the mattress.

“Ivy!” he warns.

“Sorry, she’s not here right now,” I mock.

I reach down between us to grasp his cock, causing him to hiss between his teeth. Before he has a second to think, I line us up and drop down, my pussy encasing him as we both moan out in delight. He moves to sit, taking me with him as we rock together on the mattress. His hand grips my hair, jerking my head back. He slides his tongue against my neck as my nails dig so violently into his back I feel a warm liquid running down his skin.

He hisses. I know I’m drawing blood, but this feels so fucking good I can hardly stand it. We rock together, trying to reach our mutual highs as I lean back, attempting to force him deeper inside me. His fingers run across my breast, squeezing, then up along my throat.

Just when I think he’s going to choke me like I do to him, his other hand slides down under us. His finger glides along my pussy, gathering some slickness, then presses on my ass, causing me to tense and pause.

“You’re Toxin right now, not Ivy, remember?” he murmurs.

It’s enough to have my muscles relax as he inserts his finger. He’s slow, cautious with his movements, but then he starts to rotate inside me while we’re fucking, and it’s like nothing I’ve ever experienced before in my life. The sensations overwhelm my body. My orgasm doesn’t build, it just hits me at full-fucking-force, wave after wave. I can’t catch my breath, the adrenaline smacks me so damn hard, and I explode

in such a carnal way that all I can see is stars.

My body quivers, shaking as I come down.

When I'm finally able to inhale, he pulls his finger from me.

I'm completely spent, lost in a sea of erotic bliss. My head lolls to his shoulder as he continues to pump his cock inside me.

"That was so... fucking. Hot," he stutters out. "Watching you come undone is my all-time favorite thing."

Slowly, I lift my head as my hooded eyes look into his. "Now, it's your turn."

Somehow, I find my strength again and push his body back down to the bed to ride him. His hands slide up my thighs to sit on my hips, helping my movements. My nails dig into his pecs as he pulls me on and off him.

"Fuck, Toxin, you feel so damn good."

His cock throbs inside me. I feel it growing, tensing with his arousal. I know he's getting close, and I thought there was no way I could go again after that last one, but he's working his magic inside me once more.

We rock together, building each other's highs as my hands slide to his throat. I squeeze, his eyes alighting as his hand slams against my throat in return. I gasp as we choke each other, riding this wave of ecstasy. His fingers tighten around my neck—not so tight I can't breathe, just enough so I can only get the smallest amount of air through. It's intoxicating, exhilarating, thrilling even, as I pant for breaths that simply aren't coming like they should. At the same time, my climax builds inside of me.

My skin slickens, my body begins to shudder. It's not as powerful as the last one, but I know it's still going to completely wreck me.

Void groans as I tighten my grip around his throat, him doing the same to me as my muscles clench, and lights dance behind my eyes as he thrusts up higher inside me, hitting the perfect spot. A long, strangled moan escapes me as his cock throbs, pulses, then he unloads inside of me at the same time I reach my peak.

We climax together in the best possible way.

"Holy-fucking-Christ," I whimper as I flop to the bed beside him.

We pant for frantic breaths as he pulls me into him, kissing the side of my head. "You are fucking unbelievable. I'm so goddamn lucky."

I'm completely spent. I don't think I could move a muscle if I tried.

Void is the man who has brought me out of my shell. He's made me into the woman I'm supposed to be. He accepts me for who I am, no questions asked, and I adore the hell out of him. I can't imagine my life without him. I want to look up at him, but I can't. He's literally worn me out.

"Void..."

"Yeah?"

I hesitate for a moment but can't help the way I feel. "I love you."

He turns, hovering over me, his eyes boring down on me, nothing but devotion shining back. "I love you too. I don't think I've ever said that to another human being in my life."

A slow smile turns up on my face as I beam with pride. “Never?”

His hand comes out to smooth a strand of hair behind my ear. “Ever.”

As I plant a tender kiss on his lips, I know I love him. I love him with every-fucking-thing I have in me.

Pulling back, he exhales. “C’mon, let’s have a shower.”

I groan. “I can’t walk. I’m exhausted.”

He chuckles. “I’ll carry you. I’ll carry you anywhere you need to go. Always, Toxin. I got you.”

My hand comes up to caress his face gently. He smiles, then suddenly pulls back, stands, and hoists me up over his shoulder. I’m so freaking exhausted I just hang there like a ragdoll. But I know as soon as we get into that shower, he’s going to wake me back up again. So, I’m going to let him carry me right now, because like he said, he’ll carry me anywhere, and I know he doesn’t just mean physically.

Void has me.

He’s got my back.

We’re a team.

We’re in this together for the long haul, and there’s no one else I would want by my side. Or under me, carrying me through.

Void is the delicious poison that courses through my veins.

Void is my toxin.

And damn if I don't want him to kill me every single day.

IVY

A Few Days Later

It's been a little crazy since I prospected into the club. The guys have been on me like nothing else. They want me to embrace what it's like to be a part of the brotherhood, and they've not given me any slack because I'm a chick.

Not that I would want them to.

Hell, I'd give them shit if they did.

The only one treating me a little differently is Void. I guess it's because I'm also his Old Lady. It's hard for him to find a balance between mad respect for his misses and no respect for the prospect. I just keep telling him while we're out in the club, I'm a prospect, but in the bedroom, when it's just us, I'm his Old Lady. He seems to be managing a little better now.

But with me becoming a prospect, it means the club has three.

That's not how it usually works.

So, Dash and West knew things were on edge for them. But this morning, Dash was promoted and patched in a relaxed ceremony. Even though he appeared freaking proud of himself, there is an air of sadness sweeping over him, so I make my way over as he sits at the bar.

He received his road name, Justice, and I think it fits, all things considered. He's always the one putting himself in danger. Always the one putting the needs of others before his own. He's the one fighting for justice in everything he does.

It feels right.

I slide onto the stool beside him at the bar and throw my arm around his shoulders, pulling him to me in an embrace. "Justice, I'm so fucking proud of you."

His eyes shift to me with a subtle nod. "Yeah. This patch is all I've ever wanted." His tone is flat as he turns back to his beer.

Sighing, I drop my arm, signaling to Stacey to bring me a beer. "You okay? Like, really okay?"

He rolls his shoulders, not looking at me. "I've been spending most of my time at a bar across town. It's just... difficult seeing you with him."

Damn! His somber tone hits me right in the guts. I knew Dash had feelings for me, but I had no clue how deep they ran. "I'm sorry, Justice, but I love Void. I always have."

"I know. Anyone can see it. And he loves you too. You're perfect for each other."

"You'll find someone. Someone much better suited to you than me."

His lips turn up in such a genuinely sweet way, with just the right touch of cheekiness. It assures me Dash is still in there somewhere, and he's not going away.

"Maybe," he says. "Until then, I'll keep going to the bar."

I rest my hand over his. "Don't drink and drive."

He snorts. “I’m Defiance, Toxin. It’s what we do.”

I frown. I’m Defiance now, and after Void’s episode with alcohol, weed, and his ride hitting the asphalt, I’m not going to be drinking and riding anytime soon. That shit scared me. It fucking scarred me. “Be safe, Justice, that’s all I’m asking.”

Justice stands and downs the rest of his beer. “I’ll catch ya later, Toxin.” He turns, heading for the door. My feelings toward Justice are nothing but friendship, always have been, but he’s had way too much to drink to be riding, and I do not want to see him hitting the asphalt the same way Void did. So I’m going to follow him.

He takes off on his ride out the gates, so I hop onto Reva, not bothering with a helmet.

Keeping a reasonable distance behind Justice so as not to be recognized and knowing he won’t hear Reva over the roar of his own Harley, I follow, and it doesn’t take long for him to pull up at a bar across town. I park down the road, but within walking distance, so he doesn’t spot me as he heads in. I wait a couple of minutes, then make my way in and stand at the back, observing him with my arms folded across my chest. I want to make sure he is actually okay.

I might even pay the bar bitch to put him in a cab when he’s done for the night.

Justice orders a drink from the waitress. She’s pretty—real pretty—and she’s paying extra special attention to Justice. He finally clicks that she’s talking to him, and he lifts his chin and starts chatting back, a faint smile appearing on his face. She flicks her hair over her shoulder, flashing her pearly whites.

Oh, that old trick.

Justice sits forward further, really engaging in the conversation, even laughing and smiling as they talk, clearly flirting with each other.

I inhale, finally letting myself relax.

Watching Justice allow himself to be happy makes everything right again. I never wanted to be a source of anguish for Justice. So maybe, just maybe, he can start to move on with his life now.

The bar girl reaches out, placing her hand on his forearm, and giggles with him.

When his eyes drop straight to her cleavage, I snicker before I turn to head for the door.

Yeah, Justice is going to be just fine.

I walk back to Reva and throw my leg over her. I can't wait to get my own ride. Reva's a little big for me, but Void's taking me shopping for my own bike in a couple of days. We're going back to see Paul, who's having a custom bike built for me.

I haven't had any input. Void's done the whole thing.

He said to trust him, so I have.

In the meantime, I get to have a few more rides on Reva. Actually, I'm sure I'll get in deep trouble for taking the VP's ride without asking. As a prospect, I'll be put on some kind of shit duty, but it was worth it to ensure Justice is okay, and I'm good with whatever punishment Void wants to dish out on me.

I kick over the engine, Reva roaring to life. Her vibration sends my excitement levels into overdrive. I rev her a couple of times, then take off back to the bunker. The wind whips through my hair, helping me feel finally free to be who I'm meant to be.

Toxin—a real Defiance biker.

Not Ivy the innocent virgin.

That's not me.

She was never me.

I had to be unleashed on the world, and I needed to meet Void to help me with that. And fuck am I glad I did, because trying to keep Toxin inside back in Cuba would have been a hefty ask.

At least here, she's free to roam wild.

And wild she will be.

Pulling back into the clubhouse, I park Reva, the weight of the world lifted from my shoulders. I rush inside the bunker to find my Old Man, who's playing pool with Nerve. Striding up to him, I throw my shoulders back assertively. "VP?"

Void turns, his eyes shining in happiness when he sees me. "Yeah, prospect?"

"I stole your bike."

Nerve chuckles to himself as Void groans, placing the pool cue down on the table. "Jesus, Toxin, again?"

I raise my hands to placate him. "Before you start, it was for a good reason."

Void folds his arms over his chest, his bulging biceps sexy as hell, and I lose all concentration for the briefest of seconds. He widens his eyes at me, and I continue. "Shit, sorry. Yeah, so I was worried about Justice. He'd been drinking, then he got on his ride."

Void instantly relaxes his posture. “You didn’t want him to crash.”

I nod, and he gestures for me to keep going. “I wanted to follow him, make sure he was okay. He went to a bar across town. I was going to tell the bar bitch to send him home in a cab when he was done, but I have a feeling a pretty little blonde will help him home instead.”

Void purses his lips. “You’re a good friend, Toxin. A bad prospect, but a good friend.”

I smirk. “Yeah, I’m kinda breaking all the damn rules, aren’t I?”

He groans. “So, I’m gonna have to restrict you to a cage for the next month. And... I’m gonna make you clean the domes every day for the next week for stealing my ride.”

I slump, pouting. “Urgh... sometimes I hate that you’re the boss of me.”

He narrows his hooded eyes. “And sometimes you love it.”

Nerve groans. “Yep, that’s me done.” He places his pool cue on the table. “Will you two just go fuck already. You trying to fight your urges right now is making me want to gag,” he calls out as he leaves.

Void grabs my hand and leads me toward the stairs. I’ve moved most of my stuff into his room. The VP’s Old Lady can’t be seen living in the Cell. But Void knows if we want to explore our kink, we head downstairs.

There’s something wrong with the both of us, we get that, but we get turned on by the fact we’re fucking next to a room full of the people we’ve killed.

There’s a reason they called me Toxin.

Because I have chaos in my veins.

I live for the thrill of death. I am Defiance. An Old Lady.

I'm more than anyone ever thought of me.

But, more importantly, I'm everything to Void.

And he is everything to me.

And that... that is all that matters.

"I love you, Void," I murmur.

"Love you too, Toxin."