







# Doc's Decision (Reapers Rejects MC: Second Generation: Nevada #3)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** She stepped up when she didn't need to, and that was the moment she belonged to me.

Doc

With the immediate threat dealt with, the club could finally rest. At least, that's what I thought at first. I thought we'd all get a break, that we'd enjoy the few moments of peace we had.

But, I was wrong.

Sassy delivered my son and I was accepting the truth—a clubwh\*\*\* had my baby. I was going to try to coparent with her, and I wasn't opposed to the idea of trying to make an honest woman out of her.

I wasn't going to be a jerk about it. I was going to be mature. I had my mind made up. I just never thought Sassy would leave a note in her room saying she wasn't coming back and that I could have him.

I went from thinking my son would have a mother in his life, that he wouldn't be raised in the same turmoil I was. Sadly, that wasn't the case. The club stepped up, though. All of the ladies were there for my little man, but there was one woman who showed up more than the rest—Mandy.

I'd become good friends with her over the last year and seeing her with my son sparked something inside me. I don't know when I made the decision, but I knew then I'd make her my ol' lady.

I wasn't going to let this magnificent woman slip through my fingers.

\*\*\*Docs Decision is the third book in the Reapers Rejects MC: Second Generation: Nevada charter by Elizabeth Knox. Even though this is within a series, it can be read as a standalone. Please note subjects within this book can be triggering, and this is intended for mature audiences only.

**Total Pages (Source):** 20

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am*

## PROLOGUE

Mandy

17 Years Old . . .

I'm flying across the living room, slamming into the thin drywall with a thud.

The cheap plaster cracks behind my head as I slump to the ground, dazed.

Tony snarls above me, eyes bloodshot and pupils dilated, "Where's my fuckin' twenty dollars, you little bitch?"

The stench of stale cigarettes and booze wafts off him.

I yell back, struggling to get to my feet, "I don't have your goddamn money! I never took it!"

He grabs me by the shoulders, his dirty fingers digging into my skin. "Don't you lie to me, Amanda. I know you stole it! Now give it back before I beat it out of you!"

"I didn't take shit from you, asshole!" I shove him off me with all my strength.

I may be a seventeen-year-old girl but I'm scrappy as hell.

Growing up in this shithole made me tough.

He staggers back, then lunges at me again, face twisted in rage.

I dodge to the side, but he clips my jaw with a wild punch.

Pain explodes through my face as I taste blood.

I need to get the fuck out of here.

Away from Tony and his bullshit, away from this dead-end life in Nowhereville, California.

I refuse to end up like my mom—strung out, broke, letting dirtbags use me for a fix.

I'm getting out, one way or another.

With shaking hands, I scramble backward on the beer can-littered carpet, trying to put some distance between us.

Tony towers over me, meaty fists clenched.

“You think I’m an idiot,” he spits out. “But I know you took my money. Hand it over!”

“I didn’t take shit from you. I never have!” I snarl back, voice ragged. The metallic taste of blood fills my mouth. “I’m done being your fucking punching bag.”

His bloodshot eyes narrow into slits. “Like hell you are.”

Tony lunges for me again.

His fingers close around my throat as he slams me to the floor.

I claw at his hands, gasping for air, vision blurring.

Fuck, I can't breathe.

Oh God, I'm going to die here.

Murdered by my tweaker stepdad in this dingy trailer.

Spots dance before my eyes.

Summoning the last of my strength, I rake my nails across his face, drawing blood.

Tony recoils with a pained yell, and his grip loosens just enough.

I wrench free, scrambling to my feet.

Sucking in ragged breaths, I dart down the narrow hallway, Tony's curses echoing behind me.

I burst into my tiny bedroom and slam the door, fumbling with the flimsy lock.

My heart pounds wildly against my ribs as I lean against it, hardly believing what just happened.

No more.

I can't live like this for one more goddamn day.

Tears spill down my cheeks, but I brush them away roughly.

Pounding on my door yanks me from my thoughts, reverberating through the thin

walls.

Tony's screaming bloody murder out there, spittle probably flying from his cracked lips. "You little bitch! Open this damn door right now and give me back what you owe me!"

I press my palms over my ears, trying to block out his grating voice.

Same shit, different day.

He always needs someone to blame when he pisses away their money on booze and scratch-offs.

The doorknob rattles violently as he yanks on it. "I'm gonna bust down this door and beat it outta you, hear me?"

I let out a shaky breath, shoving down the fear churning in my gut.

This is nothing new—his groundless accusations, the threats.

How many times have I heard it all before?

But I refuse to cower anymore.

I'm almost eighteen.

Old enough to strike out on my own and find a job somewhere that's not a greasy diner or gas station.

Hell, maybe I'll even finish school, though that dream feels far-fetched in this moment.

I wipe my damp cheeks with the hem of my shirt, wincing as the movement tugs on my split lip.

Gently, I probe the tender skin around my eye.

Fuck, another shiner to cover up.

A bitter laugh escapes me.

I should've gotten wise to their game years ago, the moment Mom brought Tony and his baggage home.

I was a dumb kid, wanting to believe her promises that this time would be different.

What a fucking joke.

Tony's still ranting and raving, but his voice is growing hoarse.

He can't keep this up forever.

My gaze darts around the cramped room at the tattered band posters and thrift store knickknacks.

I've wasted too many years here already, trapped in this cycle of poverty and abuse.

I can't let it suck me in any deeper.

Jaw clenched with determination, I drag my duffle bag from the closet and start shoving clothes inside.

A plan begins to take shape in my mind.



It's a long shot, but what do I have to lose?

Anything's better than rotting away in this toxic wasteland.

I'm getting the hell out of here.

Tonight.

The trailer door slams, rattling the thin walls.

I freeze, straining to hear over my pounding heart.

Muffled curses and the crunch of gravel signal Tony's departure.

I don't trust the silence.

It could be a trap, him lying in wait to catch me off guard.

But as an engine growls to life and tires spit dirt, I let out a shaky breath.

He's gone, but he's likely to blow more cash at the local dive.

Adrenaline urges me into action. I zip up the duffle, the clothing jumbled inside, mirroring my chaotic thoughts.

My hands tremble as I yank on boots and a hoodie, ignoring the metallic taste of blood on my tongue.

I can't afford to fall apart now.

Swiping the little savings from my sock drawer, I stuff the crumpled bills into my

pocket.

It's not much, but it'll have to do.

I slip out the back door, daring one last glance at the rusted trailer I've called home for far too long.

Part of me aches at abandoning Mom and my little brother, Alfie, but she made her choice long ago.

I have to save myself before I go down with her.

Gravel bites into my soles as I hurry down the darkened road, duffle bouncing against my hip.

My best friend, Harlow's place is a good mile away, but I don't dare slow down.

Fear propels me forward, my breaths coming in harsh puffs.

I can't shake the feeling that Tony might return any second. His fury reignited.

After what feels like an eternity, Harlow's sagging porch comes into view.

Light spills from the windows, a beacon of hope in the gloom.

I stumble up the steps, a sob lodged in my throat.

Please be home.

Please don't turn me away.

I barely finish knocking before the door swings open, revealing Harlow's surprised face. "Mandy? What the hell?—"

"I'm done," I choke out, the dam finally breaking.

Hot tears spill down my cheeks as I collapse into her arms. "I can't go back there, Harlow. I just can't."

She holds me tight, her embrace a lifeline. "Shh, I got you," she soothes, stroking my matted hair. "It's gonna be okay. We'll figure this out together."

Harlow guides me inside, kicking the door shut behind us.

Her mother looks up from the couch, concern, etching deep lines into her face.

I brace myself for the barrage of questions, the judgment sure to follow.

But instead, she rises and wraps me in a fierce hug, her flowery perfume enveloping me. "You're safe now, sweetheart," she murmurs, her voice thick with emotion. "You're staying here tonight, no arguments."

I nod mutely, too overwhelmed to protest.

Harlow leads me to the bathroom, pressing a wad of tissues into my hand. "Get cleaned up," she orders gently. "I'll make up the couch for you."

As I mechanically wipe away the grime and blood, snippets of hushed conversation drift through the thin walls.

". . . can't send her back there, Mom. You know how bad it is . . ."

“ . . . course not. Poor thing’s been through enough . . . ”

“ . . . gotta get out of this town. Both of us. Before it’s too late . . . ”

A flicker of hope sparks in my chest.

Maybe, just maybe, this is the turning point I’ve been desperate for.

A chance to break free from the cycle of misery and start fresh somewhere new.

Somewhere far away from the ghost of Tony’s fists and Mom’s broken promises.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am*

### CHAPTER ONE

Doc

Present Day . . .

I take a deep breath and look down at the tiny, squirming bundle in my arms.

Bright blue eyes blink up at me, gazing with innocent curiosity.

My son, Kash.

It still hasn't fully sunk in, even though it's been a week since he was unceremoniously dumped on the clubhouse doorstep.

A fucking week of stumbling through this fatherhood thing blind as a bat.

My old man was a deadbeat waste of space who never gave a rat's ass about me, so it's not like I had much to go on as far as father figures.

Hell if I'm not trying my damndest to figure it out.

This kid deserves better than I had.

Kash starts fussing, and I bounce him gently, humming some random tune.

He quiets for a minute but then ramps right back up into pissed-off wailing.

I've changed him, fed him, burped him, but nothing's working. "Come on, buddy, give your old man a break," I mutter.

I pace back and forth across the clubhouse, patting his back.

The guys are probably taking bets on how long before I lose my shit completely.

Fuck 'em.

Most of them don't know the first thing about babies either.

I'm so focused on the screaming infant that I don't even notice Mandy, Zoe's friend, walk in.

She's a cute little thing, watching me with a hint of a smile quirking her lips.

She saunters closer. "Need a hand there, Doc?"

I blow out a heavy breath. "Darlin', if you can get him to stop howling like a banshee, I'll owe you big time."

Her smile grows as she holds out her arms.

I pass Kash over, wondering if she has some kind of magic touch.

Lord knows I could use a miracle about now.

Mandy cradles Kash close to her chest, cooing softly. "Hey there, little man. What's all the fuss about, huh?"

Damned if the kid doesn't instantly quiet, blinking up at her with those big blue eyes.

I shake my head in disbelief. “How’d you do that?”

She laughs, the sound light and musical. “Oh, you know. Just my natural charm.”

I snort. “Right. Well, feel free to use that charm anytime. Seriously.”

Mandy keeps rocking Kash gently, and he seems completely content now as if he wasn’t just screaming his head off a minute ago.

I run a hand through my hair, suddenly feeling the exhaustion of the past week catching up to me.

“You look beat, Doc,” Mandy says, her voice laced with sympathy. “When’s the last time you got a decent night’s sleep?”

I shrug. “Fuck if I know. Feels like a lifetime ago.” I watch as she sways back and forth, Kash’s eyelids starting to droop. “Guess I’m still trying to wrap my head around all this. Being a dad and shit.”

Mandy nods, her gaze soft as she looks down at my son. “Well, for what it’s worth, I think you’re doing a great job. It’s not easy, but you’re clearly giving it your all.”

Something in my chest warms at her words.

It’s nice to hear, even if I’m not so sure I believe it myself.

But I’ll keep trying for Kash.

The kid didn’t ask for any of this, but he’s mine now.

My responsibility.

“So,” I drawl, trying to lighten the mood a bit, “about those tricks of the trade . . . any chance you’d be willing to share a few? Feels like I could use all the help I can get these days.”

Mandy looks up at me, a playful smirk tugging at her lips. “Oh, I don’t know. Some of these secrets are pretty valuable. Might cost you.”

I raise an eyebrow, enjoying the little spark of flirtation between us. “Yeah? And what exactly would be the going rate for baby whisperer wisdom?”

She pretends to think for a moment. “Hmm . . . how about a drink sometime? You know, when you can actually leave this little guy for more than five minutes without worrying he’ll bring down the clubhouse.”

I chuckle, shaking my head. “You got yourself a deal. Whenever you’re free, I’m buying.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Mandy says with a wink.

We fall into a comfortable silence for a bit, just watching Kash as he sleeps peacefully in her arms.

It’s a good look on her, I can’t help but think.

Natural, like she was meant to be a mama herself someday.

The thought catches me off guard.

I barely know this chick, and here I am, imagining her with a kid of her own.

Something about seeing her with my son, so gentle and sure . . . it does things to me.



Makes me wonder about the what-ifs and maybes.

I mentally shake myself.

Now's not the time for getting lost in pointless daydreams.

I have enough on my plate as it is.

Still, as Mandy carefully transfers Kash back into my arms, our eyes meeting in a loaded gaze, I can't quite squash the tiny tendril of hope unfurling in my chest.

Maybe, just maybe, I don't have to do this whole dad thing completely alone after all.

"So, have you heard from her at all? Sassy, I mean," Mandy asks softly, settling onto the couch beside me.

I tense up, my jaw clenching tight. "Nah. Not a fucking word."

"That's rough," she says, genuine sympathy in her voice. "I'm sorry you're having to deal with all this."

I just shrug, staring down at Kash's sleeping face. "It is what it is. I'm not gonna waste my time worrying about someone who obviously doesn't give a shit."

"Still, he's her kid too. You'd think she'd at least check in, make sure he's okay."

"Yeah, well, that would require her to think of someone other than herself for half a second," I mutter bitterly. "Apparently, that's too much to ask."

Mandy's hand comes to rest on my knee, a gesture of comfort and support that I wasn't expecting but find myself deeply appreciating.

“Hey,” she says gently, waiting until I meet her gaze. “You’re doing a great job with him, Doc. Kash is lucky to have you. And fuck Sassy for putting you in this position in the first place. You both deserve so much better.”

Warmth blooms in my chest at her words, and I feel some of the tension bleed out of my muscles. “Thanks, doll,” I murmur, offering her a small, grateful smile. “I’m just trying to do right by my boy, you know? Be the dad he needs since he sure as hell ain’t getting a mom anytime soon.”

“And you will,” she assures me, giving my knee a gentle squeeze. “You already are. Kash adores you. Anyone can see that. The way his whole face lights up when you walk into the room . . . that’s not nothing, Doc. That’s everything.”

I clear my throat, embarrassed by the sudden influx of emotion welling up inside me. “Yeah, well, I’m not exactly Father of the Year material yet,” I joke, trying to deflect from the deep shit we just dove into. “Still learning on the fly here, you know?”

She gives me a teasing nudge with her elbow. “Don’t sell yourself short, cowboy. You’ve got this parenting thing down pat. Besides, Kash is a resilient little guy!”

Kash suddenly starts crying out of nowhere, hiccupping sobs radiating through the clubhouse.

“Shh, it’s okay, buddy, it’s okay,” I hear her coo, rubbing his back in slow, soothing circles, her hazel eyes over his head reflecting equal parts panic and relief. “Everything’s all right. It happens to the best of us, you know? Sometimes, we all need a little cry.”

Kash sniffles, and I can see him nodding into her shoulder.

Mandy glances up at me, and for a moment, I see it again.

That maternal glow that I'd seen when she first laid eyes on him here at the clubhouse.

It's like watching the sunrise after a long, dark night.

"I think he's good to go, Dad," she says, handing him over to me with the utmost care as if she's in fear of breaking him.

She's right, though; he's already squirming in my arms, wanting to be let down.

Fuck me if my heart doesn't swell ten sizes bigger when he reaches for Mandy's hand. "But I'm thinking it's bath time for this little maniac before he leaves a trail of destruction in his wake."

I chuckle, shaking my head in amusement as I plant a wet, sticky kiss on the top of Kash's head before starting to walk off. "Yeah, no arguments here. Let's go, champ. Time to get all cleaned up, and then maybe we'll read a bedtime story, huh?"

Mandy and I exchange one final glance as I head outside of the clubhouse, back to the trailer I share with Shiver. "Thank you," I mouth, and for once, I mean it with every fiber of my being.

Her words hit me right in the feels, and I have to take a second to compose myself.

Mandy's kindness and sincerity are a balm to my battered soul, and I find myself wishing, not for the first time, that things could be different between us.

That I could be the kind of man she deserves instead of the broken mess I am.

Lost in thought, my mind drifts to my own mother, locked away in that godforsaken facility back in California.

It's been too damn long since I've seen her, and the guilt gnaws at me like a starving dog on a bone.

I need to get her transferred out here, closer to me and Kash.

She deserves to know her grandson, even if she won't remember him from one visit to the next.

I walk the short distance back to my and Shiver's trailer and head inside, heading straight for my room.

I'm new at this dad thing, obviously, but I'm trying my damndest here.

The things that fly out of this kid's asshole is downright disgusting.

He needs a bath and stat.

Kash, at only a week old, has already amazed me.

He's pushed me to be a better father than I thought I could be.

I quickly strip him down, careful to avoid the healing umbilical cord that's dwindling down to nothing.

I fill the sink in my bathroom halfway and begin to bathe him, slow and thorough.

His tiny cries pierce my heart, but I keep talking to him, soothing words of love and promise.

He settles after a few minutes, his big eyes staring up at me with trust as I carefully wash his hair.

“Your mother’s missing out on all this, Kash,” I tell him softly. “She’s missing out on watching you grow, on seeing you smile and laugh . . . but don’t you worry, little man. Daddy has got you.”

I can’t help myself.

I lean down and press a soft kiss on his forehead.

His skin is so warm and smooth against my lips.

By the time he’s clean and swaddled in a fresh diaper and onesie, his little eyelids are drooping, and the energy drain from his earlier tantrum is evident.

I cradle him in my arms, his small body fitting perfectly against my chest, his soft sighs echoing in the quiet room.

“Time for bed, champ,” I whisper, tucking him into the portable crib that’s been set up in the corner of my room.

It ain’t much, but it’s home for now.

I take a minute to watch him sleep, my heart clenching with a fierce protectiveness that’s entirely new to me.

This little guy is mine, all mine, and God help anyone who tries to hurt him.

### CHAPTER TWO

Mandy

I take a swig of beer, letting the sharp, cold liquid slide down my throat.

Across the table, the girls are laughing about some shit.

The tangy scent of barbecue sauce wafts over from a nearby table.

“God, this place reminds me of Texas,” Harlow says, her eyes sparkling with amusement. “The pork ribs are to die for.”

I nod, tearing into a piece of cornbread. “I haven’t had barbecue this good in ages. Figured we needed some proper grub for your visit.”

Zoe snorts. “More like you just didn’t want to cook.”

We all bust up laughing at that.

She knows me too well.

Cooking is not exactly my forte—I’d much rather be in front of the camera, getting filthy with my girl Zoe while Spark watches.

But that’s a whole other story.

Growing up in a shitty town with an even shittier stepdad, laughter was in short supply.

He was a real piece of work—a degenerate gambler who made my life hell.

But somehow, through all the bullshit, Harlow and I managed to keep our friendship intact.

She was the one bright spot in an otherwise craptastic childhood.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I fish it out.

A text from Doc pops up on the screen:

Hey, darlin'. Is there any chance you can watch Kash a bit later? Got some errands to run.

A smile spreads across my face as I type back a reply.

Doc's a real sweetheart, even if he tries to hide it under that gruff biker exterior.

And his little boy Kash is the most adorable thing I've ever laid eyes on.

Zoe eyes me suspiciously. "What's got you grinning like the Cheshire Cat?"

I shrug, trying to play it cool. "Oh, just Doc. He wants me to watch Kash for a bit."

Harlow raises an eyebrow. "Doc? Who's that?"

"One of the guys from the motorcycle club Zoe's man is prospecting for," I explain. "Real good dude."

Zoe scoffs. “Good dude, my ass. With the way you two have been making googly eyes at each other, there’s definitely more to it than that.”

I roll my eyes, even as a blush creeps up my neck. “We’re just friends, Zoe. He’s been going through some shit lately, and I’m helping him out, that’s all.”

“Uh-huh. You keep telling yourself that, babe.” Zoe smirks knowingly. “I saw the way you practically drooled when he took his shirt off the other day.”

“Whoa, hold up,” Harlow interjects, holding up a hand. “How’d this Doc guy get his road name anyway? Sounds like there’s a story there.”

I take another sip of beer, trying to ignore the heat flooding my cheeks. “He was an army medic back in the day. Got himself a medical discharge and ended up prospecting for the Reapers Rejects.”

Zoe snorts again. “And you know all this how? Oh, right, because you’re just friends.”

I flip her the bird, but I can’t help laughing. “Fuck off, Z. I’m allowed to have guy friends.”

“Yeah, ‘friends’ you call Daddy,” she shoots back with a wicked grin.

At this point, Harlow is practically falling out of her seat, giggling. “Wait, what now?”

I groan, dropping my head into my hands. “Oh my God, it wasn’t like that! He’s an actual dad, you pervs. I was just being nice.”

But even as the words leave my mouth, I know it’s a flimsy excuse.



The truth is, there's a part of me that loves the idea of calling Doc "Daddy" . . . and not just because he has a kid.

The man oozes sex appeal from every pore with his piercing blue eyes and chiseled jawline.

Maybe Zoe's right.

Maybe there is more between us than friendship.

But I'm not ready to go there, not yet.

My last relationship crashed and burned spectacularly, leaving me gun-shy about opening up again.

So for now, I'll stick to being Doc's friend . . . even if my traitorous body has other ideas.

Besides, we've both got enough baggage to fill a 747.

The last thing either of us needs is more drama.

I force a smile and grab a rib from the platter in front of me. "All right, enough about my non-existent love life. Let's talk about something else. Harlow, tell us about this new job of yours in Austin."

As she launches into a story about her douchebag boss, I let myself relax, grateful for the change in subject.

This is nice—catching up with old friends over some killer barbecue, shooting the shit without a care in the world.

For a few hours, I can forget about the ghosts of my past and the uncertain future that lies ahead.

Right now, at this moment, life is good.

And I'll hold onto that feeling for as long as I can.

Harlow's voice pulls me out of my thoughts, "I still can't believe Mama helped us get out of that shithole town. If it wasn't for her . . ." She shakes her head, emotion flickering across her face.

"We'd probably be stuck there, popping out babies and waiting tables at the diner," I finish her sentence, the memories rushing back.

Harlow's mom was a fucking saint, always looking out for us, even when her own life was falling apart.

"Remember when she gave us that envelope full of cash? Told us to run and never look back?" Harlow's eyes mist over. "I thought she was crazy at first. But she knew . . . she knew we needed to get out before it was too late."

I nod, swallowing past the lump in my throat. "I'll never forget that night. Sneaking out while everyone was passed out drunk, hopping on that Greyhound bus with nothing but a backpack and a prayer."

"And then we ended up here." Harlow gestures around at the glittering lights of the Vegas strip in the distance. "Two small-town girls trying to make it in the big city."

"We did more than try. We fucking made it." I raise my glass in a toast, "To Harlow's mom. And to us, for having the balls to chase our dreams."

“Hey, we had some good times in that shitty studio apartment,” Harlow protests with a grin. “Remember when the AC broke in the middle of July, and we slept on the floor in our underwear for a week straight?”

“Oh God, don’t remind me,” I groan. “I thought I was gonna melt into a puddle of sweat.”

Zoe snorts. “Sounds like my kind of party.”

“Yeah, well, it wasn’t all bad,” I concede, thinking back on those early days. “We had each other’s backs, no matter what. Even when Harlow decided to abandon me and move to Austin.”

I shoot her a teasing glare, and she rolls her eyes. “I didn’t abandon you. I got a job offer I couldn’t refuse.”

“Mhmm, sure. You keep telling yourself that.” I smirk, but there’s no real heat behind it. I’m proud as hell of everything Harlow has accomplished. “Speaking of Austin, this place is giving me major Texas vibes.”

I glance around the restaurant, taking in the rustic wooden beams, the cowhide barstools, and the tangy scent of barbecue in the air.

A neon sign on the wall proudly proclaims, “Don’t Mess With Texas”.

“Right?” Harlow beams. “When you said we were going to a barbecue joint, I knew I’d either love it or hate it.”

“I figured it was time to put some meat on those bones of yours.” I poke at her ribs playfully. “Can’t have you wasting away out there.”

“Please, like that would ever happen,” Harlow scoffs. “I’m a strong-ass woman through and through. We’re made of tougher stuff than that.”

It feels so damn good to have my girls together again, even if it’s only for a little while.

The server arrives then with a heaping tray of food—ribs, brisket, jalapeño cornbread, baked beans, the works.

My mouth starts watering at the sight of it.

“Looks like we’re gonna need a wheelbarrow to cart me outta here.” I whistle lowly as he sets the spread in front of us. “Haven’t had grub this good in ages.”

“That’s ‘cause you never learned to cook worth a damn,” Zoe ribs me as she grabs a saucy rib. “It’s a miracle you haven’t starved by now.”

“Hey, I’ve got skills where it counts.” I flash her a wicked grin before digging into the brisket with gusto.

The smoky meat practically melts on my tongue, the spices igniting my taste buds in the best way. “Besides, cooking is overrated. I’d rather let someone else do the hard work.”

“Of course you would.” Harlow shakes her head in amusement, reaching for the cornbread. “Some things never change.”

We settle into an easy silence then, too busy stuffing our faces to keep up the banter.

It’s a comfortable quiet, the kind that comes from years of friendship and shared history.

I savor each bite and sip, wishing I could bottle up this feeling, this moment—a full stomach, buzzing head, heart so damn happy I could burst.

Knowing my girls have my back, no matter what shit life throws my way.

For the first time in a long time, I feel like . . . maybe my luck is finally turning around.

“So, I know you wanted to change the subject and all, but I have to dig a little more.” Harlow leans forward with a wicked gleam in her eyes. “Please, for the love of God, give me the dirty deets.”

I groan internally, already regretting opening this particular can of worms.

Harlow’s not one to let things go, especially when she scents fresh gossip.

Zoe jumps in before I can deflect. “You already know Doc’s one of the guys in Spark’s MC. He’s a total DILF—all muscles and tattoos and broody intensity. And our girl here”—she jabs a finger at me—“has been thirsting after him for weeks now.”

The denial bursts out of me, but it rings hollow even to my own ears. “I have not!”

Zoe just smirks, entirely too pleased with herself.

“Uh-huh. That’s why you practically start drooling every time he walks into the room.”

My face flames hot, and I duck my head, letting my hair curtain forward to hide the incriminating blush.

It's not my fault Doc is basically walking sex in worn jeans and scuffed boots.

The man exudes a raw, magnetic pull that snares my attention every damn time, no matter how hard I try to resist.

"It's not like that," I mumble, picking at the label on my beer bottle. "We're just friends. He's going through some stuff, and I'm trying to be there for him, that's all."

Harlow cocks her head, shrewd gaze raking over me. "Friends, huh? Is that why you're lit up like a Christmas tree right now, just from one little text?"

I sputter, scrambling for a plausible excuse.

I'm drawing a total blank, my usually clever tongue tied in knots.

The truth is, she's not wrong.

There's something about Doc that just gets to me, burrowing past all my carefully constructed walls and defenses.

He makes me feel seen in a way I haven't experienced in far too long.

Like he looks at me and actually sees me —not just the glossy exterior I project to the world but all the messy, aching, hopeful parts I try so hard to keep hidden.

It's unnerving as hell.

"Look, he's a great guy and an amazing dad," I say finally, treading with care. "But really, I'm just helping him out. Sassy put him in a shit position, you know?"

Harlow looks between me and Zoe. "Sassy?"

Zoe wastes no time filling her in. “The clubwhore who Doc knocked up. She was a dumb, ratty bitch who turned on the club and tossed her son aside. Luckily, Doc’s the kind of man who takes care of his responsibilities.”

“Wow.” Harlow shakes her head in denial. “I can’t fucking believe how cruel some can be. I’m sure that little boy is better off without her.”

There’s no doubt in my mind that he is.

Harlow giggles. “You’d better hop on him soon, and I do mean on him. Men like that don’t stay single for long.”

I shake my head. “He’s just a friend, ladies.”

I’m dimly aware of Harlow and Zoe exchanging knowing glances over my head.

But I ignore them, focusing instead on the lie I’ve just spun.

Pretending it’s the truth.

Because deep down, I know I’m not ready for the alternative.

To face the terrifying reality that maybe—just maybe—my heart’s already long since been lost.

Lost to a man who might not ever be mine.

Lost to the ghost of a future that will never be.

Lost to the breaking tide of a love I’ll never fully know.

I don't know what scares me more: the possibility of never having him or the risk of wanting him anyway.



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*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am*

### CHAPTER THREE

Doc

I'm frantically rummaging through the kitchen cabinets, Kash squirming in my other arm as he starts to fuss.

I mutter, scanning the cluttered shelves, "Where the hell did I put that damn formula?"

Kash lets out a plaintive wail.

"Shh, I know, buddy, I know you're hungry," I try to soothe him, bouncing him gently. "Just give Daddy a minute."

The canister of formula I always try to keep stocked here at the clubhouse is nowhere to be found.

I must have used the last of it and forgotten to order more, like an idiot.

Rookie mistake.

I walk over to the old, beat-up mini fridge, shifting Kash to my other arm as I yank open the door.

Fuck, there's nothing but beer, condiments, and some dubious leftovers that have probably been in here since Halloween.

“Shit,” I curse under my breath.

Kash’s cries are getting louder and more insistent.

The poor little guy must be starving.

I slam the fridge shut with more force than necessary, causing Kash to startle and let out an extra loud shriek.

I grimace and pat his back. “Sorry, sorry. Daddy’s just a dumbass who can’t remember to keep his kid fed.”

I stride quickly out of the kitchen and down the narrow hallway to the main room of the clubhouse.

A couple of the guys are sprawled out on the grungy couches, eating some snacks and shooting the shit.

They glance up as I enter.

“Hey Doc, what’s up with the rugrat?” Shiver asks, throwing another pretzel into his mouth. “Kid sounds like a goddamn banshee.”

Shiver is a quiet one unless he’s talking to the ladies or someone’s pissed him off.

He’s also my roommate and a damn good dude once you get to know him.

“I’m out of fucking formula,” I growl. “Gotta go see if I have any in the trailer.”

“Shit, man,” Shiver says with an uninterested shrug before turning back to his conversation with Cobra.

I push open the clubhouse door with my shoulder, squinting against the late afternoon sun as I head across the dusty lot to my trailer, Kash still wailing away.

For such a little dude, he's sure got an impressive set of lungs on him.

Inside the trailer, I set him down in his playpen, wincing as his screams reach ear-splitting heights.

I turn in a circle, scanning the small, cluttered space.

Formula, formula, where the hell do I keep the formula?

I yank open cabinets, rifling through the hodgepodge of dishes, baby supplies, and random junk.

I check the fridge, the grimy kitchen counters, and the jam-packed shelves above the stove.

Nothing.

I'm shit out of luck.

"Goddammit," I snarl, slamming my fist against the flimsy wall and instantly regretting it when the whole trailer shakes.

Kash's face is beet red now as he howls, fat tears rolling down his chubby cheeks.

It physically pains me to see him so upset.

I'm his dad. I'm supposed to take care of him and make sure he has everything he needs.

Yet here I am, failing spectacularly at the most basic task.

I scoop him up and cradle him against my chest, making shushing noises and rocking him gently. “I’m sorry, Kash. I’m so sorry, buddy. Daddy fucked up, but we’ll figure this out, okay? Shh, don’t cry. Please don’t cry.”

He just keeps on sobbing, tiny hands balled into fists, body shaking.

He’s hungry and mad, and I’m helpless to do anything about it.

I pace back and forth in the small space, mind racing.

I could call Mandy to see if she could run to the store for me, but she’s probably busy.

She works like fucking crazy.

Almost like I have a sign outside of my trailer, Raven pops her head inside, eyebrows raised. “Everything okay in here? I heard Kash wailing from halfway across the lot.”

Relief floods through me.

Raven’s always been good to me and Kash.

If anyone can help, it’s her.

“Hey, yeah, I’m in a bind. Totally out of formula, and this little man’s starving. You wouldn’t happen to have any extra cans stashed away, would you?”

She frowns, thinking. “Sorry, Doc. I haven’t started stocking up on it yet. But hey, I can make a quick run to the store down the street and grab some for you. No biggie.”

I hesitate.

I hate imposing and hate asking for favors.

Especially from Raven, who already does so damn much for the club. “Nah, that’s okay. You don’t have to do that. I’ll figure something out.”

“Shut up,” she says, already yanking her keys out of her pocket. “I want to. You need formula. I’m getting you formula. Simple as that.”

I let out a breath, bouncing Kash lightly.

He’s still fussing, but not as loudly now. “You’re a lifesaver, Raven. Seriously. I owe you.”

“No, you don’t.” She holds out her hand, wiggling her fingers. “Just give me some cash, and we’ll call it even.”

I fish a crumpled fifty out of my cut and slap it into her palm. “Thanks again. I mean it.”

She waves me off. “Yeah, yeah. You’re just lucky I like that adorable little nugget of yours.” She chucks Kash gently under the chin, and he hiccups. “Be back in a few.”

And then she’s gone, the door swinging shut behind her from a gust of wind, resulting in a bang that makes Kash startle and let out another ear-splitting wail.

“Shit, I’m sorry. Shh, shh. It’s okay, buddy. Aunt Raven’s gonna be right back with some yummy formula for you. Just gotta wait a little longer.”

But he’s not having it.

His cries climb in volume and intensity, and his body stiffens in my arms as he screams.

I can feel his hunger, his frustration, his utter inability to understand why I'm not feeding him right now .

I pace the length of the trailer, humming Metallica under my breath, the way I always do when I'm trying to soothe him.

But it's not working.

Nothing's fucking working.

He just keeps on howling, face purpling, tears and snot smearing across my neck where his head is nestled.

Fuck, this is bad. Really bad.

My kid is starving and miserable, and it's all my goddamn fault.

Some father I am, I can't even remember to stock up on fucking formula.

I should've known better.

I should've double-checked our supplies days ago.

Stupid, stupid mistake.

My stomach twists with guilt and self-loathing. I'm a pathetic excuse for a dad.

No wonder my own father was never around. Probably couldn't stand the sight of his

useless fuckup son.

I cut off that train of thought before it can spiral any further.

I can't afford to wallow right now.

Kash needs me to keep my shit together.

I take a deep breath and blow it out slowly, trying to project a calm I definitely don't feel. "Just a little longer, Kash," I murmur, my voice cracking. "Raven will be back any second now. You can hold on 'til then. I know you can, tough guy. Shh, don't cry. Please don't cry . . ."

Just then, there's a light knock on the door.

My head whips around, hope surging in my chest, but it's not Raven who comes striding through.

It's Mandy.

The instant Mandy spots me with a red-faced, wailing Kash, her smile drops, and she hurries over, concern etched on her pretty features. "Doc? What's going on?"

I grimace, hating that she has to see me failing like this. "Ran out of formula like a fucking idiot. Raven's out getting more, but Kash here isn't thrilled about the delay."

Understanding dawns in Mandy's warm hazel eyes.

She reaches out to stroke a soothing hand over Kash's downy hair. "Aw, poor little man. It's okay, everything will be a-okay real soon," she coos. Then she meets my gaze and asks softly, "May I?"

Gratitude crashes through me, and I immediately shift Kash into her waiting arms.

She cuddles him close, making sympathetic noises as she rocks him gently. “There now, sweet boy. I know, I know you’re so hungry and tired. But your daddy is taking such good care of you. Yes, he is. Just gotta be patient a tiny bit longer.”

As if he can understand her words, Kash’s screams start to quiet, dwindling into little hiccupping sobs and snuffles against Mandy’s shoulder. I stare in amazement, some of the tension easing from my body.

I am in complete awe of Mandy’s innate skill.

She’s a natural, no doubt about it.

Kash usually doesn’t calm this quickly for anyone besides me.

Yet here he is, slowly relaxing in Mandy’s confident hold, soothed by her honeyed voice and tender touch.

Something warm and wonderful unfurls inside my chest as I watch them together.

An overwhelming surge of longing and . . . something else.

Something raw and fierce and undeniable.

I swallow hard against the sudden lump in my throat.

Christ, get ahold of yourself.

She’s just being a good friend, doing you a solid.



That's all this is.

But deep down, I know that's a lie.

Fuck, seeing Mandy cradle my son so sweetly, so lovingly, stirs up desires I've never let myself acknowledge before.

Dangerous desires that could ruin the easy, comfortable friendship we've built.

I try to shove those inappropriate feelings back into their box, lock them up tight.

I can't go there.

I won't.

Our relationship is strictly platonic, and that's how it has to stay.

No matter how badly I might crave more.

Mandy glances up then, her hazel eyes shining with affection as they meet mine. "He's such a little angel," she murmurs, tracing a finger delicately over his round cheek. "You're doing an amazing job with him, Doc."

My throat constricts at the honest praise in her voice, the open admiration on her lovely face.

Feels like I'm being sucker-punched right in the solar plexus. "I'm tryin' my best," I rasp out, hoping she doesn't notice how wrecked I sound. "It ain't always easy flying solo."

"I can only imagine." Sympathy softens her expression as she gently rocks Kash. "I

don't know how you juggle it all—being a kickass man, a single dad, plus being in the MC.” She jerks her chin toward the clubhouse.

A rough chuckle escapes me. “Takes a hell of a lot of caffeine and even more patience. But I’m learning as I go.” I hesitate, then decide what the hell and add, “Having you around to help has been a real lifesaver, not gonna lie.”

Her lush lips curve into a brilliant smile that makes my heart thud heavily against my ribs. “I’m always happy to lend a hand. You know that.” She shifts Kash to her other arm, and he nestles into her soft curves without so much as a peep.

Lucky little bastard.

What I wouldn't give to bury my face between those perfect tits and just?—

Mandy's gentle voice cuts into my wildly inappropriate train of thought, “So, you got any big plans tonight? Hot date or whatever?”

There's a teasing lilt to her words, but I could swear I detected an underlying note of . . . jealousy.

Nah, must be imagining it. Wishful thinking.

“Not exactly.” I drag a hand through my hair and blow out a harsh breath. “Gotta head out to Cali in a bit, check on my mom.”

Her playful expression morphs into one of concern. “Is she okay? Did something happen?”

I mutter bitterly. “Same shit, different day.”

The familiar mix of anger, guilt, and sorrow rises like bile in the back of my throat whenever I think about the fucked up situation with Ma.

Mandy's brow furrows. "What do you mean?"

I sigh heavily.

I don't talk about this with many people, but Mandy . . . I know I can trust her.

She's good people.

I find myself explaining, "Back when I was sixteen, Ma got into a nasty wreck. Traumatic brain injury. Screwed with her memory somethin' fierce." I swallow thickly. "Most days, she's still stuck thinkin' I'm just a punk teenager. Don't even realize she's got a grandbaby now."

"Oh Doc . . ." Mandy's eyes swim with empathy. "I'm so sorry. That must be incredibly hard."

I give a jerky nod, my throat too tight for words.

Her compassion threatens to undo me.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asks softly. "Anything at all. I'm here for you."

And that . . . that earnest promise of support . . .

It fractures something deep inside my chest.

Because God, what I wouldn't give to pull her into my arms and just hold on tight.

To accept the comfort she's freely offering.

But I can't put that on her.

It wouldn't be fair.

She didn't sign up for my broke-ass baggage.

So I simply force my lips into a weak attempt at a smile. "Nah, I'm good, darlin'. But thanks." I reach out to chuck Kash gently under his chin. "You just keep doing what you're doing with this little man. That's more than enough."

Our gazes catch and hold, the air between us thickening with unspoken emotions.

Maybe I'm a fool, but I could swear there are sparks flying hot and bright behind those captivating eyes.

I clear my throat gruffly, breaking the charged moment before I do something monumentally stupid.

Like hauling her in for a kiss that will make her melt onto the floor in need.

"Anyway, I best hit the road. These old bones ain't getting any younger, and the traffic at this hour can be a real mother."

I pause for a moment before instinct takes over me.

I wrap my arms around Mandy and press a chaste kiss on her forehead. "See ya later, babe."

It happens so fast I don't know how to react.

I snag my keys and reluctantly turn to go, even though every cell in my body is screaming at me to stay.

To finally take a chance and tell this amazing woman how I feel about her.

Hell, I already fucked up with that damn forehead kiss.

But I just . . . can't.

The timing ain't right.

Not sure it ever will be.

So, with a heavy heart, I shoot Mandy one last tortured glance over my shoulder. "I'll see ya when I get back?" It comes out sounding more vulnerable than I intend.

She smiles at me softly, bouncing Kash in her arms. "Of course, Doc. I'll be here. We'll be here." A promise and a reassurance all in one.

I give a tight nod, those three little words doing funny things to my bruised and battered heart.

Then I rush out of the trailer before I can do something else I'll regret.

Because God help me, this woman makes me yearn for her every damn day . . . and I'm pretty damn sure it's gonna be the death of me.

I gun the engine and peel off into the night, my heart racing faster than my bike.

All I can think about is Mandy and how badly I want things to change with her.

If they do . . . nothing will be the same.

Because once I cross that line with Mandy, there's no going back.

As I tear through the evening, the wind whipping past me, I can't shake the truth.

I'm done for. I'm in deep, and it's not because of the club bullshit with Seraphina's mother trying to take us down.

It's a five-foot-nothing blonde turning into brunette, with a mouth as sharp as her curves are soft.

She's got me twisted up in more ways than one, and I'm powerless to resist.

I need to get her off my mind and deal with the shit at Ma's long-term care facility.

I can worry about Mandy later.

I tear down the on-ramp to I-15.

Nothing but open road as far as the eye can see.

Perfect.

Just what I need to clear my head.

I settle in for the long haul, zipping past semis and minivans, doing eighty in a 65.

The sun beats down on my back, but the wind whipping past provides some relief from the Vegas heat.

My mind drifts to Ma as the miles tick by.

I can picture her now, sitting by the window in that sterile hellhole they call a “care facility”.

Staring blankly at the gardens and probably silently cursing my name for sticking her there in the first place, if she even remembers me today.

Fuck.

I scrub a hand down my face, guilt eating at my guts like battery acid.

Every time I saw her, it was like pouring salt into a wound that refused to heal.

The blank look in her eyes when she called me “Darren”.

The way she’d ask why I looked so different.

Hell, the way she accused me of being a liar, that I wasn’t really her son.

Christ. It gutted me every single time.

Before long, an hour has gone by and I’m at the long-term care facility.

I park my bike in the parking lot of her facility, the same one she’s been at for the last few years.

Each time I visit, things seem to get shittier and shittier.

The paint peels off the walls, the grass browns more and more, and the overall depressing atmosphere weighs me down.

I walk in, greeted by the same sour-faced receptionist who never cracks a smile.

“Hey there, Doc,” she says with a bored drawl. “You here to see your mother?”

Nodding, I confirm her thoughts. “Yeah, but first, I wanna talk to the admin. She called and left me a message.”

The receptionist’s eyebrows raise a fraction of an inch. “Well, aren’t we feisty today? Okay, go on back, third door on your right.”

I stride down the sterile hallways, the smell of disinfectant and old age hitting me in waves.

I knock once on the admin’s door before entering without waiting for a response.

“Darren, I’m glad you showed. I’m afraid your mother isn’t doing well.” Janice sighs, handing me a file-stamped with my mother’s name as I approach her desk. “Her condition’s deteriorating, and we’ve done all we can for her here.”

Rage boils in my gut. “Well, that’s just fucking great. Thanks for keeping me in the loop.”

“We’ve called you multiple times, but?—”

“I know, I know. I’ve been . . . busy.”

Busy proving myself to the MC, running from my past, and running from my goddamn life.

“Look, is there anything you can do? Anything at all?” I spit out, hating the desperation in my voice.



Janice hesitates. “Well, there is one thing . . .”

“What’s that?” I ask, not liking where this is going, but I’m desperate enough to hear her out.

“This facility is ill-equipped to handle her needs anymore. She . . . she needs more specialized care. Care that we simply can’t provide her with here.” Janice takes a deep breath before continuing, “However, there is . . . an experimental treatment, a trial, being held at a private facility for patients in a similar state as your mother’s. It’s risky, but it’s her only shot.”

Yeah, okay, right.

I can’t hold back my scoff because this sounds like a fucking scam to me. “And what’s the catch?”

Nothing in life is ever free, especially not miracles.

“The catch,” Janice says, her gaze dropping to the floor, “is that it is a trial, so while this is regulated, it could put her overall health at risk. Regardless, if you don’t want her in the trial . . . I do believe it would be in your best interests to transfer her to another facility. You’ve barely come to see her, and it’s obvious to me and her team that when you have been around, her health spikes up for a bit.”

The room seems to spin around me.

The last thing I want is for my mother, my last remaining family, to be reduced to a lab rat in some sick experiment.

But, there’s something else I can do here . . . I can get her moved to another facility, and I will.

If it helps Ma, I'll make sure it fucking happens.

Inhaling deeply, I look right into Janice's eyes. "Can you give me a list of recommended facilities within half an hour of Las Vegas, Nevada?"

### CHAPTER FOUR

Mandy

I stare at my reflection in the bathroom mirror as I apply a layer of cherry red lipstick.

It's been two weeks since Doc kissed me on the forehead that night when he had to go visit his mother's long-term care facility.

There were two weeks of radio silence between us, and not a word was spoken about what happened.

Part of me wonders if he regrets it if he wishes he could take it back.

The other part of me hopes he's just too shy or embarrassed to bring it up again.

Sighing, I put the lipstick down and fluff my curled, now brunette hair.

Why am I even overthinking this so much?

It was just a peck on the forehead, not some hot and heavy make out session.

Still, it felt intimate in a way I'm not used to, especially not with Doc.

Grabbing my purse, I head out to the living room. "Shnookums! Where are you, you little furball?" I call out in a sing-song voice.

A pathetic meow answers me, and I spot my scraggly rescue cat curled up on the couch, his patchy fur sticking up at odd angles.

The poor thing has been through hell, diagnosed with bone cancer, and only given a year to live.

That was two years ago.

Now, he spends his days hopped up on kitty painkillers, living the high life.

“Time for your meds, buddy,” I coo, scooping him up to administer the liquid medication.

He swallows it without much fuss, used to the routine by now. “That’s a good boy.”

Setting Shnookums back down gently on his favorite pillow, I head into the kitchen to check on the stuffing.

I pull the stuffing out of the oven, the savory aroma of sage and thyme wafting through my kitchen.

As I set the hot pan on the stove to cool, my mind drifts back to Doc, like it has been constantly the past couple of weeks.

“Fuck,” I mutter under my breath, realizing I almost let the last batch of stuffing burn while spacing out thinking about him again.

Get it together, Mandy.

I grab some tins and start scooping the stuffing into them to bring to the clubhouse for Thanksgiving dinner.

They'll feed the whole rowdy Reapers Rejects crew and then some.

I check the time and curse. I still need to get dressed and go over to the clubhouse.

In my bedroom, I slip into a black lace bra and panty set, the material smooth against my skin.

Over that goes a pair of tight suede bell bottoms that hug my ass just right and a low-cut black top.

I quickly run a curling iron through my hair, creating loose, sexy waves.

Some gold jewelry and I'm ready to roll.

I stack up the tins of stuffing in insulated bags and head out to my car.

The whole drive over to the clubhouse, I can't stop imagining how it will feel to see Doc today.

Will it be awkward?

Will he avoid me?

Or will he finally say something about that kiss and what it meant?

My heart races as I pull up to the gate, and Shiver lets me through with a nod.

I park and grab the heavy bags of food from my backseat.

Kade, one of the older members, calls out as I'm struggling to juggle the tins, "Need a hand with those, darlin'?"

I huff, blowing a strand of hair out of my face. “That’d be great, thanks.”

Kade grins and opens the clubhouse door.

“Hey, Doc! Get your ass out here,” Kade hollers inside. “Your girl needs some help!”

My stomach flips at his words—your girl.

If only.

A second later, Doc himself appears, his green eyes flashing in the sunlight as they land on me.

He jogs over and grabs the bags from my arms, his fingers grazing mine briefly. I suppress a shiver.

“Thanks,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady.

Orion and Fate come tearing out of the clubhouse, shrieking with laughter.

They almost run straight into us.

Kade scolds them, going into dad mode, “Hey, you two, calm your asses down!”

I chuckle as the twins ignore him completely.

“Just wait ‘til it’s Kash wreaking havoc around here soon,” I tease Doc with a smirk.

“It goes by fast.”

Doc’s eyes crinkle at the corners as he smiles back at me. “Let’s hope I can savor the baby stage for a while first.”

I clear my throat. “Well, we better get this food inside.”

Doc nods and leads the way, holding the door for me like a true Southern gentleman.

The delicious smells of roasting turkey and homemade pies envelop us as we step into the warm, bustling clubhouse.

My eyes can’t help but follow the lines of Doc’s broad shoulders as he carries my stuffing over to the overflowing dining table.

Things may be complicated between us right now, but damn if he isn’t a sight to behold.

I want him. I can’t deny that. Messy backstory and overprotective streak included.

But I’m terrified of messing up our friendship, this special bond we’ve formed.

He means more to me than I’m ready to admit.

Doc glances back and catches me staring.

A slow, knowing smile spreads across his face before he turns back to arranging the food.

Busted.

Heat floods my cheeks, and I busy myself saying hi to the other club members and ol’ ladies, but I can still feel the weight of Doc’s gaze on me.

It’s going to be an interesting Thanksgiving, that’s for damn sure.

I just hope I can make it through the day without jumping the man.

With the way he keeps looking at me when he thinks I don't notice, I'm not betting on my self-control.

Only time will tell if we'll keep dancing around this thing between us or if one of us will finally have the guts to do something about it.

"Hey, Mandy, get that stuffing out of that man's hands and come give me a hug!" Zoe calls out, waving wildly at me from across the room where she's perched on Spark's lap.

I shake myself out of my overthinking spiral and flash her a grin, pushing thoughts of Doc, and that kiss aside for now.

Today's about friends and found family, something I don't take for granted. Everything else can wait.

"Coming, Z!" I reply, making my way through the sea of people, stuffing in hand.

As I reach them, Zoe practically tackles me in a hug, nearly spilling her drink on both of us.

I hug her back just as tightly, grateful for her presence in my life, even if she has no idea how much she means to me.

We finally release each other, both a little misty-eyed, and I turn to greet Spark, who slings an arm around my shoulders. "Bout time you showed up. Doc's been pacing like a caged tiger waiting on you," he teases with a wink.

I elbow him in the ribs and roll my eyes. "Shut it, you."



I can't help sneaking a glance at Doc, who seems engrossed in conversation with Kade and Mouser.

As if sensing my gaze, he looks over, and our eyes meet, electricity arcing between us.

I swallow hard and quickly look away, my heart thudding erratically.

Zoe watches the exchange with a knowing smirk. "Uh-huh, you just keep telling yourself there's nothing going on there. I've got eyes, babe. That man wants you something fierce."

"Can we not do this right now?" I mutter, my face heating. "All of this is complicated."

She snorts inelegantly. "Doesn't look that complicated to me. He wants you. You want him. Seems pretty simple."

If only it were that easy.

She and Spark start bickering about something that's not overly important when Damon calls everyone to eat.

The mouth-watering scents of roasted turkey and savory sides waft in the air.

My stomach rumbles in anticipation, and I gratefully seize the distraction, knowing Zoe is nowhere near done with this topic.

But it buys me a little time to get my swirling thoughts and hormones under control.

We all gather around the heavily laden table, a mishmash of folding chairs and stools,

paper plates, and real china.

Kash smiles excitedly in Doc's arms, reaching chubby hands out for the colorful dishes.

Warmth spreads through me at the sight of Doc with his son. So natural and loving.

He's an amazing dad, even if he doesn't always see it himself.

As if drawn by my thoughts, Doc glances up, his mossy green eyes finding mine.

A thousand unspoken words pass between us in that charged moment.

Questions and confessions, fears and desires, all tangled up in a complicated web.

I ache to unravel it all, to lay myself bare to this man who's come to mean so much to me.

But I'm terrified of what I might find on the other side.

Doc's lips quirk faintly, ruefully, and he inclines his head just slightly as if to say 'later'.

I nod back minutely, both relieved and disappointed.

We've been dancing around this growing thing between us for weeks now, both too chickenshit to upset the delicate balance we've found.

I can feel us teetering on the edge, the point of no return looming closer each day.

Clearing his throat, Damon immediately silences everyone.

All eyes turn to him expectantly as he stands at the head of the table, Kat tucked into his side. “Normally, this is where I’d give a long-winded speech about brotherhood and loyalty,” he starts, his gravelly voice carrying easily. Chuckles ripple around the group. “But I figure you assholes know that already or you wouldn’t be here.”

“Damn straight!” someone calls out to raucous laughter and agreement.

Damon grins and flips them the bird before continuing. “In all seriousness though, this here,” he gestures to encompass the room, “this is what it’s all about. Not just the club or the bikes. It’s family. The ones we choose to let in, to fight for, to die for. And I’m fuckin’ thankful for each and every one of you sons of bitches. Now, let’s eat!”

A chorus of “hell yeah!” and the clatter of serving spoons signals the feast kicking into full gear.

As I load my plate with glistening turkey, creamy mashed potatoes, and the stuffing I slaved over, I can’t help but steal another glance at Doc and Kash.

Doc is attempting to juggle filling his own plate while preventing his wriggly offspring from face-planting into the cranberry sauce.

It’s adorable, and my ovaries clench at the sweet picture they make.

He must feel the weight of my stare because he looks up again, a half-smile tugging at his lips.

“Wrangling this one is like trying to herd cats,” he comments wryly, shifting a squirming Kash in his lap.

“I can take him if you want,” I offer impulsively, already setting my plate aside and reaching for the baby. “Let you actually eat a full meal with both hands for once.”

Gratitude and something deeper, more intense, flickers across Doc's handsome face as he willingly passes Kash over to me.

Our hands brush in the exchange, calluses against soft skin, and awareness sizzles up my arms. "Thanks, sweetheart," he murmurs, the endearment sending a shiver through me. "I owe you one."

"Anytime," I manage around the lump in my throat, snuggling Kash close and breathing in his sweet baby scent to center myself.

Doc's eyes soften, and he reaches out to tuck a stray curl behind my ear, his touch lingering for just a moment too long to be casual. "You look amazing tonight," he says quietly, holding my gaze.

There it is again, that sense of tipping over the edge into the unknown.

The air feels too thick, too charged, and I can hardly breathe past the fluttering in my stomach.

I know I need to break the intensity to step back from the brink before I do something reckless.

Like kissing this man senseless in front of God and everyone.

Kash chooses that moment to grab a fistful of my hair and shove it gleefully into his drool-slick mouth, effectively shattering the moment. "Oh no, buddy, Aunt Mandy's hair is not for eating." I laugh, gently untangling his chubby fingers and making silly faces at him until he shrieks with giggles.

Crisis temporarily averted, I risk a darting glance at Doc from beneath my lashes.

He's watching us with an unreadable expression, something hungry and yearning and almost painful in its intensity.

It steals my breath, and I have to look away and focus intently on Kash.

The rest of the meal passes in a blur of laughter, conversation, and the occasional loaded moment whenever my eyes meet Doc's across the table.

I'm hyperaware of him, every shift of his big body, every rumbling chuckle that I swear I can feel in my bones.

It's maddening and thrilling, and I just want to crawl out of my own skin or maybe into his.

By the time the pies are reduced to crumbs, I'm relieved to escape to the bathroom for a few minutes alone to regroup.

I pass the drowsy baby off to his doting uncles, ignoring Doc's questioning look, and shut myself in the blessedly quiet room.

Gripping the edge of the sink, I stare at my reflection, taking in my flushed cheeks and dilated eyes.

I look wrecked, and I feel it too like I'm coming apart at the seams, unraveling with pent-up wanting.

For Doc.

For something real and raw and soul-deep.

It terrifies and exhilarates me in equal measure.

“Get it together, Mandy,” I whisper harshly to myself. “He’s your friend. Don’t fuck this up.”

But even as I say the words, I know it’s futile.

Whatever this is between Doc and me, it’s bigger than friendship now.

It’s like a live wire, sparking and spitting and threatening to ignite at any moment.

We can’t go on like this, in this maddening limbo.

Something’s gotta give.

I wash the remnants of dinner off my face and straighten my clothes, trying to tamp down the unruly curls that have sprung to life in the dry heat of Nevada.

I can’t let on just how much he affects me.

I can’t afford to show weakness.

As I open the bathroom door, I can hear the low rumble of Doc’s laughter carrying from the main area.

My stomach flips, but I force myself to school my features into a mask of indifference.

I can do this.

I can be just friends with Doc.

I have to be.

His green eyes meet mine, full of concern. “Hey, you okay?”

Fuck, he’s too perceptive.

Damn him for always seeing right through me.

“Yeah,” I manage to croak out, clearing my throat. “Just needed a second. You know how it is.”

He nods, but I know he doesn’t buy it.

The rest of the night passes by in a blur.

We watch some mind-numbing zombie flick on one of the couches in the main area, both of us careful not to touch more than necessary.

I focus on the screen, trying to ignore the way my body aches for his touch, for his hands on my skin, but soon enough, sleep takes me.

### CHAPTER FIVE

Doc

Watching this movie has suddenly made me exhausted.

Meanwhile, Mandy was able to get a cat nap while a few of us got through the damn thing.

She stirs awake, and I shoot her a smile. “Mornin’ darlin’.”

She blinks a few times and rubs her eyes. “Fuck, what time is it? Is the movie over?”

Nodding, I confirm, “Yeah, just ended a few minutes ago.”

Mandy yawns and stretches as she gets off the couch. “I’ll be back in a few.”

Sure enough, she is. I guess she went to go freshen up or something.

She comes back over next to me and pops a squat.

“So Mandy,” Shiver says from one of the other couches, leaning forward on his elbows, “I gotta say, that last video you posted was hot as hell. You and Zoe really know how to put on a show.”

He waggles his eyebrows suggestively.



I stiffen, my grip tightening on the remote.

I arch a brow at Shiver's comment. "You subscribe to her content?"

Shiver smirks, his eyes flicking between Mandy and Zoe. "Oh yeah, there's some good shit in there." He chuckles low and dirty. "That last video was hot as all hell."

The thought of Shiver, of any of my brothers, jerking off to Mandy makes me want to put my fist through a fucking wall. I know it's her job, I know it ain't my place, but fuck if I can make the feeling go away.

I force myself to take a slow, even breath. "That so?" I grind out through my teeth.

Shiver seems oblivious to the rage simmering under my skin. He grins, all cocky-like. "Damn straight. Your girl knows how to put on a show. Wouldn't mind having a piece of that action myself, if you know what I mean." He winks at Mandy.

White hot fury explodes behind my eyes.

Before I even realize what I'm doing, I'm halfway out of my seat, ready to choke the shit out of him.

But Mandy's hand on my thigh stops me cold. "Doc," she says quietly, a warning in her voice.

It's like a bucket of ice water dumped over my head.

I slowly sink back down, struggling to regain control.

I can't fucking lose it, not here, not now.

But I want to. God, I want to.

Shiver finally seems to clue in that he's misstepped.

He holds up his hands in mock surrender. "Whoa, hey, just paying the lady a compliment! Didn't mean nothing by it."

"Then watch your fucking mouth," I snarl under my breath. "That's not how you talk about her. Any of them."

My blood's still boiling, my chest heaving with barely leashed aggression.

The dark, ugly thing inside me rattles its cage, hungry to break free.

To stake its claim on Mandy in front of everyone, consequences be damned.

But I wrestle it back and shove it down deep where it belongs.

Imagining my brother getting off to Mandy sends a surge of possessive jealousy through my veins.

I don't want any of them seeing her like that, picturing what they'd do to her perfect curves.

She's so much more than a piece of ass.

"Shit, man, I didn't mean nothin' bad by it." Shiver smirks. "Cut me a break, will ya?"

Mandy shifts and grabs the beer in my other hand, taking a big swig of it, clearly eager for us to change the subject.

I open my mouth, ready to tell Shiver to shut the fuck up when Dixon jumps in. “Jalen had a hell of a game last week. Coach says he could make varsity as a freshman if he keeps it up.”

“Boy’s a natural,” Indra adds proudly. “Get used to seeing his jersey at the top of the leaderboards.”

The conversation drifts to football and everyone’s plans for the holidays.

Crisis averted, for now at least.

But I put the remote down and wrap my arm around Mandy’s shoulders, offering her some reassurance.

She doesn’t pull away.

“I should go check on Kash,” I say reluctantly, not wanting to leave her side but knowing I need to peek in on my boy.

He’s been out cold for a couple hours now.

Ivy waves me off from across the room, where she’s pouring another round. “I got him, Doc, don’t worry. You two go on and enjoy yourselves for a bit. I’m not taking no for an answer,” she adds when Mandy opens her mouth.

Ivy winks at us over the bottle of Jack.

I chuckle and stand, holding a hand out to Mandy. “You heard the lady. Let’s go get some air.”

Mandy hesitates a second before taking my hand and letting me pull her to her feet.

Her skin is soft and warm against mine. “I need a drink first.”

“Well, come on then, darlin’. I know where Dixon keeps the good stuff.” I lead her over to the bar, reluctantly dropping her hand so I can duck behind it and grab a bottle of eighteen-year-old Macallan scotch and two tumblers.

Mandy watches appreciatively as I pour each of us a few fingers worth.

We clink glasses and head out the back door onto the small deck. The cool evening air greets us.

Stars glitter overhead, bright against the inky sky.

Music and voices filter out from inside, but it’s muted as if we’re in our own little bubble out here.

Mandy takes a sip of her drink. “It’s a nice night.”

The amber liquid clings to her plush bottom lip for a second before her tongue darts out to lick it away.

I swallow hard.

“Sure is.”

I lean my forearms on the rough wood railing, glass dangling between my fingers, and turn to study her. “You warm enough?”

She mirrors my pose, her arm brushing mine. “I’m good, thanks.”

We both take a drink, savoring the slow burn sliding down our throats.

Crickets chirp in the grass.

I'm hyper-aware of every breath she takes and every shift of her weight from foot to foot.

"So . . . about the other day," Mandy says after a few charged moments, "when you kissed my forehead. What was that all about?"

Even in the low light spilling from the clubhouse windows, I can make out the furrow between her brows and the uncertainty in her hazel eyes as she gazes up at me.

My heart thuds against my rib cage. "Guess I just wanted you to know how much I appreciate you, 'specially with Kash and all. You've really stepped up, Mandy. More than you had to."

She shrugs and looks down into her glass, hair falling to hide her expression. "It's nothing. You needed help, so."

"Nah, that ain't nothing. Most people wouldn't bother." I reach over to tuck some hair behind her ear, letting my fingers linger on her jaw to tip her chin up until she meets my eyes again. "Why'd you do it?" I ask softly.

Mandy's throat bobs as she swallows.

A self-deprecating little laugh escapes her. "Honestly? I've never had anyone really be there for me, not like you are for Kash. Guess a part of me just wants to know what that feels like."

"What do you mean?" I frown, not liking the pain that flashes across her face.

Makes me want to hunt down whoever put it there and beat their ass.

She sighs and turns to stare out at the dark tree line, worrying her lip between her teeth. “My mom was a junkie, in and out of rehab more times than I can count. Dad took off before I was even born. Then she shacked up with my stepdad, who was a mean drunk. Always throwing things, screaming, gambling away what little money we had. Not exactly a stable home life, you know?”

“Shit, Mandy. I’m so sorry.” I ache to reach for her, to pull her into my arms and hold her close.

To shield her from all that ugliness.

But I don’t want to spook her, so I keep still even though it kills me. “You deserved so much better than that.”

“Yeah, well. Can’t change the past.” She shrugs like it doesn’t matter, even though I can tell it does.

It matters a whole fucking lot. “What about you? An all-American upbringing with a picket fence?”

I snort out a laugh. “Hardly. Sperm donor was never around, and Ma . . . she was in a bad wreck when I was sixteen. Traumatic brain injury. Docs say she’s got anterograde amnesia, like Drew Barrymore in *50 First Dates* , yeah? She makes new memories for a bit, but then they just disappear, and she resets back to the day of the accident. Still thinks I’m some skinny kid.”

“God, Doc, that’s awful. I’m so sorry.” Mandy’s hand finds mine on the railing, her fingers curling around and holding tight. An anchor in the dark. “I can’t imagine how hard that must be.”

“Was at first,” I admit, thumb rubbing over her knuckles. “But I graduated early and

enlisted, and I made sure she was set up in a good facility with the benefits I got. She's taken care of, even if I can't fix her."

Mandy squeezes my hand. "She's lucky to have you. Kash too. You're a good man."

Nobody's ever said those words to me before. I have to blink a few times to clear the sudden thickness from my throat. "Just doing what I gotta."

God, she's stunning on the inside and out.

A diamond in a sea of coal.

And I'm just the poor schmuck lucky enough to bask in her glow, even if I'll never truly have her.

Not the way I'm starting to realize how badly I want her.

I'll take what I can get.

Her friendship, her presence in my life, in Kash's life.

It's more than I deserve.

More than I ever thought I'd ever have.

I suck in a deep breath and tell myself I have to stop being such a possessive prick.

Mandy's not a damn doll to stick on a shelf.

She's a living, breathing person.

Who she shares her body with, on camera or off, is her choice.

It's not mine.

Even if the mere thought of another man seeing her the way I have makes me want to put my fist through a wall.

The primal, caveman part of my brain roars in outrage at the idea.

But I don't have that right.

I'm not hers, and she sure as shit ain't mine . . . no matter how badly I'm starting to wish things were different.

A wry smile tugs at my mouth. "Mandy, would you have wanted me to kiss you somewhere else?"

She huffs out a laugh, shaking her head. "You're impossible."

But there's no heat in her words, only fond exasperation.

I lick my lips, staring directly at her. "In all seriousness, though . . . I truly mean this. You've been amazing with Kash, and with me. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Something flickers in her hazel eyes—something soft and warm that makes my heart stutter in my chest. "I care about you, Doc. Both of you. You're family now."

Family.

The word wraps around me like a balm, soothing the ragged edges of my battered



soul.

Before I can second guess myself, I set my glass down on the railing and step closer, crowding into her space.

Her breath hitches, her eyes widening as I cup her face in my hands. “What if I want more than that, Mandy? What if I want everything with you?”

I swallow hard, my heart hammering against my ribs as I search her face for any sign of rejection or disgust.

But all I see is surprise . . . and maybe a flicker of hope?

She whispers, her voice barely audible over the distant sounds of laughter and music drifting out from the clubhouse. “Everything?”

I nod, my thumb brushing over the swell of her bottom lip. “Everything,” I confirm roughly. “I want to wake up next to you every morning and fall asleep with you in my arms. I want . . . Fuck, Mandy, I just want you .”

She sucks in a shaky breath, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. “I—I don’t know what to say . . .”

“You don’t have to say anything,” I assure her quickly, suddenly terrified that I’ve pushed too far, too fast. “You can count on me,” I tell her fiercely, squeezing her fingers for emphasis. “I’m not going anywhere, Mandy. I promise.”

She searches my face for a long moment as if trying to gauge my sincerity.

Whatever she sees there must satisfy her because she nods slowly, a tentative smile curving her lips.

“Okay,” she whispers, stepping into the circle of my arms and winding her own around my waist. “I trust you, Doc. With my heart and my life.”

I crush her to me, burying my face in her hair as a wave of fierce possessiveness crashes over me.

This woman is mine now, body and soul, and God help anyone who tries to come between us.

Her gaze drops to my lips and lingers there, the air between us suddenly charged with unspoken longing.

Before I can second guess myself, I tell her we have plans this weekend. “You’re coming out with me on Saturday night. We’ll go hit up a bar, shoot some pool, and have some fun together. Just the two of us.”

She blinks at me for a second, clearly caught off guard.

A bedazzling smile spreads across her face, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and something that looks a hell of a lot like relief.

“Yeah, Doc. I’d like that. I’d like that a whole lot,” she says softly, threading her fingers through mine and squeezing like she never wants to let go.

I tug her closer, slinging my other arm around her shoulders as we turn to head back inside the clubhouse. “All right then, darlin’. It’s a date. Think you can handle keeping up with me?”

Mandy tosses her head back and laughs, the joyous, uninhibited sound arrowing straight to my heart and my groin. “Oh, baby, trust me—it’s you who better worry about keeping up with me. I’m gonna rock your world six ways from Sunday. Just

wait.”

I chuckle and press an affectionate kiss to her temple. “Looking forward to every second of it, beautiful. Every damn second.”

For the first time in longer than I can remember, I find myself actually meaning those words.

Actually excited to see what the future might hold, so long as Mandy’s right there by my side to share it with me.

### CHAPTER SIX

Mandy

I sit in my condo, eyes glued to my computer screen as I edit the latest steamy content Zoe and I filmed over the past few days.

Spark plays the role of cuckolded husband to perfection as Zoe and I tease and tantalize him on camera, never quite giving him the satisfaction he craves.

Clicking through the footage, I can't help but marvel at how our subscriber count has skyrocketed past 100,000 since Zoe brought Spark into our naughty little partnership.

The chemistry between them is electric, even if Spark is only allowed to touch Zoe while I remain strictly off limits to him.

As I splice together the hottest moments, I find my mind wandering to thoughts of Doc and the undeniable connection growing between us lately.

It both thrills and terrifies me.

After a string of failed relationships with men, I thought I had sworn off getting involved with men again... but yet here I am with Doc.

Relationships with men have only ever been too risky, too unpredictable for me.

But there's something about Doc that draws me in against my better judgment.

The way his eyes smolder when he looks at me, the rasp of his voice, the raw masculinity he exudes.

It's intoxicating and I'm finding it harder to resist.

My phone chimes with a text from Doc:

Still on for drinks tonight, darlin'? Can't wait to see you.

I bite my lip, typing back:

Wouldn't miss it. Meet you at the clubhouse at 6. Prepare to be blown away ;)

Tossing my phone aside, I refocus on finishing up the video edits, determined to have everything queued up and ready to post for our eager fans over the next week.

The money Zoe and I are raking in from our content still feels surreal sometimes.

Just a few months ago I was struggling to get by after my identity was stolen, worrying how I'd make my mortgage payments.

I didn't tell anyone about it... because it was my battle.

Now I'm completely debt-free with a hefty cushion in my bank account.

It's a powerful feeling, knowing my hard work and willingness to push boundaries is paying off so handsomely.

For the first time, I'm completely financially independent, beholden to no one.

The freedom is dizzying.

With the last video scheduled to post, I glance at the time—4pm already.

I hop in the shower, shaving and soaping up every inch before emerging to get dolled up for Doc.

I slip into a black lace bodysuit that hugs my curves in all the right places, tugging on skin-tight jean shorts overtop.

Zippering up knee-high leather boots, I give myself an approving once-over in the mirror.

I look hot as hell and I know it.

A black leather jacket and crossbody purse complete the look along with a sweep of mascara and a bold red lip.

Satisfied that Doc won't know what hit him, I head out to my car, excitement already simmering in my veins for the night ahead.

The sun hangs low, painting the sky in vivid oranges and pinks, as I pull up to the Reapers Rejects MC gate right at 6pm.

Shiver is manning it and gives me a wolfish grin as I roll down my window.

"Well well, look who it is... the bisexual bombshell," he drawls, eyes raking over me appreciatively. "What brings you around tonight, sweetheart? Finally come to your senses and ditched Doc for a real man?"

I level him with a flat stare, arching one brow. "In your dreams, Shiver. We both know you couldn't handle me even if I did stoop to your level."

He chuckles, unfazed by the jab. "That's what they all say, baby girl. But I'd have you screaming my name all night long. Best remember that when you're wasting your time with Doc."

Rolling my eyes, I rev my engine impatiently. "How about you stop running your mouth and open the damn gate already? I don't have all night."

With an exaggerated leer, he does as I command, the gate slowly swinging open.

I peel out, gravel spraying behind me as I head for the clubhouse.

This man infuriates me on a good day but I'm determined not to let him get under my skin tonight.

And there's Doc, looking sexy as sin as he leans against his Harley, waiting for me.

Faded jeans hug his muscular thighs, black t-shirt stretched tight over his chest and abs, cut displaying his allegiance.

He grins as I hop out, stalking toward him with an extra swing in my hips. "You're a vision, darlin'. Damn, I'm a lucky man to have you on the back of my bike," he says, brushing a kiss across my cheek.

"Mmm, play your cards right and you might get even luckier later," I tease, winking at him playfully. "Now how about you show me a good time, big boy?"

His eyes flash with heat as he settles onto his bike and waits for me to climb on behind him, tapping his helmet. "Buckle up, baby. We're in for a hell of a ride tonight."

As the last rays of sun disappear and twilight takes over, we roar down the highway,

the powerful rumble of Doc's Harley between my thighs only adding to the buzz of arousal taking hold.

My arms wrap around his waist, hands splayed across his hard abs, and I press closer, savoring his warmth and the tang of his cologne in my nose.

We pull up to Twisted Barrels, the most infamous dive bar on this side of Vegas before long, and I can already feel the eyes on me as every man on the patio turns to openly ogle the hottie Doc's brought to their favorite watering hole.

I'll never get used to the blatant way men stare at me these days, my ego still not quite caught up to my newfound sex appeal.

Damn if I don't love it, especially tonight with Doc by my side.

Let them look all they want—I'm spoken for.

Inside it's all scuffed floors and nicotine stained walls, the clack of pool balls mixing with the clink of glasses and raucous conversation.

We claim two stools at the bar and order a round, knees brushing as we swivel to face each other.

Doc toasts, blue eyes twinkling as he clinks his glass against mine. "To a fun night together."

"To getting into trouble with a handsome devil," I volley back with a smirk, taking a generous sip of my whiskey sour.

The booze burns pleasantly going down.



We chat and laugh, the conversation flowing as easily as the drinks.

The chemistry between us heightens higher by the minute.

I can't remember the last time I've connected this effortlessly with someone.

He makes me feel giddy like a teenager with her first crush.

When he starts opening up about his hopes for being a good father to Kash, my heart squeezes, and I reach for his hand.

"Hey, you are an amazing father, Doc. Anyone can see how much that baby boy loves the ever loving shit outta you," I insist earnestly, giving his fingers a squeeze. "Don't ever doubt that."

He looks at me, something undefined but potent simmering in his eyes. "What did I ever do to deserve you, darlin'?"

I duck my head shyly, a goofy smile curving my lips, unsure how to respond to the seemingly innocent question that feels loaded with meaning.

"Dance with me," he says suddenly, tugging me off my stool and leading me to the little scuffed up dancefloor where a few other couples sway to a sexy southern rock ballad.

Doc's hands settle on my hips, pulling me flush against his hard body as he finds the rhythm.

I loop my arms around his neck, everything else fading away except his clean scent, the heat of his skin through the thin cotton of his shirt, the rasp of denim against denim.

We move together, my body molding to his like we were made for this and I forget how to breathe when his fingertips slip under my shirt to graze the bare skin of my lower back.

This suddenly feels more intimate than anything I've ever filmed.

Raw.

Real.

Overwhelming.

The song ends but we stay wrapped up in each other, his darkened blue eyes boring into mine.

The air feels too thick, crackling with a live current that has my heart galloping against my ribs.

"Mandy..." he rumbles, my name a gravelly prayer on his lips.

I surge up on my tiptoes before I lose my nerve, capturing his mouth in a searing kiss that obliterates any lingering doubts.

He responds instantly, his arms banding around me tight as his tongue delves past my parted lips to stroke against mine.

I moan into the kiss, my fingers sinking into his hair, totally uncaring that we're in the middle of a crowded bar.

All that matters is his taste, his touch, the way he consumes me so completely.

We finally break apart, both breathing hard.

Doc rests his forehead against mine, his thumb stroking along my jaw. "Been wanting to do that for a while now," he murmurs, his voice rough with desire.

"Me too," I admit softly, still reeling from the intensity of that kiss.

It was like a live wire directly to my core.

"Babe, you're gonna be the death of me," he says, a mix of lust and amusement in his voice. "But fuck if I care."

I confess, "Neither do I."

He chuckles, deep and throaty. "Come on, let's go get another round."

We head back over to the bar and Doc drapes an arm across the back of my stool, his fingertips drawing idle patterns on my shoulder.

It's a seemingly casual gesture, but I know better.

He's marking his territory, warning off any would-be suitors with a single glance.

As we sip our whiskey sours, the conversation flows effortlessly.

We talk about everything and nothing, laughter punctuating the comfortable silences.

But there's an undercurrent of tension, a delicious anticipation building with every slide of his fingers along my skin.

Doc's gaze turns serious, his green eyes boring into mine. "I'm glad we're doing this,

Mandy. It feels right, being here with you."

I swallow hard, my heart stuttering in my chest. "Me too, Doc. It's...easy. Natural."

His lips quirk up at the corners. "Damn right it is. We should've done this sooner."

I duck my head, a nervous giggle escaping unbidden.

When I glance back up, Doc is watching me intently, a wicked glint in his eye.

"What?" I ask, breathless.

He throws back the rest of his whiskey and smiles, "I'm just real fuckin' happy right now, Mands."

Mands? I've never been called that before, but fuck if I don't like it.

He leans close to me and captures my lips in a soul searing kiss.

The kiss deepens, grows more urgent, until we're both breathless and panting.

I break away, my lips tingling, my head spinning.

"Bathroom," I gasp out. "Now."

Doc's grin is positively wolfish. "Spontaneous. I like it."

He laces his fingers with mine and tugs me toward the back of the bar, toward the promise of more.

I follow willingly, eager to see where this night will take us.

In the shadowy bathroom, we don't even bother to close the stall door.

We're drunk on lust and whatever the hell we have between us.

His hands are everywhere, desperate and rough, and I can't get enough.

I fumble with his belt, yanking down his jeans, freeing him.

He's hard, so damn hard, straining against his boxers.

With shaking hands, I take him in my mouth, my tongue swirling around the head of his cock, teasing him, torturing us both.

He moans above me, bracing himself against the cool wall.

"Condom," he grunts out.

I stand, yanking down my panties and panting, "In my purse."

He curses under his breath, but it's too late.

I'm already lifting my leg, pressing up against him. "Just...just do it."

"Are you sure?" he asks, his voice raw with desire.

"Yes," I moan, caressing my aching nipple through my shirt. "Yes, God yes."

Doc slides into me with a low growl, filling me completely, stretching me in the most delicious way.

My nails score down his back as we move frantically against each other.

"Fuck, Mands," he gasps, his grip on my ass tightening. "You're so wet."

I can't even form a coherent response.

All I can do is moan and arch my back, silently begging for more.

"Harder, Doc, fuck me harder," I grunt, my voice rough with passion.

With a low grunt, he complies, thrusting into me with force that sends shockwaves through me.

The sensation is near overwhelming; the thrill of publicly being taken by Doc, the sheer rawness of it all, has my head spinning and my body on fire for him.

His teeth graze the sensitive skin at my neck and I barely suppress the urge to scream out.

He growls into my skin, words lost in his lust.

His grip on my ass tightens as he drives into me harder and faster.

I grasp at him, nails digging into his muscular back as the tension coils tighter within me.

My senses are heightened—every movement sends sparks of pleasure jolting through me, each rough thrust pushing me closer to the edge.

The scent of sex mixed with whiskey fills the small bathroom and I can't help but revel in it.

This is intoxicating.

This is real.

This is us.

His response is immediate, and his rhythm intensifies, pushing me up against the cool bathroom wall.

His grip on my hips is bruising in its intensity, but I love it.

"Jesus, Mands," he groans, his rugged face buried in the crook of my neck, "You're killin' me."

I can only gasp as each thrust sends jolts of pleasure ricocheting through me.

The world narrows to this room, to Doc's body moving against mine in a rhythm as old as time itself.

Unexpected emotion wells up in my chest, overpowering in its intensity.

I clutch at Doc's back, my nails leaving red trails along his skin.

He hisses out a curse but doesn't break his rhythm.

If anything, he moves faster, harder.

I feel the tension coil tighter inside me, a spring wound so tight it's about to snap.

"Oh god," I moan loudly.

He grants my request, thrusting deeper, faster.

Every stroke sends jolts of pleasure coursing through me that coalesce into a white-hot ball at my core.

"Say my name," he grunts, his voice harsh.

"Doc..." I gasp out, clinging to his shoulders as the pleasure builds relentlessly. "Oh, God, Doc..."

"That's it, darlin', come for me..."

And just like that, the dam breaks.

I scream his name as I climax, my entire body shaking with the force of it.

He follows right after me with a guttural groan, collapsing against me in a delicious heap of well-satisfied man.

We take a moment to catch our breaths, trembling together in the dimly lit bathroom stall.

Then Doc's kissing me again, slow this time and full of a tenderness that makes my heart flutter in my chest.

This man could very well be the death of me.



### CHAPTER SEVEN

Doc

We stay locked together for a long moment, catching our breath, skin slicked with sweat.

Finally, I slide out of her and we clean up quickly, sharing a few languid kisses.

Pulling my jeans back on, I glance at her, taking in her flushed cheeks and sex-mussed hair.

Damn, she's a looker.

It doesn't hurt she's a wildcat in the sack.

My cock twitches just thinking about round two.

I tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. "C'mere, gorgeous," I murmur, pulling her into my arms.

She nestles against my chest, fitting perfectly, like she belongs there.

I've only known her for a few months, but something about this chick just gets under my skin in all the right ways.

Damn, I wish I had a kid with her and not Sassy.

She's not just a pretty face—though she's certainly got that going for her.

She's smart as a whip, with a wicked sense of humor that matches mine, and she takes no shit, a real spitfire.

Most importantly, she's great with my son Kash.

Doesn't mind that I've got baggage.

Hell, sounds like she's got plenty of her own, with her messed up family back in Cali.

As we exit the bathroom, I tug her close and press a kiss to her temple. "You're something else, you know that?" I tell her gruffly. "I'm damn glad you walked into my life, Mands."

She looks up at me, hazel eyes sparkling with mischief and something deeper. "Careful, Doc. Keep sweet talking me like that and I might never leave."

I chuckle, my hand sliding down to squeeze her ass. "Promise?" I wink at her.

She just laughs and shakes her head.

We make our way back to the bar, her tucked under my arm.

I'm not usually one for PDA, but with her, I can't seem to keep my hands to myself.

She just fits like a missing puzzle piece I didn't know I needed.

As we wait for another round of drinks, I lean in close, my lips brushing her ear. "Spend the night with me," I murmur, more of a statement than a question.

She shivers, goosebumps rising on her skin. "Okay," she whispers back, eyes darkening with renewed hunger.

I smile, triumphant. "Good. Because I'm nowhere near done with you yet, darlin'." I nip at her earlobe playfully.

Just then, I notice her body go rigid in my arms.

Her face pales and she sucks in a sharp breath.

I follow her gaze to see an older man approaching us, a leering smile on his weathered face.

"Amanda?" he calls out. "Well, well. Fancy running into you here."

I feel Mandy start to tremble against me and every protective instinct surges to the forefront.

I tighten my arm around her and turn to face the newcomer, positioning my body in front of hers.

"I'm sorry, you are?" I ask coolly, making it clear this asshole is interrupting.

His eyes flick dismissively over me before settling back on Mandy. "Oh, where are my manners? I'm Tony. Mandy's dear old dad." His tone drips with false sincerity.

"Step-father," Mandy spits out from behind me, venom lacing her words.

I glance back at her over my shoulder, noting the fear and revulsion playing across her delicate features.

Shit.

Whoever this prick is, he's bad fucking news to put that look on my girl's face.

I shift to further shield her from view. "Well, Tony," I say, letting disdain color my words. "It's been a real treat. But if you'll excuse us..." I turn to guide Mandy away.

Quick as a snake, Tony's hand darts out to grab Mandy's wrist. "I heard you've been in the adult content industry. Is that right? You takin' after your momma after all?"

I snarl, ready to break the fucker's arm, but Mandy wrenches herself free before I can react.

"Don't fucking touch me!" she hisses, eyes wild. "You lost that right after what you did, you bastard."

Tony holds his hands up in mock surrender, chuckling darkly. "Still holding a grudge, I see. It was years ago, Amanda. And we both know you brought it on yourself. Always such a little tease..."

White hot rage boils through my veins and my hands ball into fists.

I take a menacing step toward him. "I think it's time for you to leave," I say, deadly calm. "While you still can."

Something in my eyes must convince him not to push it.

With a final oily smile, he shrugs. "Fine, I can take a hint. See you around, sweetie."

He blows Mandy a mocking kiss.

The second he's out of sight, I turn and pull her into my arms.

She's shaking like a leaf, silent tears streaming down her face. "I've got you," I murmur into her hair. "You're safe, Mands. He can't hurt you."

She clings to me, fisting her hands in my shirt. "Take me back to the clubhouse. Please, Doc. I need to get the fuck out of here."

I don't hesitate, leading her quickly out to my bike.

I help her on behind me and we take off with a roar, tearing out of the parking lot like the devil himself is on our tail.

By the time we arrive back at the compound, her trembling has eased but I can still feel the tension thrumming through her.

I help her off and lead her inside with an arm around her waist.

Kat looks up as we enter the trailer I share with Shiver and frowns. "Everything all right?" she asks, taking in Mandy's red-rimmed eyes.

I give a terse nod. "It is now. Kash still out?"

She nods. "Like a light."

"You're an angel, Kat. I owe you."

She waves me off, hands me the baby monitor, and leaves. "Happy to help. You two go get some rest."

Inside, I search Mandy's face, thumb rubbing soothingly over her knuckles.

"You wanna talk about it?" I ask softly.

She shakes her head. "No, not yet. Can you just...hold me for a while?"

My heart clenches as if she even needs to ask. "Of course, darlin'. C'mere."

I lead her to my room and we stretch out on the bed, curled around each other.

I stroke her hair and press gentle kisses to her forehead as she tucks her face into my neck.

We lay there in silence for a long time before she finally speaks, voice small and muffled against my skin.

"He used to hit me," she whispers. "When he drank. Which was all the time. And my mom, when she wasn't too fucked up to notice. But she never did anything to stop it."

I go cold all over, arms tightening around her protectively. "Jesus, Mandy..."

"The last time...I thought he was really going to kill me. I barely got out. Went to my best friend's house and her mom helped me leave town that night. I haven't been back since. All over 20 bucks. Fucking ridiculous."

White hot fury courses through me, warring with heartbreak for the lost, broken girl in my arms.

I want to find that sick son of a bitch and rip him limb from fucking limb for ever laying a hand on her.

I know that's not what she needs from me right now.

So, I take a deep breath, reining myself in.

I tip her chin up to look at me.

"You listen to me, Mands," I say fiercely. "You did what you had to do to survive. To get yourself out of a shitty, dangerous situation. And fuck anyone who says different. You're one of the strongest women I know."

Fresh tears well in her eyes but she smiles tremulously. "Thank you," she breathes. "For everything tonight. I'm really glad you were there."

"Anytime, babe," I murmur, using my thumb to wipe her tears away. "You're not alone anymore, okay? I'm right here. I've got you."

"Doc," she whispers, her voice shaking. "I've never... I've never told anyone that before."

"I know, Mandy... and I'm honored that you trust me enough to share that with me," I say, stroking her cheek gently.

She nods, wiping the remaining tears from her eyes. "Thank you, Doc... for everything. I... I think I need some air. Mind if we step outside for a smoke?"

"Yeah, of course. I could use a smoke too." I stand up, grabbing her hand and leading her outside.

The cool night air hits us as we step outside, and I light up a cigarette, offering her one too.

She takes it with a grateful smile.

We stand there in silence for a moment, both lost in our own thoughts.

"So, Mandy... I need to ask you somethin'. You and Zoe... what's up with that?" I ask, exhaling a cloud of smoke.

She hesitates, looking torn. "It's... complicated, Doc. I mean, I love her, but... I she'll never love me the way I love her. She's my best friend, but, I'm bisexual so I'm complicated." Mandy laughs.

"Ouch. That sucks, Mandy. I'm sorry." I put my arm around her shoulder, pulling her closer. "What's that mean for you and me then? You just fool around with her for your content, or what?"

"Yeah, for content. It's all it'll ever be... and I'm finally okay with that. Someone special has come into my life."

I bend to press a soft kiss to her forehead.

I take her hand, leading her down the short hallway to my room. "Come on, let's get you to bed. It's been a long day."

She hesitates in the doorway, glancing up at me uncertainly. "You sure you don't mind me staying? I can always run back home."

"Not a chance in hell," I cut her off firmly. "I wouldn't have asked you if I didn't want you here with me. Unless you're not comfortable with that?"

"No, I am," she assures me quickly. "I just...didn't want to put you out or anything."

I shake my head, tugging her into the room and shutting the door behind us. "You could never. I like having you close."



Something shifts in her gaze, a flicker of heat beneath the vulnerability.

She steps closer to me, hands resting on my chest. "Yeah? How close are we talking?"

My hands find her hips, thumbs stroking over her hipbones through her clothes. "As close as you'll let me get, darlin'."

Mandy rises up on her toes, arms twining around my neck as she molds her soft curves against me. "I think I'd like to get very close indeed, Doc," she purrs, nuzzling her nose along my jawline. "If you're up for it."

I groan lowly, hands sliding down to palm her perfect ass. "Sweetheart, I've been up since the second I laid eyes on you. The question is, are you sure this is what you want right now? After the night you've had?"

She pulls back to look me dead in the eye, pupils blown wide with desire. "I'm sure. I want you, Doc. Want to feel something good."

That's all the encouragement I need.

I walk us backward until her legs hit the bed, bearing her down onto the mattress as I claim her mouth in a searing kiss.

Our tongues tangle together, a hot, desperate dance as we both try to make up for lost time.

Mandy moans into my mouth, hips arching against me, grinding against my hard length.

I'm on the verge of losing my mind when a soft whimper brings me to my senses.

Shit, I can't be this selfish.

We just had sex earlier tonight.

Disappointment flashes in her eyes, but she nods, understanding. "Oh, okay...yeah, um..."

"Don't do that. It's not that I don't want to," I assure her, running a soothing hand down her spine. "I just gotta savor you, darlin'."

Mandy smiles wistfully and nods, untangling herself from my arms. "Yeah, I got you."

She adjusts her pants, smoothing out the wrinkles as I do the same to my jeans, both of us trying to erase any evidence of our near-indiscretion.

"Listen, Mands," I start , "if you ever need to talk or... you know, whatever, my door's always open."

She gives me a grateful smile. "Thanks, Doc. I appreciate that."

"Now come on, let's get into bed."

### CHAPTER EIGHT

Mandy

I'm practically bouncing into the clubhouse, a grin plastered on my face.

Fluttering butterflies still fill my stomach, and I feel like I'm walking on a cloud.

It's been seven days—a whole damn week—since my first official date with Doc and I can't stop reliving all the perfect moments in my head.

His easy laugh, the rough stubble of his jaw under my fingers as I pulled him in for a kiss, the electricity I felt when his hands finally touched my skin.

I let out a dreamy sigh as I enter the main room.

Zoe's sprawled on the leather couch, a playful glint in her eyes as she eyes my beaming expression.

She winks suggestively. "Well someone's in a good mood! I take it things are still going great with biker boy?"

"Better than great." I flop down next to her, unable to contain my giddy grin. "I know it's only been one date but...I've never felt this way before, Zoe. It's like something just clicked into place, you know? Like this is exactly where I'm meant to be."

She throws an arm around my shoulders, giving me a squeeze. "I'm so happy for you,

Mandy. You deserve this after all the shit you've been through. And Doc is one of the really good ones. I mean that!"

I lean into her familiar embrace, savoring her approval and support.

Zoe's opinion means the world to me. "Thanks babe. I think...I think this could really be something special. Well, as long as my luck doesn't run out."

We sit in comfortable silence for a moment, just basking in the joyful glow surrounding me.

For the first time in longer than I can remember, I feel hopeful and excited for what the future might bring.

It's all because of a certain bearded, green-eyed biker who's totally rocked my world.

Zoe seems to sense the swirling subject of my thoughts.

She arches a brow at me, her gaze probing. "You nervous for Doc out there on this run?"

I exhale shakily, running my fingers through my hair. "Yeah... I mean, I didn't think I'd be. But something's shifted, Zoe. These days, I find myself thinking about him constantly. About Kash. About our potential future... It's like my heart's on the line in a way it never has been before."

A slow smile spreads across Zoe's face and she reaches out to squeeze my hand. "Babe, I'm so damn happy for you. You deserve this, Mandy—you deserve a love that consumes you, challenges you, changes your whole fucking perspective."

I bark out a laugh, shaking my head. "Okay, okay, enough ego-stroking! I know Doc

and I have a connection, but let's not get carried away here. You know I prefer women anyways."

Zoe snorts, rolling her eyes. "Girl, I'm not blowing smoke up your ass. You should hear the way Doc talks about you. It's like you hung the goddamn moon. I swear, he's completely smitten. Told me the other day that he wishes Kash was yours, that you were building a family together..."

I nearly choke on my own spit, my eyes bugging out of my head. "He... he said that? Holy shit..."

A bittersweet pang lances through me at the thought.

I adore Kash, but the reminder of Doc's baggage, of the other woman who bore his child... damn, it's like a bucket of ice water dumped over my head.

"Speaking of the baby mama," I say, desperate to change the subject, "any idea what happened to Sassy? Where she fucked off to after ditching her own kid?"

Zoe's expression darkens, her mouth twisting in distaste. "No clue. And frankly, I couldn't care less. As far as I'm concerned, Kash is better off without that toxic skank in his life."

"Fair enough," I mutter, but I can't entirely quash my curiosity—or the nagging sense that Sassy's disappearance is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the secrets and sins lurking beneath the surface of this MC.

Zoe leans in closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "But here's the real tea. Apparently, Sassy was the rat all along. Feeding info to Seraphina's bitch of a mother, the one who's been gunning for the club."

My eyebrows shoot up so high they nearly merge with my hairline. "What?!" I hiss, my mind reeling as I try to process this bombshell. "Sassy was working with Sera's mom? Against the MC?"

Zoe nods, a humorless chuckle escaping her lips. "Yeah, it's a lot. Like some fucking soap opera shit, I swear."

I slump back in my seat, my head spinning with the implications.

If Sassy betrayed the club, betrayed Doc... God, no wonder he's been so on edge lately.

The fury and hurt that must be eating away at him.

Sera chooses that moment to saunter over, a bowl of chips cradled against her chest as she plops down beside us. "What are you two gossiping about?" she asks, popping a chip into her mouth with a loud crunch.

I open my mouth to brush off her question, but Zoe beats me to the punch. "Oh, you know, just filling Mandy in on the latest club drama. The whole 'Sassy is a backstabbing bitch' thing."

Sera's eyes widen, her hand freezing halfway to her mouth. "Shit, I almost forgot about that. It's been a wild fucking week, huh?"

"Understatement of the century," I mutter, snagging a chip from Sera's bowl.

The salty crunch is a welcome distraction from the whirlwind of emotions churning in my gut.

As the three of us sit there, munching on snacks and letting the weight of the

revelations sink in, I can't shake the feeling that this is just the beginning—that there are more secrets, more lies, more dangers lurking in the shadows of this MC world I've found myself drawn into.

Despite the fear prickling at the back of my neck, despite the rational voice in my head screaming at me to cut and run while I still can, I know there's no turning back now.

Not when my heart is already hopelessly entangled with a gruff, tattooed biker and the baby boy who's starting to feel like my own.

Zoe breaks the heavy silence with a clap of her hands, making Sera and I both jump. "Well, fuck it. I need a drink after all that. Sera, you want one?"

Sera hesitates for a split second before shaking her head. "Nah, I'm good. Actually..."

She glances around cautiously, then leans in closer, lowering her voice. "I need you both to swear to secrecy, okay? I'm serious, not a bloody word to anyone."

My brows shoot up, curiosity instantly piqued.

Zoe mirrors my expression as we both nod. "Of course, babe. Spill."

Sera takes a deep breath, her fingers twisting anxiously in her lap. "I'm pregnant, and I have no fucking clue how to tell Abe."

Holy shit.

My jaw drops as Zoe lets out a low whistle. "Damn, girl. Congrats! That's huge."

A small, nervous smile tugs at Sera's lips. "Thanks. I'm excited, but also scared

shitless, you know? We didn't exactly plan this."

I reach out and squeeze her hand, offering a reassuring smile. "Hey, you got this. Turmoil loves you like crazy. He's gonna be thrilled."

Sera nods, looking a little more at ease. "I hope so. I just need to find the right time and way to tell him."

Zoe snorts, a mischievous glint in her eye. "Seems like everyone around here is catching the baby bug lately." Her gaze slides meaningfully to me. "What about you, Mandy? You and Doc thinking about adding to the brood anytime soon?"

I nearly choke on my own spit, my cheeks flaming. "Jesus, Zoe. No. Absolutely not. We haven't even talked about if we're an item or not. You're jumping the gun."

I glance over at Kash, smiling at the show on the tv, blissfully oblivious to our conversation. "Trust me, this little man is plenty. I am so not ready for the whole pregnancy thing."

The very thought sends a shiver of panic down my spine.

I'm just starting to figure out this whole pseudo-stepmom gig.

Throwing another baby into the mix? Yeah, no thanks.

Sera cocks her head, a thought occurring to her. "Speaking of babies... any word on Tania? She's gotta be ready to pop any day now, right?"

Zoe grins, nodding. "Oh, she popped alright. My dad had to rush her to the hospital earlier. You should've seen him. I've never seen the tough bastard so frazzled. It was high-grade comedy, I'm tellin' you."



We all bust out into a fit laughter, the heaviness of the moment temporarily lifted. But even as we joke and gossip, my mind can't help but wander.

Wander to thoughts of the future, of the dangerous, thrilling, uncertain path I'm hurtling down with Doc and his son.

This life, this world, these people... they're starting to feel like home.

Almost like they're my family.

That realization is as terrifying as it is exhilarating.

The sudden ping of Zoe's phone jolts me from my thoughts.

She glances down at the screen, her face splitting into a wide, joyful grin.

"It's my dad!" she announces excitedly, her eyes scanning the message. "The baby's here! A little girl. They named her Jinx Reign."

"Jinx Reign," Sera repeats, testing the name on her tongue. "I like it. Strong name for a strong girl."

"She's gonna need to be strong, growing up in this world," I muse, my gaze drifting to Kash once more.

Zoe follows my line of sight, her expression softening with understanding. She reaches out, placing a gentle hand on my knee.

"Hey," she says quietly, her tone uncharacteristically serious. "Can I ask you something? About you and Doc?"

I swallow hard, my heart rate picking up speed. "Sure. What's up?"

Zoe hesitates, choosing her words carefully. "You two seem to be getting pretty serious. Have you... have you talked about the future at all? About your job, and how it might fit into his life?"

The question hits me like a sucker punch to the gut. I feel the color drain from my face as a cold, sinking realization washes over me.

No. We haven't talked about it. Not in detail at least.

In the whirlwind of new love and hot sex and playing house, the logistics of our vastly different lives haven't even been a blip on the radar.

Now, with Zoe's words ringing in my ears, I can't ignore the glaring truth.

I'm a porn star, an adult entertainer.

I fuck my best friend for a living, for all the world to see.

And Doc... Doc is part of this.

Part of the club, the brotherhood.

A world of old-school values and fierce, uncompromising loyalty.

Can my job ever truly be accepted by him?

Fuck. Why haven't I thought of this before?

### CHAPTER NINE

Doc

I pop the top on a warm bottle and start feeding Kash, while I slump back on the worn leather couch.

Turmoil is pacing back and forth, combat boots clomping against the clubhouse floor.

He runs a hand over his head, looking tense as fuck.

"What's eating you, brother?" I ask, taking a swig of my own beer. "You're wearing a hole in the damn floor."

Turmoil's eyes snap to mine, dark and stormy. "Sera. She was supposed to show up an hour ago. Not like her to be late and she's not answering her phone. No texts either."

I frown.

Sera is Turmoil's ol' lady, his ride or die.

They're tighter than a virgin's ass.

If she said she'd be here, she meant it.

"What do you want to do? Go out and look for her?" I suggest.

Sera is keeping her relationship with Turmoil under the radar, especially since she's a double agent—reporting info back to the club that will help us take down her mother.

"What do you think?" he snaps. "Of course I do. Something's wrong, I can feel it in my bones. After the shit with her snake of a mother...I just don't trust this, brother."

He trails off but I get what he's saying.

If Sally figured out her daughter is working against her...god, who knows what she'd do.

I've heard some crazy stories about that woman.

I look at my little man, mind racing with the possibilities, each one uglier than the last.

How is the world so cruel when there are innocent creatures like this who depend on us?

It just gives me the urge to rip every bit of evil from the planet.

My stomach churns thinking about what could be going on.

Hopefully Sera turns up. Maybe she fell asleep, was exhausted from her day and crashed.

That's the best thing to think about, not the alternative.

If Sera's been made, if her mother discovered she's the mole, there's no telling what kind of danger she could be in right now.

"Let's go, man. We'll track her down and figure out what the fuck is going on," I say firmly, standing up.

Turmoil shakes his head, his eyes stormy with barely contained rage and fear. "I gotta talk to Prez first. See what he wants to do. Can't just go off half-cocked, much as I want to burn rubber outta here."

I get it, I do.

There's protocol.

Damon is the one who calls the shots, and the last thing we need to be doing is pissing him off.

If Sally Bernard has Sera...that means she knows everything.

It means that the underground battle we've had with her is now being brought to the surface...and shit is about to get real.

My mind keeps circling back to Sera's involvement.

She took immeasurable risks and could have been caught at any time.

Slipping info to Turmoil, helping us uncover every move her mother was trying to make.

Sera would always show up to the clubhouse under the cover of night, when she could sneak away undetected.

Bile rises in my throat.

If anything happens to her because she chose us, because she fell in love with Turmoil and wanted to make things right...God, it just might kill him.

"Go find Damon," I urge him, my voice low and intense. "I'll round up the rest of the prospects, get everyone ready for when Damon gives the order. We'll find your girl, bring her home safe."

Turmoil looks at me, a fierce light in his eyes.

He clasps my arm. "Thank you so fuckin' much, brother."

He turns on his heel and strides off to find our Prez, a man on a mission.

I watch him go, my gut twisting into knots.

I hope like hell we're not too late, and that Turmoil's hunch is wrong.

Please, God, let her be passed out on her couch.

With a quick flick of my thumb, I fire off a message to the rest of the club prospects, then place my now sleeping son in the bassinet.

Once he's settled, I pivot on my heel and make a beeline for the kitchen.

The hollow echo in my gut's been growling like a caged beast for too long, demanding to be fed.

Camila's in there, at the stove, cooking up who knows what.

I peek over her shoulder, my nostrils filling with the heavenly scent of simmering garlic and herbs. "Whatcha got there, Camila?"

She jumps, whirling around to face me, brandishing a wooden spoon like a weapon.

"Christ Almighty, Doc! Don't sneak up on me like that," she huffs, slapping my arm with said spoon.

"Sorry, mama bear." I hold my hands up in mock surrender. "Just came to see what smells so good."

She rolls her eyes but her lips twitch into a small smile. "It's chicken stew. Want some?"

"Do I ever say no to your cooking?" I listen closely to see if Kash has stirred in his bassinet, but he hasn't so I walk up to Camila, ready to stuff my fucking face with this deliciousness.

Camila spoons some stew into a bowl for me and I head back out into the main area of the clubhouse, where Kash is happily sleeping.

I shove a spoonful in my mouth and muffle out, "Thanks so much."

Camila waves her hand in dismissal. "It's nothing. I need to get a whole bunch more batched up and put in the freezer."

"Still, I appreciate it. Boog's a lucky man."

Camila turns to me and raises her brows, "And you're looking to be a lucky man too, with Mandy and all."

I lick my lips, "Yeah, I guess you could say that."

We haven't said what we are, and I doubt we fucking will for a while.

There's no label on it, but there's no doubt in my mind she belongs to me.

Camila's laughter rings out, breaking the momentary silence. "Look at you blushing like a schoolboy. She must be something special."

"Yeah, she is," I respond, feeling a soft smile creeping onto my face as Mandy's image fills my mind.

Her warmth.

Her laughter.

Her spirit.

I shake my head, trying to wrangle my thoughts back to the present.

Heading back into the main area, I'm midway into a bite of food when the door flies open and Damon strides in, his expression thunderous.

Turmoil is hot on his heels, a coiled spring of tension and barely leashed fury.

All eyes snap to them as a hush falls over the clubhouse.

It's so quiet in here you could hear a pin drop.

Damon rakes his gaze over the assembled men, prospects, and patches alike.

When he speaks, his voice is a low growl. "Listen up. We've got a situation. Sera's gone dark—no communication, her location disabled. And we all know that isn't like her."



Murmurs ripple through the room, guys exchanging uneasy glances.

My own pulse kicks up a notch as some of my brothers file into the clubhouse.

Damon holds up a hand, signaling anyone who has questions to be quiet.

He clears his throat and looks around the room, "Normally I'd call an emergency church session, prospects excluded. But shit's different now."

He looks at each of us prospects in turn, with something like respect or maybe even pride in his eyes. "You've all proven yourselves. Shown your loyalty to the club, kept your noses clean. I know damn well none of you is the rat that's been fucking with us."

Damn straight.

We might be newer to the club, but we'd ride or die for it.

To most of us, this club is the only family we'll ever truly have.

Damon's jaw clenches. "We already know the threat is coming from outside the club's doors. I've already told y'all Sera is missing, and I'll put money on the fact her mother has something to do with it. Some of you know, and some of you don't, but Sera's mother is the one who's been trying to fuck with the club's money, take us down, and do damn well anything she can. "

Turmoil makes a low sound, halfway between a snarl and a groan.

His hands flex at his sides, like he's imagining wrapping them around Sally Bernard's throat.

I can't blame him one bit.

If that evil cunt has laid one hand on Sera, I know he'll rip her mother's throat right out.

"So here's what we're gonna do," Damon continues grimly. "We're gonna turn over every rock, shake down every source. We will find Turmoil's girl and bring her back home where she belongs."

His eyes blaze with barely contained violence. "And then? We'll burn the whole fucking world down around Sally Bernard until nothing's left but ashes and dust. The empire she built in the wake of Lunatic's death will crumble, or be given to her daughter. The choice is hers."

Damon's cold, hard gaze travels the room, marking each face.

When it lands on Turmoil, there's a flicker of sympathy, but his voice remains as authoritative as ever. "Turmoil, you know Sera the best. I need you to dig deep, brother. Any place she might go, people she'd turn to. We have to retrace her steps, find out where she was last seen before she went dark on us."

Turmoil drags a hand over his face, looking like he's aged a decade in the span of an hour. "The casino, for sure. Her condo. Probably her grandfather's place."

His expression twists with a mix of rage and anguish I feel in my own gut.

If this was Mandy in Sera's shoes, I don't know what I'd do.

"I swear if that cunt Sally has touched one hair on Sera's head..."

Widow rests a heavy hand on Turmoil's shoulder, steadying him. "We'll get your girl

back, and make that bitch pay. But we gotta keep our heads, go about this the smart way. None of us can help Sera if we're seeing red."

A hollow opens up in my chest when I think about what could be happening to her.

We take care of our own, and Sera is ours, down to the fucking bone.

I can still see her teasing smile as she sassed Turmoil at the bar, the way her eyes danced with secrets.

She's one of the toughest women I've ever met, and she's his perfect woman.

She has to be okay. I refuse to consider any other possibility.

We'll rip the city apart until we find her.

As for Sally Bernard...well, her mother better know now is the time she should run, because we're coming for her and hell is coming with us.

Turmoil straightens up, his jaw set in determined lines. "Her grandfather is the reason she found out the truth, about her father being a shitbag."

All our eyes turn to him, waiting for Turmoil to keep going. "Sera said the old man didn't approve of the way her mother was helping her avenge a man who didn't deserve it, wanted to give Sera an option to stop. He told her who Lunatic really was, which isn't hard to imagine."

Damon rubs his chin, wheels clearly turning behind those keen eyes. "Sounds like Gramps might be our best shot at getting a lead on her then."

Turmoil nods, his voice growing weary. "It's a long shot, but fuck, I'll take any shot

we can get right now. I need to get my girl back.”

I pipe up, "I say we pay her grandpa a visit. We all know her mom's evil as fuck, but the old timer seems decent, from what Sera's said."

I remember Sera mentioning how her grandfather doted on her growing up, shielding her from her parents' fucked up world.

The man's got balls, I'll give him that.

Damon nods slowly. "You're right, Doc. Gramps could be the key." He fixes us all with a steely gaze. "But we need to be smart about this. Do our homework before we make a move."

Zoe gets up from a couch in the corner, Spark eyeing her nervously as she walks right into the center of the room.

She swallows hard, her soft voice cuts through the tense silence like a blade. "I shouldn't be saying this, because Sera wanted to tell you herself, but..." She fixes her gaze on Turmoil, eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "She's pregnant."

Wait, what the fuck?

I want to think she's joking, but there's no way in fucking hell Zoe would joke about something like this.

The words hit me like a sledgehammer to the chest.

I can only imagine how hard they're hitting him.

Turmoil goes dead still, his face draining of color.

Jesus Christ, this changes everything.

Sera's not the only one in danger. We have to think about her and Turmoil's little one now too.

The gravity of the situation falls over the room like a suffocating blanket.

I can practically see the wheels turning in everyone's heads as they process this game-changing revelation.

This just made everything that much worse, and we have to try to find her, and fast.

The stakes just got a hell of a lot higher.

Turmoil clenches his fists, a muscle ticking in his jaw.

I half expect him to put a hole through the wall.

Instead, he takes a deep, shuddering breath, visibly reining in his emotions.

There has to be a tornado ripping through his head right now.

Fear, rage, desperation—a toxic cocktail threatening to boil over.

But beneath it all, I catch a glimmer of something else in Turmoil's eyes.

Something fierce, primal, and protective as fuck.

He's not just fighting for his old lady anymore.

He's fighting for his family.

Internally, I know shit is about to pop off with the club.

We thought we might have some peace for a while, but now that Seraphina is AWOL, it means one of our own is in imminent danger.

And she's carrying precious cargo.

We need to work fast.

Every second counts.

Every heartbeat brings Sera closer to God knows what horrors.

Failure isn't a fucking option.

Especially not now.

We'll rain down holy hell on anyone who stands between us and bringing Sera and the baby home safe.

That's a goddamn promise.

### CHAPTER TEN

Mandy

Doc's strong hands knead into the soles of my feet, sending tingles up my legs.

I let out a content sigh and sink deeper into the couch cushions.

It's been a long day at work and this foot rub is exactly what I needed.

"How's that, darlin'?" Doc drawls, his jade green eyes twinkling mischievously. "Feel good?"

"Mmm, amazing," I purr. "You sure know how to treat a girl right."

He chuckles, his calloused fingers pressing into a particularly sensitive spot.

I bite my lip to hold back a moan.

Damn, this man and his magic hands.

We're curled up on the couch in my condo, just enjoying a quiet night in.

Kash is sound asleep in the bassinet I set up in my spare room.

Poor little guy was tuckered out after a busy day of eating, pooping, and charming the pants off everyone he meets with his adorable gummy smiles.

He may not be mine by blood, but I already love the kid to pieces.

"What's on your mind, sweet thing?" Doc asks, noticing my pensive expression. "You seem like you got something to say."

I hesitate for a moment, unsure how to broach the subject.

Things have been going so well between us lately.

The last thing I want to do is rock the boat.

But if our relationship is getting serious, which it definitely seems to be, then he deserves to know the truth about what I do.

"Well, it's just..." I begin nervously. "You know that content I film with Zoe? The adult stuff?"

Doc nods, his hands still kneading my feet.

If he's surprised by my sudden topic change, he doesn't show it.

I take a deep breath and plow ahead. "I just wanted to make sure you're okay with it. I mean, I know it's not exactly a traditional job. And we never really talked about it before. But it's important to me that you're comfortable with Spark being a cuckold in it as well. It's just...I don't want to disrespect?—"

"Hey," he cuts me off gently. "Mandy, look at me."

I raise my eyes to meet his steady gaze.

He's not judging me or looking at me with disgust.



If anything, there's understanding and acceptance shining from those jade depths.

"It doesn't bother me," he says firmly. "Not one bit. You do what you gotta do to get by. Ain't none of my business to tell you different."

Relief crashes over me like a wave.

I knew Doc was a good man, but I didn't expect him to be so accepting about my line of work.

Most guys would pitch a fit, call me a whore, and run for the hills.

But not him.

He takes it in stride like it's no big deal.

"So you're really okay with it?" I clarify, just to be sure. "It's not an issue for you? Even with Spark being involved?"

He shakes his head, a wry smile playing on his sensual lips. "Nah, darlin'. Your body, your choice. I've got no right to raise hell over how you pay the bills. As long as you're not fuckin' another man, fuck as many women as you want. I might get territorial over you, but that's 'cause you're my woman. I'm gonna get that way, especially if some certain dumb fucks at the club like Shiver wanna get a rise outta me."

Overcome with emotion, I launch myself into his arms, straddling his lap.

His hands come up to grip my hips as I rain kisses all over his handsome face.

"You're incredible," I murmur against his mouth. "Everything I've ever wanted. I

don't know how I got so lucky."

Doc laughs and presses a sweet kiss to my forehead. "That makes two of us then. Now c'mere and let me show you just how okay with it I am."

I don't need to be told again.

Our mouths crash together in a heated kiss, tongues tangling as our hands roam over each other's bodies like we can't get enough.

Shirt buttons fly open like they're on fire, and the next thing I know, I'm standing naked in my living room, Doc's strong hands all over me.

"Condom," I pant between kisses. "Lube."

"Oh, we gonna get real freaky tonight, huh?" He winks at me, walking over to my bedroom.

He's back within a few seconds, condom and lube in hand.

He rips open the condom packaging with his teeth like a damn sex god.

We stumble our way to the couch, the perfect place for a good ol' fashioned tryst.

I slide onto my hands and knees, ass in the air as I look over my shoulder at him.

"Take me, Daddy. Show me what you're made of."

His eyes practically glow at my dirty talk, and before I can blink, he's behind me, entering me in one long, hard thrust.

I moan, my back arching as my nails dig into the leather couch.

"God, Mandy," he groans. " You feel so fucking good."

"You're not so bad yourself," I pant, rocking back against him, meeting his thrusts.

We move together like we've been doing this forever, our bodies in sync, sweat dripping down our faces as the temperature in the room rises.

His grip tightens on my hips as he picks up the pace, and I know he's close.

I moan, my climax building deep inside me. "I'm gonna cum."

He growls, angling his hips just right. "Cum for me, baby."

And then it hits, like a freight train of pleasure, tearing through my entire body as I scream out his name.

"Fuck, Doc!" I grip the couch cushions as wave after wave crashes through me.

He continues his thrusts, like we're two teenagers who could get caught at a moment's notice.

I say it before I change my mind. "God, Doc. Take the condom off and fuck my ass!"

I've never had any man fuck my ass before, but I want to experience this with him.

His pace hitches for a second, and I turn to look at him.

His eyes meet mine and I know he craves it as desperately as I do.

Sure, there's surprise there, yes, but also an unmistakable glint of desire. "You sure, baby?"

I nod, biting my lower lip. "I want you. All of you."

With that, he carefully pulls out and removes the condom.

He lubes up his already hard cock again, and I can't help but shiver in anticipation.

"Relax, Mandy," he whispers, his voice gentle against my ear.

His fingers stroke soothing circles on my back as he slowly pushes himself into me.

It's uncomfortable at first, a strange fullness I'm not used to.

But he waits patiently until I adjust and when I give him a small nod, he starts to move again.

This new sensation is different: rawer, more intimate than anything I've ever experienced.

I gasp as Doc thrusts into me slowly, carefully.

He kisses the back of my shoulder.

"Damn, Mandy," He hisses, his voice low and gravelly with desire. "You feel so fuckin' good."

He wraps a strong arm around my midsection, pulling me closer to him.

His other hand reaches around, sliding between my legs.

His fingers dance over my sensitive bud as he continues his slow, measured thrusts.

My body responds instantly, heat pooling low in my abdomen as the pleasure builds to an almost unbearable pitch once more.

"Faster," I gasp, clutching the couch cushion.

He growls in response, his fingers increasing their pace along with his thrusts.

I can feel every inch of him moving inside me, the delicious friction setting my nerves aflame with aching need.

Sensations spiral out of control as the pleasure peaks and I tip over the edge again, crying out.

My body clenches tight around him and that's all it takes for Doc to follow me into oblivion.

He thrusts forward one last time and grunts as he releases inside me, bringing his lips next to my ear. "That's Daddy's good girl."

Afterward, Doc's breathing is ragged, matching my own.

He pulls out slowly, making me whimper at the loss of contact.

He holds me close until our breathing returns to normal.

I don't want to move from this position.

I'm comfortable here, in his embrace.

His warmth is comforting, calming my overwrought nerves.

Eventually, Doc pulls away and I make a small noise of protest.

He chuckles low in his throat and presses a kiss to my forehead. "Don't worry, baby. I'm not going anywhere."

True to his word, he doesn't leave.

Instead, he takes the time to clean me up with the care of someone who truly cares.

He tosses the used washcloths in the hamper and climbs onto the couch with me, covering me up in a blanket, except he leaves my breasts exposed.

He comes up to me and lays on me, grabs my breast, and suckles my nipple into his mouth.

The sensation sends a shudder down my spine, a tantalizing echo of the pleasure that still hums beneath my skin.

His tongue flicks against my sensitive nub, drawing a soft gasp from my lips.

One of his hands slides down my stomach, his fingers tracing lazy circles over my bare skin.

I grip the back of his head tightly as he continues to tease me, the tension building slowly, steadily.

There's nothing rushed about this—it's slow, languid, almost luxurious.

His mouth on me is like fire and ice—hot and cool at the same time.

It's an intoxicating contrast that has me squirming beneath him.

Every touch of his mouth sends a jolt of pleasure through me, making my body hum with need once more.

He chuckles against my skin.

And then Doc moves, shifting until he's nestled between my thighs.

Before I have time to protest the loss of contact with his mouth, he replaces his mouth with his fingers, rolling both of my nipples until they're hard nubs.

His mouth is on my pussy, "Fuck, you taste delicious."

The words strike me like a bolt.

It's so raw, so explicit, but it's Doc.

He wouldn't be him without his blunt honesty.

I feel myself blush, the heat radiating from my face and spreading all the way down to my chest, but I don't push him away.

Instead, I grip his shoulders and arch my back, pushing myself further into his mouth.

He groans against me, the vibration sending sparks of desire coursing through my veins that only heighten the sweet torture he's inflicting on me.

I'm panting now, gasping for breath as he continues to feast on me like a man starved.

“Doc,” I whimper, rolling my hips against his mouth.

He lifts his head just long enough to give me a devilish smirk before diving back in.

I can do nothing but writhe underneath him, trapped by the onslaught of pleasure he’s causing with every flick of his tongue and teasing nip of his teeth.

My breaths come out in ragged gasps, my heart slamming hard against my ribs.

I’m so close to the edge, the tension coiling tightly within me.

I can feel that familiar rush building up, ready to push me over into oblivion.

"Doc... Doc," I mumble his name like a prayer, clutching onto him as if he were my only anchor in the storm of pleasure sweeping over me.

He responds by intensifying his movements, his tongue delving deeper and the soft petal-like licks turning into insistent prods that soon have me unraveling beneath him.

“Fuck,” I gasp out, my hips bucking off the couch as waves of pleasure rip through me.

The world narrows down to just Doc and the incredible things he’s doing to me.

It’s too much, and yet not enough.

I can feel him smiling against me even as I convulse around him, riding out my orgasm until I’m left breathless and shuddering on the plush cushions.

As my senses slowly come back to me, I vaguely become aware of his body shifting against mine.



His roughened hands gently slide up my body, tracing a line of fire along my hypersensitive skin.

He murmurs hoarsely against my ear, his warm breath fanning across my cheek. "God, Mandy."

"Watching you come undone..." he trails off, his hand cradling my cheek as his green eyes bore into mine.

The intensity in his gaze is almost too much to bear, but I can't look away.

As we bask in the afterglow, Doc's stomach lets out a truly impressive growl.

I can't help but giggle. "Worked up an appetite, did you?"

He grins at me unrepentantly. "What can I say, you're insatiable. A man needs sustenance to keep up with you."

Just then, a thin wail issues from the spare bedroom.

Kash is awake and making his displeasure known.

He definitely takes after his daddy in the volume department.

"Speaking of needing sustenance..." I sigh and start to disentangle myself from Doc, but he stops me with a hand on my thigh.

"Tell you what—I'll grab the little man, and you make a food run. Pretty sure we worked off whatever calories we're about to consume."

I arch an eyebrow at him. "You just want an excuse to eat junk food."

He chuckles. "Damn straight. I'm thinking pizza. Or those sliders from the pub down on 5th..."

Laughing, I shake my head. "Oh no. There's a 24-hour cafe downstairs that has amazing pastries and sandwiches. I'll grab us something from there while you deal with our tiny tyrant."

Doc arches a brow and smirks, "Our tiny tyrant, huh?"

I don't even realize what I said until he repeats it... and I don't know how to recover from it.

In another universe, maybe I'm Kash's mom, and I'm Doc's ol' lady... a girl could dream.

Doc's eyes are twinkling. "I expect a cookie for my trouble. Maybe two."

"You drive a hard bargain, but deal." I peck him on the lips before scooting off his lap.

Snagging his t-shirt from the floor, I slip it over my head. The hem barely skims my thighs.

Doc rakes an appreciative gaze over me and groans. "Christ, woman, you can't walk around looking like that. I'm only human."

Feeling sexy and powerful, I shoot him a wink over my shoulder as I slide on a knee-length jacket and button it up.

I grab my purse and I'm all ready. "Just keeping you on your toes. Be back in a few—try not to miss me too much."

The cafe is quiet this time of night, only a few insomniacs and night shift workers scattered among the booths.

I smile at the purple-haired barista and place my order—two hot chocolates, a couple breakfast sandwiches, and an assortment of sinfully decadent pastries, plus two cookies.

Gotta keep my man happy.

As I'm waiting for my food, a voice from the past cuts through the 90s alt-rock playing over the speakers.

A voice I hoped to never hear again. "Amanda, how ironic it is to be running into you again?"

My blood turns to ice in my veins.

No.

It can't be.

Why the fuck is he here?

Slowly, hardly daring to breathe, I turn...and find myself staring into the cruel, glinting eyes of my stepfather.

God, I can see even better now how the years haven't been kind to him.

His face is more heavily lined, his hair grayer and thinner.

But that cold, calculating gleam in his gaze is the same.

It still makes my skin crawl, even after all this time.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I demand, my voice trembling only slightly.

I'm not a scared teenager anymore.

He can't hurt me now.

A smirk twists his thin lips. "I live here, sweetheart. Just bought a condo in this building. Nice place." His eyes flick over me, assessing. Judging. "You visiting someone? Or do you live here too?"

Unease prickles along my spine.

I don't want this man knowing anything about my life, especially where I live.

My boyfriend...

"I don't live here," I snap. "My boyfriend does."

There.

Let him chew on that.

I have someone in my life now, someone who would happily beat this abusive prick into the ground if he tried anything.

But even as a small measure of smug satisfaction washes over me, my mind is reeling.

How can he afford to live in a swanky building like this?

Last I heard, he'd gambled away every cent and was in debt up to his eyeballs.

Cirrhosis of the liver should've killed him by now with how much he drank.

Yet here he stands, looking as arrogantly confident as ever.

None of this adds up.

Just then, the barista calls my name.

I turn to grab the cardboard tray holding our hot chocolates and the paper bag full of food.

All I want is to get back to the safety of my condo, back to Doc's strong arms.

But as I start to walk quickly toward the elevator, my stepfather's clammy hand clamps around my arm. "I'll be seeing you around, Amanda. Count on it."

My stomach plummets as I yank my arm free of his grip and hurry to the elevators, my heart hammering against my ribs.

The doors slide shut and I slump back against the mirrored wall, my legs suddenly weak.

How is this happening?

I left that life behind, started over.

Yet here he is, like a malignant tumor that keeps coming back no matter how many times it's cut out.

The elevator dings and I step out onto my floor, fumbling for my keys with shaking hands.

I unlock the door and slip inside, letting it click shut behind me.

The warm, comforting scent of home wraps around me but I barely notice.

All I can think is that he's found me. Somehow, some way, my past has caught up to me.

Doc's deep voice drifts out from the living room. "Babe? That was fast."

I swallow hard and force my feet to carry me down the hall.

He's sitting on the couch, Kash nestled in the crook of his muscular arm.

The sight of them, my two guys, sends a pang through my chest.

All I want is to keep them safe. Happy.

"Hey," I say, hoping my voice doesn't betray my inner turmoil. "They didn't have much of a line."

I set the food and drinks on the coffee table and perch on the edge of the couch, my body still thrumming with tension.

Doc studies my face, his eyes narrowing. "What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost."

I bark out a humorless laugh. "Something like that."

Taking a deep breath, I tell him not to worry about it, that we should enjoy our food.

Luckily, he doesn't press me any further.

Still, what is my step-father doing here, and why am I seeing him twice in the last couple of weeks?

### CHAPTER ELEVEN

Doc

I stride into the clubhouse, my boots thumping on the scuffed wood floor.

Most of the other prospects and full patch members are running around like chickens with their heads cut off, gearing up for the big ride.

The place is a flurry of activity—cuts being shrugged on, weapons getting checked and holstered, bikes revving to life outside.

Turmoil shouts over to me as he jams extra ammo clips into his pockets. "Yo Doc, you ready to roll or what?"

His eyes are hard and determined.

We're all coiled tight, ready to unleash hell to get Sera back.

I adjust my own gun at my hip, feeling the heavy, reassuring weight of cold steel. "Born fuckin' ready, brother. Those shitstains who took Seraphina ain't gonna know what hit 'em."

My mind flashes to Mandy for a split second.

Her soft curves, the way her hair is getting more natural by the day, and the way her blue eyes dance when she smiles at me...Fuck.



I shake my head to force her out of my mind.

I can't be focusing on the woman who's damn well stealing my heart right now.

I have to focus on the task at hand.

There will be time for me and my woman later, once Sera is back safe and sound, where she belongs.

Damon roars, stomping towards the doors. "All right, time to mount up!"

Once we all make it outside, he continues. "We ride hard, no stopping 'til we reach the location. And when we get there..." His gaze sweeps over us, feral and full of vicious promise. "We do whatever we need to get her back."

I swing my leg over my Harley, the bike purring to life beneath me like a wild animal ready to hunt.

My brothers fan out around me, an armada of pissed off bikers dead set on one goal.

The clubhouse disappears behind us as we roar out onto the open road, a pack of wolves racing toward our destination.

Destination: Seraphina's grandfather's place.

He's our best bet in finding her.

Before long, the gates of the ritzy neighborhood loom ahead, all wrought iron and snooty as fuck.

I can practically smell the money oozing from the manicured lawns and pristine

mansions beyond.

Gramps sure knows how to live large.

Then again, what else should I expect?

Seraphina does come from a family of billionaires.

We roll to a stop at the security booth, engines rumbling impatiently.

A rent-a-cop in a cheap uniform eyes us warily, hand twitching toward the phone.

Damon leans forward on his handlebars, pinning the dude with a glare that could melt steel. "Bernard residence. Now," he growls, voice brooking no argument.

The guard swallows hard, adam's apple bobbing.

He fumbles for a button and the gates slowly creak open.

Smart man.

We rev through, Harleys snarling like rabid beasts as we prowl past the cookie-cutter mansions.

The Bernard estate sits at the end of the winding road, all stately columns and pretentious landscaping.

As we pull up out front, gravel crunching beneath our tires, the huge oak doors swing open.

A prim and proper butler steps out, not a silver hair out of place.

He clears his throat delicately, dark eyes impassive as he takes in the sight of a bunch of rough and tumble bikers invading his pristine domain.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he intones in a snooty British accent. "Mr. Bernard has been expecting you. Please, do come in."

He steps back and gestures toward the open door in clear invitation.

I glance at Damon, brows raised.

He nods curtly, swinging off his bike.

We follow suit, the quiet suddenly deafening without the rumble of engines.

My hand drifts to the piece tucked in my waistband as we stride forward, boots thudding heavily on the polished marble.

Time to see what dear ol' gramps has to say.

I pray he's got some answers.

We stalk inside, the butler leading us through an opulent foyer that reeks of old money.

Crystal chandeliers, antique furniture, oil paintings in gilded frames—this place is a fucking mausoleum.

He shows us into a wood-paneled study, all dark leather and the stench of cigars.

Perched in a wingback chair like a king on his goddamn throne is Mr. Bernard.

Steel gray hair, hawkish nose, beady eyes that gleam with strength.

He takes a long drag on a cigar, smoke curling from his thin lips. "It's about bloody time," he growls, his posh accent dripping condescension. "I've done all the hard work and now you lot need to go get my granddaughter."

Damon steps forward, muscles coiled tight. "You know where she is."

It's not a question.

Bernard scoffs. "Well, do you think I wouldn't? Of course, I do. Her mother, that spiteful bitch, has gotten her holed up in one of the family's 'therapy facilities.' Load of rubbish. I'm too old to get her myself, so you all need to do the hard work and get my Sera out of there!"

My blood runs cold at the implications.

Seraphina locked away, at the mercy of whatever twisted "treatment" her psycho mother has subjected her to.

Bile rises in my throat and my hands clench into fists.

I want to put them through her mother's face.

And if I want to do that, I can only imagine what Turmoil wants to do.

"Where is she?" Damon's tone could cut steel. "Name. Address. Anything else is a waste of our fucking time."

Bernard slowly stubs out his cigar, each movement deliberate.

He reaches into his suit jacket and withdraws a folded slip of paper, holding it out between two fingers.

"Northern Nevada. Off the beaten path. I trust you boys can handle the rest." His thin mouth curves in a grim smile. "Oh, and one more thing..."

Turmoil steps forward and snatches the paper from his wrinkled fingers. "What kind of sick 'therapy facility' is this?"

Anger vibrates through his voice.

Bernard leans back, appraising him with cold eyes. "The kind designed to correct...undesirable behaviors. To beat the deviancy out of someone. What do they call it now? Ah yes, conversion therapy. Her mother is relentless. Go get her, boys."

Every second we wait is another moment Seraphina suffers.

We turn to leave, heavy boots thudding on the polished floor.

At the door, Turmoil pauses and looks back at Bernard. "We'll bring her back safe and sound. I fucking swear it."

His eyes glitter, hard as diamonds. "You'd better. And when she's safe, you contact me immediately so we can deal with her mother. Permanently."

Turmoil nods curtly.

The unspoken threat hangs heavy in the air.

We file out to our bikes, engines rumbling to life like a snarling beast.

Adrenaline surges through my veins as we roar out of the gated community.

Wind whips at my cut as I push my bike to its limits.

Hold on, Seraphina. We're coming for you.

And god help anyone who stands in our way.

The heat shimmers in waves off the black asphalt as we speed north through the Nevada desert.

Sweat trickles down my back beneath heavy leather, but I barely feel the scorching sun.

We turn off the main highway onto a dusty gravel road, kicking up clouds of grit.

Up ahead, a cluster of dilapidated buildings hunches against the barren landscape.

As we draw closer, I make out faded lettering on a weathered sign: "Desert Springs Wellness Facility".

The irony makes me want to puke.

I kill the engine and swing off my bike, boots crunching on sun-baked earth.

The place looks like it's been abandoned for years, paint peeling off crumbling walls.

But there's a few cars parked haphazardly around the property.

And I can hear the faint hum of a generator.

Turmoil mutters, pulling up beside me. "You sure this is the right place?"

I murmur. "This has to be it. It's our best chance at getting your girl."

I check my gun, slick metal warm against my palm.

The familiar weight is a cold comfort.

Dixon and Mouser flank me, weapons drawn, faces grim.

We approach the sagging front door, our senses on high alert.

It's eerily quiet, just the creak of our leathers and the wind whistling through decaying buildings.

I raise a booted foot, about to kick the door in, when it suddenly swings open.

A weaselly-looking man in a white coat blinks out at us from behind wire-rimmed glasses. "Can I help?—"

His words cut off in a strangled yelp as Turmoil seizes him by the throat and slams him against the doorframe. "Where is she?" He snarls, getting right up in his face. "Where the fuck is Seraphina?"

The little rat just whimpers and claws feebly at Turmoil's hand crushing his windpipe.

I press the muzzle of my gun under his chin and he goes rigid, eyes bulging. "Last chance, asshole. Where. Is. She."

He makes a choked gurgling sound, lips moving soundlessly.

Turmoil eases up just enough for him to rasp out: "L-last room. End of the h-hall."

My brother releases him and he crumples to the floor, gasping.

We step over his retching form and stride inside, weapons up.

The stench of piss and antiseptic assaults my nostrils.

This hellhole reeks of pain and despair.

We move swiftly, kicking open doors, sweeping each room with ruthless efficiency.

A few more whitecoats scurry out like cockroaches.

Mouser pistol-whips one that makes a sudden move.

Dixon cold-cocks another.

We have no mercy for these sick fucks.

Finally, we reach the last door.

I shoulder it open, bracing for whatever nightmares await inside.

But nothing could've prepared me for the scene of depravity we find.

Seraphina.

Strapped to a blood-soaked chair in the center of the room.

Golden skin shredded, tattoos carved from her flesh, leaving gaping wounds.



One eye swollen shut, the other a glassy slit.

Compound fracture jutting through her leg at a sickening angle.

Bile scorches the back of my throat.

The blood drains from my face. "Jesus fucking Christ..."

Turmoil's moving before I can even register it, boots pounding across grimy tiles.

He drops to his knees beside her, hands hovering, afraid to touch her ruined body.  
"Seraphina? Baby, can you hear me?"

Her head lolls, a moan slipping from split lips.

I want to weep.

I want to burn this place to ashes for the pain they're both in right now.

But right now, we have to get her out of here.

We need to get her to safety.

Turmoil speaks in hushed whispers to her, "I've got you, sweetheart. I've got you.  
You're safe now."

He starts unfastening the leather straps binding her, jaw clenched so tight my teeth  
ache.

I help him, cursing under my breath.

We ease her broken body out of that chair, every agonized whimper twisting my fucking heart.

Turmoil cradles his woman against his chest, blood soaking into his cut.

Nothing else matters except getting her help.

Fixing what those sadistic cocksuckers did to his girl.

We'll make them pay.

Every last one of them.

But first, we need to get Seraphina fixed up.

Turmoil carries her out to the van Booger drove, each step measured, trying not to jostle her injuries.

It's amazing that she's still alive, still fighting for her life.

I yank open the van door and he settles Seraphina across the backseat as gently as he can.

She clings to his hand, fingers cold as ice.

He squeezes it back, hoping she can feel it through the pain. "Stay with me, baby. Just stay with me."

I pull out my phone and dial Sakura with shaking fingers.

Pick up, pick up...

"Doc?" Her voice crackles through the speaker. "Did you find her?"

There's no beating around the bush here. I need to just get it out. "Yeah. And she's in bad fuckin' shape. We need a surgeon, Sakura. Someone who can keep their mouth shut."

Sakura's silent for a few moments, then, "I know someone. Plastic surgeon, private clinic. He'll do it, but it won't be cheap."

Price doesn't matter. "None of us give a shit about the price. Just tell me where to go."

I hear her tapping keys, muffled voices in the background. "Texting you the address now. I'll smooth things over, make sure he's ready for you."

"Thanks, Sakura. I owe you."

"Just bring her back safe, Doc. That's all I want."

The line goes dead and a second later my phone pings with the address.

I forward it to the group chat and tell them we're going there with Sera.

Turmoil hops in the back of the van, and Shiver gets out.

They have a brief conversation and Shiver gets on Turmoil's bike.

Before long, Shiver is peeling out of the lot and Turmoil's slamming the door to the van, getting in the back with his woman.

I sit on my bike and head out with the crowd of my brothers.

We all ride like hell to get Seraphina to the surgeon and two hours fly by.

I don't know how much time passes as we sit in a waiting room, waiting for the surgeon to come out and give us some sort of update.

Eventually, the surgeon emerges from the operating room, weary lines etched into his face. "The surgery went as well as can be expected, given her condition."

He removes his glasses, rubbing his eyes. "I've set the fracture, cleaned and stitched her wounds. Started her on a broad-spectrum antibiotic to combat infection."

Damon's jaw is clenched tight. "What about...the other injuries?"

The doc sighs. "I've done what I can to minimize scarring from the...carvings. But she'll need time to heal, both physically and emotionally."

His gaze meets Turmoil's, sympathy swimming in the depths. "She's young, healthy. She'll recover. But it won't be easy."

"We'll get her through it," Turmoil rasps, the heaviness of the situation weighing on him. "What about the baby?"

The doctor swallows hard, "Fortunately, the baby is okay. Granted, your girlfriend has been through a lot of stress. She needs to rest and heal. I won't get your hopes up, or completely shatter them... but be prepared for the worst case scenario. She has been through hell."

Damon nods, clasping Turmoil's shoulder. "Doc's right. She's strong. A fighter. She'll make it." He turns to the others. "Mouser, Dixon, Doc, Spark—head back to the clubhouse. Let everyone know she's out of surgery. We'll stay with her."

We all say our goodbyes, promising to check in soon.

After a forty minute ride, the clubhouse comes into view, bikes gleaming in the floodlights.

I pull into my spot, cutting the engine.

The silence rings in my ears, too loud. Too heavy.

I need a drink.

Need to fucking forget how horrible she looked.

But more than that, I need my woman.

I need to hold Mandy in my arms and know she's safe.

I find her in my trailer, pacing restlessly in the living room.

She looks up when I enter, eyes widening. "Doc? What happened? Is Seraphina?"

I crush her to my chest, burying my face in her hair.

She smells like citrus and sandalwood, warm and alive against me.

"She made it through surgery," I rasp, voice breaking. "She's alive, baby. I just gotta fuckin' hold you right now, okay?"

This is the kind of shit that we face every day—fears that the same thing that happened to Seraphina will happen to one of our women.

I don't know what I'd do if something happened to Mandy.

### CHAPTER TWELVE

Mandy

I've never been real big on visiting hospitals or long-term care facilities.

They usually smell like stale piss and cafeteria meatloaf, but Doc asked me to come with him to see his mom who just got transferred to Desert View Assisted Living.

She's settling in and he wants to check on her.

So, here I am, sitting on the back of Doc's rumbling Harley, my arms wrapped tight around his waist as the desert scenery whizzes by in a blur of ochre and burnt orange.

The wind whips my hair into a blonde tornado and the vibration of the bike thrums between my thighs in a way that makes me think of last night, when Doc did his signature move.

When his head was buried between them. God, that man eats pussy better than a woman and I'm not even kidding.

We pull into the parking lot, kicking up clouds of dust.

Doc cuts the engine and helps me off, his big hands warm on my waist even through my leather jacket.

I follow him inside, my boots clicking on the polished linoleum.

The receptionist eyes us skeptically over her bifocals as we approach the sign-in desk.

I guess we don't exactly look like the typical visitors—Doc in his cut with the Reapers Rejects emblem on the back, and me in my ripped jeans and tank top.

But she slides the clipboard over without comment. "Names and IDs please," she drones nasally.

We both fish out our licenses and scrawl our names.

Amanda Blake.

I can't even remember the last time I wrote my legal name out.

Doc's real name still catches me off guard sometimes too—Darren Nixon.

It doesn't quite have the same ring as Doc.

The receptionist buzzes us through the security doors with a click.

"All right, she's in room 118, east wing."

Doc's jaw tightens as we walk down the antiseptic smelling hallway.

I reach for his hand and lace my fingers through his.

I squeeze his hand. "Hey. You okay?"

He exhales heavily through his nose. "Yeah. It's just...hard. Seeing her like this. She still thinks I'm fucking fifteen," he grits out.



My heart pangs for him.

I can't imagine how gut-wrenching it must be, your own mother not recognizing you, frozen in time.

Forever looking at you like a ghost.

"I'm right here with you," I murmur, rubbing my thumb over his knuckles. "We'll get through this together."

He glances over at me, eyes glinting emerald, and lifts my hand to his lips, kissing it softly. "I know, darlin'. And I can't tell you how much that means to me."

We reach room 118.

Doc pauses with his hand on the doorknob and draws in a deep breath, steeling himself.

Then he pushes it open. "Hey Ma. I'm here."

The room is spartanly furnished, just a hospital bed, a nightstand with a few framed photos, and an occupied wheelchair by the window.

Doc's mother, Doris, sits slumped over in her chair, gazing out at the barren desert landscape.

Her silver hair is pulled back in a loose bun, and her once vibrant green eyes are now dull.

But she still carries the same strong jawline as her son.

Her voice wavers. "Marcus?"

Doc shakes his head. "No, it's me, Ma, Darren. I brought...someone for you to meet."

She turns her head to me, blinking.

Her cloudy gaze tries to focus on my face. "Who are you?"

I offer her a soft smile. "I'm Mandy. It's so nice to finally meet you, Mrs. Nixon."

Her once rosebud lips quirk upward. "Oh, call me Doris, everyone else does," she pats the seat on the bed, indicating for me to sit down.

All of a sudden his mother's demeanor completely changes. "You said you were my son...but...you look so much older, I don't understand..."

Doc swallows hard, pulling a chair up to her bedside. "It's been a long time, Ma. Over fifteen years. I'm thirty-two now. I know it's hard to keep track. The time just keeps flyin' by."

"Thirty-two?" She shakes her head in disbelief. "No, that can't be right. Just yesterday you were getting ready for homecoming..."

"I know. But a lot of time has passed since then," Doc says gently but firmly. "Listen, that's not important right now. What matters is I'm here to see you. And I brought someone special with me." He reaches a hand out to me. "This is Mandy. My girlfriend."

Girlfriend.

The word rings in my ears and expands in my chest like a balloon.

I've never heard him call me that before.

It feels...fucking incredible.

Like puzzle pieces locking into place.

A promise of a future with him and Kash.

"Oh, um, okay...I guess that makes sense," her eyes crinkle as she smiles up at me.

She's struggling and I don't know if Doc sees how badly she is.

God, this must be unimaginable for her, and for him too.

This has to be why he doesn't come and visit her more.

Suddenly, Doris' bewilderment transforms into pure panic, her eyes wild as she surveys Doc's face. "Wait," she says, a sense of urgency in her voice. "You're not my boy..."

Doc immediately places his hands on her trembling shoulders. "Ma, it's me— Darren. I promise."

She jerks away from him violently and grabs the porcelain vase from the nightstand, throwing it at Doc with surprising strength. "Get out! You're an imposter!"

The vase shatters against the wall next to him, raining shards of porcelain around him.

"Mrs. Nixon!" I cry out, shock winding its way through my veins.

But Doc just takes it all in stride, ducking the flying pieces with fluid grace and straightening up once the danger is past.

His gaze remains steady on his mother who's now sobbing in her wheelchair.

"No," he says softly, his voice barely above a whisper. "Ma, please. It's me. I promise you, it's me."

Suddenly she lunges for another item, a small glass bird trinket that twinkles in the harsh fluorescent light of the nursing home room.

With a wild yell, she throws it.

The tiny bird takes flight and crashes into Doc's forehead.

An audible crack echoes around the room as the glass shatters on impact.

I scream, instinctively moving to Doc's side. "Shit!"

Blood trickles from his brow, seeping down the side of his face as he winces in pain.

His green eyes are filled with a mix of shock and sorrow that makes my heart ache.

The sound of footsteps echo in the hallway outside before they burst through the door.

A nurse, her name tag reading 'Gloria', rushes into the room to see what all the commotion was about.

She pushes past me to get to Mrs. Nixon, her hands reaching out to calm her frantic flailing.

"Mrs. Nixon, you need to calm down!" Gloria shouts over the sound of her own heavy breathing, trying to wrestle the older woman's hands away from a ceramic lamp on the nightstand.

"It's not him, it's not him," she keeps repeating like a broken record, her eyes darting around the room in wild desperation.

"Mrs. Nixon, Darren is your son," Gloria tries to reason with her, looking over at Doc with an apologetic grimace.

Doc gives a brief nod of understanding, taking a step back from his mother's bed.

His face is a mask of control but I can see the pain flickering in his green eyes.

I rush over to him, pulling a tissue from my pocket and pressing it against his cut. "You're bleeding," I whisper, my hand shaking as I touch his warm skin.

"It's fine," he murmurs back, his gaze meeting mine for a brief moment before shifting back toward his mother.

Before I can stop myself, I lean closer and press a kiss to his cheek, my lips barely brushing against his stubble. "I'm here for you, honey," I say, letting my hand rest on his chest.

His heartbeat is a steady thud beneath my palm.

His eyes snap back to mine, holding a depth of gratitude that takes my breath away. "I know, darlin',"

We both turn back toward the bed as Gloria finally manages to calm his mother down.

She's slumped over in her chair again, chest rising and falling heavily.

"All right Mrs. Nixon, let's get you back to your bed," Gloria suggests gently, her arms wrapping around his mother's frail body.

Doc moves as if to help, but Gloria waves him off.

"It's okay," she says in a voice heavy with exhaustion and a touch of sadness. "I think it's best if you two leave for now. Your mother isn't having a great day, and the rest of your visit might not go well. It might be best to call her a couple of times."

He doesn't argue.

Instead, he gives his mom one last look. "Love ya, Ma. I'll see ya next time."

Doc and I leave his mother's room and exit the long-term care facility.

We get outside and his rough, calloused hand grabs mine. "Thanks so much for comin' with me, baby. You have no idea how much it means to me."

I offer him a soft smile, "Of course. I wouldn't have missed this for the world. Are you okay, though?" I run my fingertips next to his cut, which has stopped bleeding.

He nods once. "Yeah, I've had way worse than this little thing."

We walk toward his bike and I bring up Seraphina. "How are Seraphina and Turmoil doing since the other day?"

Doc sighs, "She's alive so that's good, but she's gonna have a long road ahead of her. She looks horrible, Mandy, absolutely horrible."

I haven't seen her since the club rescued her, but I can only imagine how bad she looks.

“And the baby?”

Doc shrugs, “So far, so good... but the doctor told Turmoil to not get too attached because she went through hell.”

The conversation dies down as we reach his bike, the sleek black paint still shining under the streetlights.

Doc swings a leg over the seat, patting the spot behind him.

Climbing on, I wrap my arms tightly around his waist and we put our helmets on.

The rumble of the engine vibrates through both of us as he kicks it into gear and we start to move.

Wind whips through my hair, tugging at it playfully as we speed up.

I close my eyes and lean against Doc's back, letting everything else fade away in the rush of speed and sensation.

For a while, I just let myself get lost in the moment— in him.

When we finally pull up to the club, it's late, and I'm sure Kat is ready to be finished with babysitting duty.

He parks the bike and we head inside the trailer.

Kat's sitting on the couch, scrolling on her phone. “Hey, how'd it go?”

Doc shrugs, “As good as it could go I guess.”

Kat rises and slides her phone in the back pocket of her jeans. “Well, the little man just fell asleep, so you guys can have some Mommy Daddy time.”

Kat gives me a wink and I hold back a laugh.

Doc doesn’t even correct her when she jokes I’m Kash’s mommy, and I love that.

I love that he’s so okay with the little family we’re creating.

Kat heads for the door, “I’ll see y’all tomorrow.”

When she’s gone I turn to Doc and place both of my hands on either side of his face. “Doc, I have to tell you something, and I need to tell you right now.”



### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Doc

My eyes lock with Mandy's, her gaze heavy with unspoken thoughts.

The air is thick, electric.

I don't know what in the hell she's thinking about, but damn she's freaking me out.

She runs her soft hands against my stubble before pulling them away.

"All right darlin', just spit it out already," I say, forcing a chuckle. "What the hell is on your mind?"

She twists a lock of blonde hair around her finger, biting her plump bottom lip.

Fuck, the way she does that drives me wild.

I push down the surge of lust.

Now isn't the time.

Mandy takes a deep breath, like she's steeling herself. "Doc, these past weeks with you and Kash...it's meant everything to me."

I nod, meeting her intense gaze. "Me too, baby. You know that."

She smiles, but it's shaky.

Tears glimmer in her eyes and it's like a fist around my heart.

Is she about to end things with me?

I can't think of another reason she'd be all teary eyed.

My voice is hoarse as I ask her what I'm thinking about. "Hey, what's wrong?"

A thousand horrible scenarios fly through my head—she's leaving, she regrets us, I'm not enough for her.

Goddamn insecurities rearing their ugly heads.

Mandy shakes her head, sucking in a stuttered breath. "Nothing's wrong. I just... I need you to know how much you mean to me. How much this—us—means to me."

Relief courses through my veins but the nervous energy still buzzes beneath my skin.

I now cup her face in my hands, searching her hazel eyes.

They're deep pools I could drown in. "I feel the same way, darlin'. You're everything to me. You and Kash."

A tear slips down her cheek and I brush it away with my thumb.

She leans into my touch, nuzzling her soft skin against my calloused hand.

My chest constricts with an emotion I'm scared to name.

Mandy places her hand over mine, interlocking our fingers. "Darren, I—" she pauses for a moment and it just about kills me. "I love you. I love you so god damn much."

Another tear falls, followed by another.

I've never seen her cry, but damn she's beautiful doing it. "I love Kash, and I love everything about us. You've taught me what I deserve, and I'm so glad to have this with you."

The words hit me square in the chest, stealing the breath from my lungs.

I never thought I'd hear those three little words from her perfect lips.

Never thought I'd feel this all-consuming love for another person besides my son.

But here we are.

And it's the most incredible feeling in the world.

I crush my mouth to hers, pouring every ounce of emotion into the kiss.

Her fingers thread behind my neck, tugging me closer.

We break apart, both panting for air.

I rest my forehead against hers, our noses brushing. "I love you too, Mandy. So fucking much. I've never felt this way about anyone before."

And it's the god's honest truth.

Sure, I thought I loved other women in the past.

But that doesn't even come close to what I feel for Mandy.

This is intense. All-encompassing. Life-altering.

She smiles through her tears and I swear it's the most beautiful sight I've ever seen.  
"You mean that? You're not just saying it because I did?"

I chuckle softly, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "I mean it with every fiber of my being, darlin'. You're it for me. My endgame."

Mandy surges forward, capturing my lips once more.

I can taste the salt of her tears but I can also feel the curve of her smile.

My heart feels like it might burst out of my chest.

I never knew it was possible to be this happy. This content.

Mandy's shown me what true love is.

I wrap my arms around her tightly, deepening the kiss.

It quickly turns heated, desperate.

Like we can't get enough of each other.

Mandy tugs at my shirt impatiently and I break away just long enough to yank it over my head.

Then my hands are on her, peeling away her clothes until she's bare before me.

"Fuck, you're so beautiful," I growl, drinking in the sight of her curves, her full breasts, the slick heat between her thighs.

I'm already rock hard, straining against my jeans.

Mandy smirks up at me, her eyes dark with desire. "Why don't you show me how beautiful you think I am, Daddy?"

A primal sound rumbles from my chest.

I love when she calls me that.

In a flash, I scoop her up and carry her over to the kitchen island, laying her out on the cool countertops.

She gasps at the sensation but then I'm kissing my way down her body and she forgets everything else.

I take my time worshipping every inch of her silky skin.

Licking, nipping, sucking.

Paying special attention to all the spots that make her moan.

"Oh god, Doc..." she whimpers, back arching as I finally settle between her legs.

I inhale deeply, getting drunk on her scent—her arousal.

I rasp before diving in and feasting on her sweet pussy. "That's it, baby girl. Let Daddy make you feel good."

She cries out, fingers sinking into my shoulders to hold me in place.

I lap at her greedily, savoring her essence on my tongue as I thrust two fingers deep inside her.

Mandy bucks her hips, grinding against my face with a ferocious hunger.

"Fuck, yes! Don't stop," she pants, her inner walls starting to flutter around my digits.

I curl them just right, rubbing that sensitive spot, as I close my lips around her clit.

"Come for me, princess. I want to feel you gush all over Daddy's fingers," I command, my voice vibrating against her flesh.

With a cry, Mandy shatters, her release flooding my hand and mouth.

I work her through it, not letting up until she's shaking and pushing at my head.

Sitting back on my knees, I make a show of licking her juices from my fingers, maintaining eye contact with her blissed out gaze.

"You taste fucking incredible. I'll never get enough," I tell her roughly.

Mandy sits up, her cheeks flushed and chest heaving.

Her lips quirk. "Get those pants off and get up here then. I need my Daddy's big cock stuffed inside me. Now."

I grin wolfishly, quickly standing to shed the rest of my clothes.

My thick erection springs free, the swollen head an angry purplish-red, dripping with

pre-cum.

Gripping the base, I notch myself at Mandy's entrance, rubbing my tip through her slick folds.

We both groan at the contact. "Christ, you're soaked, baby girl. So goddamn ready for me," I growl.

Mandy lifts her hips impatiently. "Always ready for you. Please, I need it. Fill me up!"

With one hard thrust, I bury myself deep inside her tight pussy.

We moan in unison as I stretch her walls, splitting her open on my thick shaft.

"Shit, you take Daddy's cock so well," I praise, slowly withdrawing before slamming back in. "Your hungry little cunt just sucks me right in, doesn't it? Like it was made for me."

"Yes! Oh fuck, you're so deep," Mandy whines, wrapping her legs around my hips. "Harder! I want to be sore tomorrow. Want to feel this for days."

I set a punishing pace, the obscene slap of skin on skin echoing through the room along with our grunts and moans.

My balls draw up with every thrust, smacking against her ass.

"Take it, baby. Fucking take this dick," I snarl. "Milk me dry. Gonna flood this pussy with my cum until it's leaking out of you."

"God yes! Fill me up, Daddy!" Mandy wails, her nails scoring down my back. "I'm so

close! Make me come on your cock!"

Reaching between us, I rub tight circles over her clit in time with my increasingly erratic thrusts.

She clenches down on me like a vice.

"That's it, princess. Come for Daddy. Now," I command gruffly.

With a sharp cry, Mandy flies apart, her walls rippling along my length.

The sensation triggers my own release and I rear back, roaring her name as I empty myself inside her clutching sheath.

I collapse on top of her, both of us panting harshly as we come down from the high.

I pepper kisses along her sweat-dampened skin, murmuring words of praise and devotion.

"I love you," I rasp hoarsely against the crook of her neck. "So fucking much. You're everything to me, Mandy."

She cradles my face in her hands, bringing my head up so she can look into my eyes. Hers are shimmering with unshed tears but her smile is radiant.

"I love you too, Darren. More than anything. You and Kash—you're my whole world now. My family."

My cock grows rigid once more, never getting enough of her.

I thrust deep and hard, the kitchen island creaking under the force of my movements.



Mandy rocks her hips to meet every punishing stroke, her nails raking down my back as she urges me on. "You just love my pussy, don't you?"

I put an iron grip on her hips, "Damn straight I do, baby."

"Fuck, just like that," she pants desperately. "Don't stop, Daddy. I need it harder."

Growling, I comply with her plea, fucking her like a raging lunatic.

She feels too damn good, her slick walls gripping me like a vice.

I angle my hips, searching for that perfect stop.

The trailer door bangs open. "Holy fuck!"

I freeze mid-thrust at the sound of Shiver's voice.

Glancing over my shoulder, I see him standing there gaping at us, eyes wide and mouth hanging open.

"Shit, next time invite me so I can watch," he leers, tongue darting out to wet his lips.

White hot rage slams into me and I quickly grab my discarded shirt, draping it over Mandy to shield her from his perverted gaze.

Easing out of her, I advance on him menacingly, not giving a single fuck that my cock is still hard and jutting out obscenely.

I snarl, shoving him roughly against the wall. "Stop bein' such a fuckin' creep, man!"

Shiver just laughs in my face, completely unfazed. "I'm not a creep, brother. I just

know what I like. You know, it's not nice to kink shame."

The audacity of this asshole!

As if violating our privacy is no big deal.

I'm half tempted to beat the ever-loving shit out of him.

But Mandy's here and the last thing I want is to upset her, plus Kash is asleep.

Jabbing a finger in his face, I growl, "Stay the fuck away from Mandy, got it? She's not some piece of ass for you to drool over."

Mandy calls out hesitantly from behind me. "Doc..."

Shit. I need to get her out of here, away from Shiver's lecherous smirk and innuendos.

I keep my eyes on my brother, talking to my girl. "Baby, go back to my room."

I turn and look at my girl, who's barely keeping my shirt over every part of her.

"Dunno why she's hiding it." Shiver throws up his hands, the sleazeball grin never leaving his face. "I've seen it all before. Many times before."

Rage vibrates through me, threatening to break free, but I force myself to keep it in check for Mandy's sake.

My gaze flicks to my woman.

She's watching me, wide hazel eyes filled with a mix of emotions—fear, embarrassment and something else... trust.

"Go," I command softly, nodding toward the hallway leading to my room.

She doesn't hesitate, disappearing from view immediately.

I let out a breath I didn't even realize I'd been holding and turn my attention back to Shiver.

There's no trace of amusement on my face now as I step closer to him. "You done fucked up this time, brother," I sneer, my voice deadly calm.

His smile falters just slightly.

He takes a step back but taking a step back won't help him.

I'm trying not to be too loud for the sake of my sleeping son. "You need to watch how you talk to my ol' lady, man. You're fuckin' with the wrong person. I'll tell you that much."

Shiver chuckles, "I didn't mean no harm by it brother, just having a little bit of fun. I mean, can you really blame me? Mandy's hot as all hell."

I know she is.

Trust me, I do.

Men can admire her, but I will not tolerate men who think they can say the types of shit he does to her.

Without even giving it a second thought I lose control.

I pop Shiver right in the nose and blood comes gushing out the bottom. "Fuck, man!"

"Keep your comments to yourself," I order lowly, eyes blazing with barely restrained fury. "And if I ever catch you pulling this shit again, I'll rearrange your entire fuckin' face. We clear?"

Shiver holds up his hands in faux-surrender, that infuriating grin still firmly in place. "Crystal, bro. Jesus."

One more smart-ass comment.

Just one more and I swear to Christ...

I head back to my bedroom and shut the door behind me, locking it so we don't get intruded on once more.

My eyes flick over to the crib in the corner where Kash is still miraculously asleep despite the racket.

Fuck.

I urge Mandy over. "Baby girl, c'mere."

She comes over with my shirt draped around her body, but I pull it down and reveal her beautiful silky skin.

I should probably take a break.

Hell, we should probably take a break... but I want her.

I don't waste any time sliding my cock back in her perfect pussy.

She rolls her hips, meeting my movements.

"That's it, baby," I grunt, reaching down to circle her clit with my thumb. "Milk Daddy's dick just like that. Fuck, you're so goddamn perfect."

Mandy lets out a breathy little moan, walls fluttering around me as she gets closer to the edge.

I can feel my own orgasm building, balls drawing up tight.

"Come on, princess," I coax roughly. "Cum all over Daddy's cock. Let me feel you."

That does it.

Mandy comes apart with a sharp cry, body shaking and spasming in my arms.

I cover her mouth with my hand, careful we won't wake Kash up.

I follow right behind, muffling my groan against her neck as I spill deep inside her welcoming body.

For a few moments we just stay like that, chests heaving as we catch our breath.

Carefully, I carry Mandy over to the bed, laying her down and spooning up behind her.

My softening length slips free and I feel a trickle of my release leaking out, but I'm too blissed out to care.

Mandy turns to face me, an amused little smile quirking her lips despite what just happened. "So... are we really not going to talk about that whole thing with Shiver?"

Fuck.

I let out a gruff chuckle, nuzzling into Mandy's neck and breathing in her sweet scent. "Later, baby. Let me enjoy this fuckin' afterglow a bit longer before we get into that shit show."

Mandy rolls her eyes but snuggles closer, slim fingers tracing idle patterns on my chest. "Fine. But don't think you're getting out of this conversation, mister."

"Wouldn't dream of it, princess." I press a kiss to her temple. "Now close those pretty eyes. Daddy needs a power nap to recover from that mind-blowing pussy of yours."

She swats at me playfully but obliges, lashes fluttering shut.

Within minutes, her breathing evens out in sleep.

I lay there holding her, soaking in the peaceful moment while I can.

Because I know it won't last long.

### CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Mandy

I wake to the golden morning light streaming through the window, Doc's warm, muscular arms wrapped around me.

His chest rises and falls steadily against my back as he sleeps.

I smile to myself, savoring his touch for a moment before the urge to pee rouses me.

Slowly, carefully, I slip out from under the duvet, trying to be stealthy as a cat burglar so I don't wake my man.

The cool morning air kisses my bare skin as I tip-toe naked across the cramped bedroom of Doc's double-wide trailer.

I rummage through the two drawers he cleared out for me a few weeks back and pull on a tank top and a pair of cotton shorts.

Before heading to the bathroom, I peek into the bassinet in the corner where little Kash is kicking his chubby baby legs, gurgling and smiling as he entertains himself.

My heart swells at the sight.

The little dude is pure sunshine, even this early.

I do my business quick and splash some water on my face at the sink.

In the mirror, my reflection looks back—blonde hair that's fading into my natural brown at the root, mussed from sleep and other nocturnal activities, lips still a little swollen from Doc's kisses.

There are finger-shaped bruises on my hips from how tightly he gripped me when he drove into me from behind last night.

The sting between my thighs is a delicious reminder.

Kash starts fussing as I dry my face, so I scoop him up and nuzzle his downy head. "Morning, little man. How about some grub, huh?"

I carry him out to the small kitchen, the linoleum cool under my bare feet.

Kash gurgles and grabs at my hair as I mix up a bottle of formula one-handed.

Multitasking like a damn pro.

"Easy, dude. The hair is attached," I joke as I free the blonde strands from his pudgy grip.

He just smiles his gummy baby smile at me.

It's impossible to be annoyed at this pint-sized charmer.

I test the formula on my wrist, then settle onto the threadbare couch to feed him.

He latches on and sucks greedily, his eyes fluttering shut in contentment.



I stroke his silky cheek as he eats, humming "You are my Sunshine" under my breath.

My mind wanders while Kash is busy filling his belly.

To Doc, snoring softly in the other room.

To the way his hands feel roaming my body, calloused and strong.

The intensity in his green eyes when he's buried deep inside me.

I squirm a little on the couch, turned on by my own daydreams.

Damn, that man does things to me.

But he's more than a fantastic lay.

He's given me a place here.

With him, with his son.

He's calling me his girlfriend, his woman, and nothing feels better than that.

It feels right, belonging to Doc this way.

Natural.

Like how I feel cradling Kash—that surge of protectiveness and care.

We're a little family.

Dysfunctional as hell, but still.

"All done, buddy?" I murmur as Kash finishes the bottle, milk dribbling down his chin.

I set it aside and shift him to my shoulder, patting his back in firm strokes until he lets out an impressive belch.

"Atta boy. Takes after your daddy already," I tease.

Doc could probably win belching contests with how loud and long his are.

Such a dude.

Kash's eyelids are drooping now, milk-drunk and ready for a post-breakfast snooze.

I start to rise and carry him back to his bassinet, but a large, tattooed hand on my knee stops me.

"Mornin', darlin'."

Doc's gravelly drawl sends a shiver down my spine.

He's leaning in the bedroom doorway wearing nothing but a pair of black boxer-briefs that hug his muscular thighs and do nothing to hide his sizeable morning wood.

Damn, he's a sight to wake up to.

"Mornin' yourself," I reply, my voice husky. "Sleep well?"

A wicked, satisfied smile spreads across his face. "Sure did. Some sexy little minx rode me like a pogo stick and then passed right out. Reckon that's why."

I roll my eyes but can't hide my smirk. "Glad to be of service."

Doc pushes off the doorframe and comes over to take a now-snoozing Kash from my arms.

He brushes a bristly kiss to the baby's head before tucking him back into his bassinet.

So gentle with him, even with those big, rough biker hands.

It makes my ovaries ache.

When he straightens, his heated gaze finds mine, raking over my body like a physical caress.

He steps closer, right up in my space, and hooks his fingers in the waistband of my shorts to tug me against him.

I can feel how hard he is through the thin cotton.

"Seems to me my sexy little minx deserves a reward for her...services," he rumbles, nuzzling my neck.

Nibbling that sensitive spot behind my ear that makes me melt. "Whaddya say? Ready for round two?"

"Mmm, you mean round twenty-two sweetheart," I hum, tilting my head to give him better access even as I half heartedly protest. "But, I want to get us some breakfast fixed up. Plus, Kash is?—"

Doc slips a hand under my tank top to palm my breast, rolling a nipple between his calloused fingers. "Is sleepin' like a rock."

I jab Doc playfully with my elbow, "Stop it and let me make us some breakfast."

Shiver stumbles out of his room looking like roadkill.

"Oh my god," I can't help but wince at the livid bruising around his nose and eyes, the split in his swollen bottom lip. "You okay?"

"I'll live," he grunts, easing himself down at the dinette with a pained grimace.

He looks up at Doc, then his gaze shifts over to me.

There's something uncharacteristically serious and almost sheepish in his expression. "Listen, Mandy...I'm sorry for all the shit I say sometimes. I don't mean nothin' by it, ya know?"

I'm a bit taken aback by the unexpected apology, but I nod slowly. "I know you don't, Shiver. But it's still not cool. Especially since Doc and I are together."

Shiver rubs the back of his neck, looking chastised. "Yeah, I get it. I'll try to rein it in. I didn't realize you were his ol' lady. Just thought you two were foolin' around." He clears his throat awkwardly. "So uh, we good?"

"We're good," I assure him, flashing a small smile.

Shiver stretches his arms overhead with a groan. "Aight, I gotta head out. Got some club shit to take care of."

He shoots me a smirk.

I roll my eyes, fighting back a smile. "Get outta here, weirdo. And put some ice on that eye!"

Shiver flips me the bird as he gets out of the trailer, careful to not let the door slam shut.

Doc whistles lowly, “Well, I didn’t expect that.”

Humming under my breath, I putter around the small kitchen, assembling ingredients. “Neither did I, but I’m not upset about it.”

Doc’s stomach grumbles, “Gotta go to the shitter, baby. Be back in a bit.”

I almost want to roll my eyes at his bluntness, but what would it even matter?

While he’s gone I whip up some scrambled eggs with cheese and salsa, turkey bacon fried to crispy perfection, toast slathered with butter. Simple but satisfying.

I pile it all on two plates, pouring a mug of strong black coffee for Doc.

He'll need the fuel after last night.

He emerges from the bathroom.

I hold up the steaming mug. "Coffee?"

Doc smiles slow, gaze raking over me in a way that makes my cheeks heat. "Hell yeah. Damn, mama, somethin' smells good."

He pads over and takes the mug, pressing a kiss to my forehead before sinking into one of the rickety kitchen chairs.

I set his plate in front of him and take my own seat, hooking my foot around his ankle under the table. “So, Doc, Shiver mentioned I’m your ol’ lady... so is that what I

am?"

He reaches across the table, capturing my hand in his big, rough one. "Damn straight you are. You're mine, Mandy. I ain't lettin' you go."

My heart flips and I squeeze his fingers. "Good. Because you're stuck with me now, buddy. No take-backsies."

Doc laughs, a deep, rich sound that warms me to my toes. "I'll take that deal, baby girl."

We go back to eating but it's hard to focus on the food when I'm so damn happy I could burst.

Doc wants me.

He's all in.

And god help me, so am I.

Come hell or high water, I'm his.

After we finish eating, I clear the plates while Doc goes to take a shower.

He presses a kiss to my temple as he passes by, making me smile like a lovesick fool.

I wash up the dishes and tidy the kitchen, then head over to the clubhouse to find Zoe.

The main room is mostly empty this early, just a couple prospects milling around.

I spot Zoe perched on a barstool, sipping coffee and scrolling through her phone.

Her face lights up when she sees me.

"Hey girl!" She waves me over. "You're looking chipper this morning. Good night?" Her eyebrows waggle suggestively.

I roll my eyes but can't stop grinning as I hop up on the stool next to her. "Maaaybe. A lady doesn't kiss and tell."

Zoe snorts. "Since when are you a lady? Spill!"

"Fine, fine." I lean in conspiratorially. "So Doc called me his ol' lady..."

"What? Oh my god!" Zoe squeals, throwing her arms around me in a hug that nearly topples us both off our seats. "That happened fast! I'm so happy for you guys."

"Thanks, Z." I squeeze her back just as hard. "It feels really good, you know? Like this is exactly where I'm meant to be."

She pulls back, her expression softening. "I totally get that. Finding your person, your place in this crazy world... There's nothing else like it."

I nod, knowing she understands completely.

The life we've chosen, loving a biker, isn't easy.

It takes strength and loyalty and an iron spine.

But god, is it ever worth it.

Zoe clinks her mug against my shoulder. "Welcome to the ol' lady club, babe. You're gonna rock it."

I clear my throat, shifting gears. "So, I'm glad I ran into you. I actually wanted to talk to you about work stuff too."

Zoe arches a brow. "Oh yeah? What's up?"

"Well, it's been a hot minute since we shot any content together. I don't want us losing momentum, you know?" I trace the rim of my mug.

She nods thoughtfully. "You're right, we should get something on the books soon. What about tomorrow, if you're free?"

I wince. "Oof, tomorrow's no good for me. Kash has a checkup in the morning and then I promised Sakura I'd help her reorganize the med kit supplies."

"No worries, I get it. Hmm..." Zoe taps her chin. "To be honest, I just started my period last night, so I'll probably be out of commission for a couple days anyway."

"Ugh, that blows. You need anything? Chocolate? Advil?" I offer sympathetically.

"Nah, I'm all stocked up, but thanks babe." She smiles wryly. "How about we tentatively plan to shoot in like three days? I should be in the clear by then."

"Works for me. I'll text Spark later and make sure he's good to go too."

We clink mugs to seal the plan.

Then I tilt my head, studying Zoe.

She seems a little subdued compared to her usual firecracker energy.

"Hey, you okay? I mean, besides the obvious crimson tide situation." I nudge her foot



with mine. "How's Seraphina doing?"

Zoe sighs heavily, her shoulders slumping. "She's...I don't know, holding up as best she can, I guess. But fuck, Mandy, she's hurting so bad. I've never seen her like this."

My heart clenches.

I can only imagine the grief and rage Sera must be drowning in right now.

Her mother quite literally had her tortured, her skin ripped from her body, her tattoos carved out like she's a fucking pumpkin.

"I'm not surprised. Something like that, it breaks a person." I reach over and squeeze Zoe's hand. "She's lucky to have you, you know. Don't underestimate how much your support means. In time, I know she'll make it through this."

"I'm trying my best to be there for her, I just...I feel so damn helpless sometimes." She looks down, blinking back tears. "She barely leaves the trailer. I don't think she'll be around the clubhouse much until she starts to feel even a little better."

"Maybe we could go visit her in a few days, if she's up for it? Not to smother her or anything, just to remind her she's got people in her corner."

Zoe nods slowly. "Yeah, that's a good idea. I'll text her later and see what she thinks."

We sit in heavy silence for a moment, the crushing unfairness of it all filling the space between us.

This life gives so much, but god, it can rip your fucking heart out too.

I finally take a breath, injecting some forced lightness into my tone. "Well, in the

meantime, is there anything fun on the agenda for tonight? I could use a distraction from...everything."

Zoe straightens up, mustering a smile. "Actually, yes. Spark's taking me out to that fancy new steakhouse downtown. Says I deserve a nice night after all the shit that's gone down."

"Ooh la la!" I grin, wagging my eyebrows. "Sounds like you're in for some wining, dining, and sixty-nineing tonight!"

She barks out a surprised laugh, her eyes regaining a bit of their usual sparkle. "Here's hoping! God knows we could both use some stress relief."

"You can say that again." I clink my mug against hers. "To blowing off steam and riding dick like a pony!"

We break into a fit of laughter, the heaviness lifting for a precious moment.

Our world may be chaotic and treacherous...but at least we have each other to lean on through the storms.

We keep chatting about a variety of other things until I shift the conversation to something a bit more serious. "So, how do you not get psyched out about all the dangers that come with the club life?"

Zoe takes a thoughtful sip of her coffee before answering.

"Girl, it ain't easy," she admits with a solemn nod. "Sometimes it feels like the whole world is just waiting to pounce on us. I was born into this life, though, so I didn't have much of a choice."

She sets her mug down, turning to fully face me.

Her eyes are somber but determined. "But the way I see it, danger is part of life. Doesn't matter if you're in a club or not. You can't live in fear of the what-ifs."

She shrugs a little, gesturing broadly around us at the clubhouse. "And besides, being a part of this... It's worth any risk. These people are my family. This place is my home. I'd fight tooth and nail for it, and I know each and every one of them would do the same for me."

Zoe's words echo in my head, seeping into my heart.

Her raw honesty strikes something deep within me.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that when you love something enough, the danger doesn't seem so scary anymore," Zoe says, holding my gaze steadily. "You lean on each other, trust each other to watch your back. That's what makes this club so damn special."

I nod slowly, her words sinking in.

It's true.

Despite the treacherous world around us, I've never felt safer than when I'm with Doc and the rest of the Reapers Rejects MC.

"Thanks for that, Z," I say sincerely. "I needed to hear it."

Zoe flashes me a small, knowing smile. "Anytime, babe."

### CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Doc

I pull into the gas station, my bike rumbling beneath me.

The night air is cool on my skin as I kill the engine and swing my leg over the side.

As I'm unscrewing the gas cap, a prickling sensation washes over me, like eyes boring into the back of my skull.

I glance up and lock gazes with an older man leaning against a rusty pickup truck, openly staring at me.

His eyes are cold and calculating.

It only takes a second for recognition to click into place.

Even though it's been a couple of weeks, I'll never forget that cruel fucking face.

Tony—Mandy's perverted asshole of a stepdad.

Rage ignites in my gut, spreading through my veins like wildfire.

I slam the nozzle back into the pump and stalk toward him, my hands balling into fists at my sides.

I growl when I reach him. "The fuck you doing here?"

Up close, I can see the threads of silver in his greasy hair, the deep lines etched around his eyes and mouth.

Tony smirks at me, completely unphased by the fury radiating off me in waves. "Well, well. If it isn't the scumbag biker my stepdaughter's been spreading her legs for. Small world, ain't it?"

My fists are clenched, anger simmering under my skin. "What the fuck are you still doing here?" I spit out.

Tony just chuckles, the sound like nails on a chalkboard. "What, Amanda didn't tell you? I moved here."

His eyes glint with sick amusement.

My mind reels with questions.

How would Mandy know that?

Why wouldn't she tell me?

As if reading my thoughts, Tony smirks. "I ran into her at the cafe in your building. So funny to think we're all neighbors now."

White hot rage surges through my veins.

The thought of this predator being anywhere near Mandy makes me see red.

I want to pummel that smug look right off his face.

A sick feeling settles in the pit of my stomach.

I know exactly why Mandy told Tony that was my apartment—she didn't want the bastard knowing where she really lived.

Can't say I blame her, considering the shit he put her through growing up.

It also explains why she's been crashing at my trailer on the club grounds more and more lately.

She must've known Tony was sniffing around, maybe even trying to track her down.

Fuck, I should've seen this coming.

I force myself to keep still, jaw clenched so hard my teeth ache. "Mandy wants nothing to do with you," I grit out. "So I suggest you stay the hell away from her if you know what's good for you."

"Or what?" he taunts, stepping closer. The reek of stale cigarettes and booze wafts off him. "You'll kick my ass? Please. I ain't scared of you, boy."

I curl my lip in disgust. "You should be. Because if you so much as look at her wrong, I'll do a lot worse than kick your ass." The threat comes out low and lethal.

Tony just laughs, cold and brittle. "Big talk. But I've known Amanda a lot longer than you have. There are things about her...things she's done...that would make even a tough guy like you think twice about having her be your woman."

Bullshit.

I know exactly what kind of man Tony is, the vile things he's capable of.

Nothing he says about Mandy could change how I feel.

"You don't know shit about her," I snarl. "Or me. So take my advice and crawl back into whatever hole you slithered out of. Because trust me—you don't want me as an enemy."

We stare each other down, the tension stretching taut between us.

I can practically feel his wheels turning, trying to figure out if I'm serious or just blowing smoke.

He chuckles, "Well, you're gonna have to get used to it since I've moved out here permanently and all."

He's got to be kidding. This can't fucking be permanent.

Licking my lips, I need to get down to the thick of this. "Why are you out here?"

Tony's expression completely shifts. "I needed a fresh start, boy. My old life wasn't any good, so I'm here to try to give it another go."

I don't buy what he's selling for one second.

I grab the piece of shit by his shirt and slam him up against the stone gas station wall. "I don't know what the fuck you're smilin' about," I growl in his ear.

Tony's grin widens, eyes glinting with malice. "I'm smilin' because you know why I'm here. She stole from me, and I'm not the kind of bastard who gets crossed and doesn't pay 'em back."

That's when I snap.

My fist is a blur as it connects with his jaw, snapping his head back and sending a few teeth flying.

Tony stumbles but doesn't go down, which only fuels my rage further.

Not that I needed any more reasons to hate his guts, but damn if he isn't dedicated to proving just how much lower than scum he really is.

"You lay so much as a finger on her, I'll make you wish you'd never been born," I hiss, voice low and menacing.

Tony massages his jaw, smirking through the blood and pain. "You're in for a rude awakening, pretty boy."

"I will make myself abundantly clear. You're not gonna lay a hand on my woman."

Tony laughs once more, "Oh, I'm gonna lay more than my hand on her for what she did—or put something in her."

Tony's smirk only fuels the rage boiling inside me.

I lose it.

There isn't even a moment of hesitation.

I don't care that I'm technically in public.

This gas station doesn't get enough traffic for me to be overly concerned about it.

"You touch her, you goddamn piece of shit, so help me—" I launch myself at him, my hands wrapping around his skinny neck before he can even blink.



Pressing down with all my strength, I watch as the color drains from his face, his eyes bulging out of their sockets like a goddamn cartoon character. "You so much as breathe in her direction, I'll put you six feet under, you hear me?"

He flails beneath me, gasping like a fish out of water.

It's fucking music to my ears—this fucker getting a taste of his own fucking medicine.

But I know I can't get carried away.

All I want to do is gut him like a fucking fish, but I can't do that here.

Tony eventually goes unconscious and I'm so fucking glad.

I pull out my phone and punch in Jolt's number from memory.

He picks up on the second ring. "Yo, what's good Doc?" His deep baritone fills the line.

"Need you and Turmoil to bring the van down to the Chevron a couple miles away from the club. Got a situation that needs handling."

A brief pause, then, "We'll be there in ten. You good until we get there?"

I nod even though he can't see me. "Yeah, but make it quick. Bastard might come to before you get here."

"On it. Be there in five."

The line clicks dead and I slide the phone back in my cut, glancing down at Tony's

unconscious form crumpled against the station wall.

Squatting down, I check his pulse—thready but there.

Wouldn't want the fucker dying before I'm done with him.

I debate securing his wrists and ankles with the zip ties now, but figure it's better to wait.

Last thing I need is some good samaritan rolling up, seeing a grown ass man hog tied, and getting ideas about calling the cops.

Nah, he'll still be out cold when the guys get here.

Headlights cut across the gas station lot minutes later.

A black van rolls up and Jolt jumps out of the driver's seat, while Turmoil comes out of the passenger seat.

Turmoil eyes Tony with disgust. "Who the fuck is that?"

Oh shit, they don't know anything about her step-father. "Tony, Mandy's step-father. He's been harassing her these last few weeks. Ran into him here and he said some things about her that I'd rather not repeat."

Jolt just shakes his head. "Play stupid games..."

Turmoil finishes, "Win stupid prizes."

He pops the back doors, gesturing inside.

The three of us pick Tony up and toss him in the back.

I then hog tie him so if he wakes up he won't create a problem for the boys.

Jolt looks over at me. "Where are we takin' him?"

The club has a shit ton of property, so I'm sure there's some place we can handle Tony that's far enough away from everyone.

I don't want anyone knowing what I'm about to do, anyone except Turmoil and Jolt.

I glance at the unconscious form of Tony. "We're going to take him way out into the desert, where no one will be able to hear his screams."

Turmoil's lip curls. "Fuck yeah, I'm all for that."

"Are you sure about this, Doc?" Jolt asks, expression serious.

He's a wild card, but also the closest thing we've got to a voice of reason out of the prospects in the club.

I don't hesitate in reassuring him. "I'm fucking positive."

With a grim nod, Jolt eases back behind the wheel while Turmoil climbs into the back with Tony.

As the van rumbles to life and they pull out of the gas station, I head for my bike and roll out behind them.

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The desert is quiet when we finally stop driving, except for the occasional gust of wind whipping through the dry scrub and cactus.

Turmoil drags Tony out of the van, throwing him onto the sandy ground like a sack of garbage.

His groans and grunts of pain bring a sadistic smile to my face.

"Ah, look who's finally awake," I drawl, crouching down in front of him. "You picked a real bad time to piss me off, Tony."

He just stares back at me, eyes wide with fear.

Good.

I want him scared.

We sit there for a minute, me watching him squirm in the dirt, him trying and failing to comprehend the shit storm he's just found himself in.

"I'm...I'm sorry, Doc," Tony stammers out. "I didn't mean nothing by it. I'll leave, you won't ever see me again."

His words don't change anything.

He's had his chances, too many of them.

"You should've thought of that earlier, Tony," I reply coolly. "Now it's too late."

His eyes dart between me and Turmoil, desperate and pleading.

He's not getting any sympathy from us.

Jolt steps forward then, handing me a dirty scrap of cloth.

I take it without question, knowing exactly what it's for.

"Gag him," he says simply.

I nod and move toward Tony who starts to thrash around on the ground in a futile attempt to escape his fate.

"Easy now," I say mockingly.

I forcefully stuff the gag in his mouth, muffling his desperate pleas for mercy.

His eyes bulge out and tears start rolling down his face, smudging the desert dust on his cheeks.

Turmoil leans back against the van, arms crossed over his chest, watching as I kneel beside Tony.

His aqua blue eyes are icy cold—there's no sympathy there, only ruthless determination.

"Should've left Mandy alone," he states, and there's a hard edge to his voice that's not usually there.

He's angry because Mandy is my ol' lady, and the last thing anyone wants is for our women to be in danger.

You mess with one of us, you mess with all of us—that's how it works in this club.

My fists fly relentlessly, each hit bringing a muffled groan from Tony.

Every bruise, every drop of blood I draw is for Mandy.

Tony's face becomes unrecognizable, swollen and bloody.

But there's no remorse in me, not for this bastard.

He made his bed when he chose to come after Mandy.

My hands ache, slick with blood and sweat but I don't stop until I feel a hand on my shoulder.

It's Jolt.

"That's enough, Doc," he says, his voice somber.

I look down at Tony, gasping and wheezing through the cloth gag.

His chest is rising and falling unevenly—each breath seemingly a struggle.

I rip the gag from his bloody mouth. "Tell me how you really fuckin' got here," I demand, my voice echoing in the quiet desert night.

Tony's eyes flicker to mine and for a moment, he seems like he might refuse.

But then his head lolls back and he coughs, spewing a spray of blood onto the sand below us.

"Sally Bernard...hired me...foreman for Bernard Industrials," he gasps out between ragged breaths. "I look over the construction on the casino sites...and she got me that

fuckin' condo."

The words hang in the air for a moment.

"She told me...my step-daughter was hitting it big and rich...so I came for my money," he finishes weakly.

His confession sends shockwaves through me, my mind racing to connect the dots.

But before I can even begin to understand what this all means, Turmoil's voice breaks through, "Sally did this on purpose. She knows more about the people close to the club than we realized..."

Turmoil's words echo in my mind as I stare down at the broken man beneath me.

Sally Bernard—she will do anything and harm anyone to get what she wants.

I feel my blood boil, rage burning through every inch of me.

Turmoil steps forward, his aqua eyes hardened like steel.

He understands the implications better than anyone else in this godforsaken desert tonight.

I clench my fists so hard that my knuckles threaten to break, and I let loose, beating Tony into oblivion.

He gags and coughs louder with each punch, until finally his wheezing takes over everything.

I grab the gag and ball it up, shoving it down his fucking throat.

He won't ever hurt Mandy ever again, and he won't be following her either.

Finally, Tony doesn't make one move.

It's done.

The fucker is dead.

"This it?" I ask Jolt, nodding to Tony's broken form.

His gaze meets mine before he finally nods. "Yeah, we need to wrap this up. The ladies were makin' that dinner for us all tonight, remember?"

I glance down at my bloodied fists, then back up at Jolt. "Right. Let's finish this."

Turmoil steps back up to us, his eyes hard and unyielding as he looks down at Tony's lifeless body. "Should we..."

"Leave him." My voice is hollow, the rage slowly seeping out of me, leaving a cold emptiness. "The desert will take care of him. Scorpions. Coyotes. Wild dogs."

Jolt doesn't say anything else, just gives a nod before heading back to the van.

It's Turmoil who lingers, his eyes on Tony's broken form. "You sure about this, Doc? Cops could find the body."

I look at him, really look at him.

Turmoil is a good guy.

He's tough, loyal, and relentless,. but even he has limits.



People think we're monsters because we wear cuts and ride bikes, but the truth is far from it.

We're just men... men who'll do anything to protect what's ours.

"Let the animals feast on his body.." I answer simply.

### CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Mandy

I knock on the door to Zoe's modular, balancing a tray of coffees and pastries in my other hand.

The ladies have decided to throw together a big dinner for the boys tonight, so I figured I might as well bring by a snack.

Camila and Kat said they needed coffee stat, and to be honest, so do I.

Kash hasn't been sleeping well the past couple of days and instead of waking Doc up, I've been letting him sleep... which means I am the most tired I've ever been in my life.

The door swings open and there stands Zoe, her ombré hair piled on top of her head in a messy bun.

She ushers me inside. "Thank God, I'm dying for some caffeine."

The smell of fresh brewed coffee fills the small space.

Zoe's little home is cozy but tidy, the shelves lined with knickknacks and framed photos of the club.

A fluffy gray cat snoozes on the back of the couch.

My eyes land on Seraphina curled up in the armchair, wrapped in a fuzzy blanket.

Fading bruises cloud her alabaster skin and a red scar slashes across her forehead.

But her gray eyes are as sharp and fierce as ever as she accepts the latte I hold out.

"How you holding up, Sera?" I ask gently, taking a seat on the couch.

She shrugs. "Could be worse. At least I'm not locked in that bloody hellhole anymore. And the little nugget is doing okay." She rests a hand on her stomach, the smallest of smiles touching her red lips.

Zoe plops down beside me, reaching for a cheese danish. "We're all damn relieved to have you back. Those assholes are gonna pay for what they did to you."

Sera's eyes flash. "Oh, they will. Every last one of them, including my mum."

Her voice is laced with venomous promise.

A chill runs down my spine at the dark look on her face.

I have no doubt Sera is out for blood, and heaven help anyone who gets in her way.

Part of me admires her ruthless strength.

The other part is a little terrified of it.

Zoe casts me a loaded glance, clearly sharing my thoughts.

She leans forward, resting her elbows on her knees. "So what's the plan, Sera? How do we take these bastards down?"

Sera takes a long sip of her latte before answering. "My grandfather and I have already set the wheels in motion. We're going to dismantle their entire operation piece by piece, starting with the businesses."

"The casino, the brothels, all of it?" I ask.

She nods, a smug smile curving her lips. "We own the majority shares. They won't know what hit them until it's too fucking late."

The scope of her vision is staggering.

"Fucking brilliant," Zoe declares with a low whistle. "You're one cold, calculating bitch and I love it. They messed with the wrong woman."

Sera's answering grin is sharp enough to cut glass. "Damn right they did. By the time I'm done, my mum will be wishing she never laid a finger on me. Her little empire will be nothing but ashes."

As I listen to Sera detail her ruthless plot for vengeance, a thrill shoots through me, electric and addicting.

This is the kind of high stakes drama I normally watch on my TV screen, and here it is, happening right in front of me.

Watching Sera's transformation from battered victim to avenging angel is like watching a phoenix rise from the flames—terrifying and mesmerizing all at once.

I glance over at Zoe and see the same hungry gleam in her eyes.

We're two of a kind, me and her, drawn to chaos like moths to a flame.

And Sera is the brightest inferno I've ever seen.

The more she talks, the more I can picture it—the Bernard empire crumbling to dust, Sera rising victorious from the rubble to take her rightful place as queen.

It's like something out of a dark fairy tale and I'm utterly spellbound.

For a moment, I allow myself to imagine being a part of it.

Finally putting my devious mind to good use, fighting by Sera and Zoe's side to take down the villains who hurt our friend.

The temptation is so strong I can almost taste it.

But then reality comes crashing back in and I shake my head, dispelling the fantasy.

I'm not a soldier or a vigilante. I'm just a camgirl with a talent for trouble.

Whatever Sera has planned, it's way above my paygrade.

No, my place is here on the sidelines, playing the supporting role.

Bringing Zoe and Sera coffee and pastries, lending an ear when they need it, but staying far away from the actual bloodshed.

I'm a lover, not a fighter.

Still, as Sera's voice rises with ferociousness, I can't help but feel a flicker of wicked anticipation.

The Bernard matriarch has no idea the sleeping dragon she's awoken in her daughter

by putting her through that hell.

And when Sera unleashes her fury, it's going to be one hell of a show.

I settle back against the couch cushions and take a bite of raspberry strudel, letting the sweet flaky pastry melt on my tongue.

Outside the modular walls, the club bustles with its usual activity—motorcycles rumbling, men shouting and laughing, music blasting.

But in here, in this little female sanctuary, we're having some much needed girl time, enjoying one another's company.

The door to the modular swings open and in strolls Kat, Camila, Ivy and Indra, their arms laden with shopping bags.

"All right bitches, the cavalry has arrived!" Kat announces with a grin, plopping her bags down on the kitchen counter. "I think we've got everything we need for that massive dinner we have planned tonight."

Camila rolls her eyes but can't hide her smile. "We put all the groceries in the clubhouse kitchen already. I know you can't possibly tell, but Kat insisted on stopping at every boutique on the way here. I think she single-handedly kept the Las Vegas economy afloat today."

"Hey, it's called retail therapy for a reason," Kat retorts, throwing herself onto the couch beside me. "Nothing like blowing your man's money on overpriced shoes to brighten the mood, am I right ladies?"

A chorus of "hell yeahs" echoes through the small space.

I chuckle and shake my head.

Kat's ability to fearlessly speak her mind is one of the things I love most about her.

With this group, there's never a need to hold back your feelings out of wanting to be polite.

As the girls unpack the spoils of their shopping excursion, I glance over at Sera.

She's been unusually quiet since the others arrived, staring pensively out the window, her fingers clenched tight around her latte.

I scoot closer and gently bump her shoulder with mine. "Hey, you okay sweetie? You've barely said a word since the wrecking crew blew in."

Sera sighs heavily and turns to face me, her gray eyes stormy with emotion. "I'm just so angry, Mandy. Angry that my mum would dare to do this to me. To put my child at risk like that."

Her hand drifts to her still flat stomach, a protective instinct. "The doctors said it's a miracle the baby survived, after everything. That I could have easily lost it. And now..."

She shakes her head, jaw clenched. "Now I want to make her pay. I want to take that bitch down completely, once and for all. And she's doing this all to avenge my father... but I can imagine he'd be furious if he knew she almost killed me and my unborn child."

The venom in Sera's normally refined voice takes me aback for a moment.

This is a side of her I've never seen before—a fierce mama bear ready to tear apart

anyone who threatens her cub.

"I get that, trust me," I reassure her, rubbing a soothing hand down her back. "But you know the club will always have your back, right? None of us will rest until your egg donor pays for what she did."

Sera nods, some of the tension easing from her shoulders. "I know. And I'm grateful, truly. But this is personal now. I can't just sit back and let everyone else fight my battles."

Her eyes take on a determined gleam. "I have my own plans in motion too. My grandfather has been feeding me information, gathering evidence against my mother and her corrupt empire."

This catches my interest. "Is your granddad helping beyond the stuff with the businesses? I remember Camila said he's the one who gave them the address where your mom was keeping you hostage?"

"He did," Sera confirms. "But that's not all. He's been my mole on the inside, keeping tabs on my mother's activity, her accounts, properties. Anything that could help take her down. He's acting like he can't believe what I did, playing out the whole double agent angle. My mum will never suspect him."

She huffs out a frustrated breath. "But ever since the club rescued me from that damn wellness center, my mother's gone suspiciously silent. Vanished without a trace. She's even abandoned her businesses, leaving everything in chaos. That's how me and my grandfather are making our moves so effortlessly. The shareholders don't like the position mum's left them in."

An uneasy feeling prickles at the base of my skull.



I've seen firsthand how cold and calculating Sera's mother can be.

For her to just up and disappear like this, without so much as a power play or parting threat...it worries me that she has something else tucked up her sleeve.

But I try to push those fears aside for now, focusing on supporting my friend. "Hey, we'll figure this out, okay? You've got some pretty fucking brilliant and badass minds in your corner. If anyone can smoke out the wicked witch of Westminster, it's this crew."

That manages to coax a small smile from Sera, and a heartfelt laugh. "I suppose you're right. Between my grandfather's intel, the club's strategic prowess, and my own thirst for vengeance...my mother won't know what hit her. And we're not from Westminster, but God that was a bloody good joke."

"Damn straight," Kat chimes in, clearly having been eavesdropping on our conversation.

She leans over the back of the couch, her expression serious for once. "Listen up, Sera. You're a Reaper now, you hear me? The ol' lady to one of our prospects, carrying the next generation in your belly. That makes you untouchable."

Kat's eyes flash with fierce loyalty. "So you just focus on growing that little prince or princess, yeah? Let us handle the rest. Because trust and believe, we won't let that cunt lay another finger on you or the nugget, even if we have to burn all of England to the ground to do it."

Sera blinks rapidly, clearly touched by the outpouring of support. "Thank you, Kat. All of you. I've never had real female friends before...I didn't realize what I was missing until now."

Kat quips, lightening the emotional mood. "Aww, shit girl, you're gonna make me ruin my mascara."

She vaults over the couch to plop between Sera and me, throwing an arm around each of us.

"Now, enough of this doom and gloom crap! It's Saturday, the kid's are at Gemma's, and we've got an entire confectionary cornucopia just begging to be devoured. So let's stuff our faces, watch trashy reality TV, and cook up a nice dinner for everyone in a couple of hours. What do ya say?"

The tension shatters as we all burst into laughter.

So I settle in, squashed between two good friends on this beaten up couch that's seen more action than Jenna Jameson.

It's just another lazy Saturday with my fellow ol' ladies on the compound.

The day continues in a whirl of laughter, gossip and food.

Kat's idea to binge watch trashy reality TV turns out to be surprisingly entertaining, further cementing the bond between us.

Sera loosens up more with every passing hour, her laughter echoing through the modular.

As the sun starts to sink, painting the sky outside with hues of purple and pink, I help Camila in the clubhouse kitchen start prepping dinner.

The smell of roast chicken wafts tantalizingly from the oven, mixing with the aroma of garlic bread that Ivy is buttering at the counter.

"Damn, it smells so good in here," Zoe comments as she strolls into the kitchen, a sleepy Kash clinging onto her shoulder.

She's just woken him up from his afternoon nap and his chubby cheeks are flushed from sleep. "What's on the menu tonight?"

Camila grins at her over her shoulder. "We've got roast chicken with mashed potatoes, green beans, salad and garlic bread.

"And for dessert," Ivy chimes in, "we've got a chocolate mousse that's going to make you drool."

Zoe grins and bounces Kash gently on her hip. "Sounds great, I'll shoot off a text to the guys and let them know dinner will be ready soon."

She disappears down the hallway, Kash's soft giggles fading with them.

I can't help but remember how this felt when this was all new to me, when I was the outsider looking in.

Now, I'm one of the ladies, and I can't imagine being anywhere else.

As if reading my thoughts, Camila glances over at me, her eyes softening. "You look like you're a million miles away," she notes.

I chuckle and shake my head. "Nah, just appreciating what we have here. It feels...it feels like home."

She gives me a knowing nod. "Because it is. This is our home, and you're part of our family."

### CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Doc

I park my bike in the lot as Jolt and Turmoil pull the van up next to me.

Dinner must've just started—I can smell the roast chicken wafting out from inside.

We walk in together and I spot Mandy sitting at our usual spot, feeding little Kash with a bottle.

His chubby hands grasp at it eagerly.

She looks up and smiles when she sees me—that smile always hits me right in the gut.

I head over, lean down and kiss her forehead. "How are my two favorite people today?"

She grins up at me. "We're great, especially now that you're here."

Fuck, what did I ever do to deserve her?

I take a seat next to her as the guys spread out, grabbing plates and joining in the rowdy conversations already in full swing.

Turmoil plops down across from us with a heaping plate.

"Where were you three off to in such a rush earlier?" Mandy asks curiously.

I squeeze her thigh reassuringly under the table. "Just had to take care of some quick business, babe. Nothing to worry about."

No way in hell am I telling her about the shit that went down with her scumbag stepfather today.

She doesn't need those images in her pretty little head.

I dig into my food, half-listening to Turmoil regale the table with another one of his crazy stories, complete with wild hand gestures.

But my mind keeps drifting back to earlier, in the desert.

The look of pure fear in that pathetic bastard's eyes as he was trying to reason with me, begging me to let him go.

He got off too easy if you ask me.

But that's done now.

I glance over at Mandy cooing softly to Kash and feel a sudden rush of fierce protectiveness.

Ain't nothing ever gonna hurt my girl or my boy, I'll make damn sure of that.

They're my whole fucking world.

As if sensing my gaze, Mandy looks up and our eyes meet.

In that moment, the rest of the clubhouse, the chatter and raucous laughter, it all just fades away.

It's just us.

Our own little family.

And I'd burn the world to ashes to keep them safe.

I drop my head, planting a tender kiss on the top of Kash's fuzzy little head before capturing Mandy's lips in a searing kiss, not giving a single fuck about the hoots and hollers from my brothers around the table.

"Later, baby," I murmur against her mouth, a dark promise.

Her cheeks flush prettily and her eyes sparkle with anticipation.

Damn, she's going to be the death of me.

Dixon, the VP, slides into the seat beside me, his expression unreadable.

Fuck. What does he know?

"Hey, what's up?" I ask casually, even as my gut clenches.

Dixon takes a swig of his beer, eyeing me intently. "Got a minute, Doc? There's something you and I need to discuss."

I exchange a quick glance with Mandy, seeing the flicker of concern in her eyes.

I give her hand a reassuring squeeze before standing up. "Sure thing. Lead the way."

As I follow Dixon to the back room, I mentally steel myself for whatever shitstorm is about to rain down on me.

Dixon shuts the door behind us with a soft click, the tension in the room so thick I could cut it with my knife.

He leans against the desk, crossing his arms over his broad chest. "You want to tell me what the hell that was all about earlier, brother? You, Jolt, and Turmoil were all gone. Van was missing, and not even a peep to any full patches or officers."

I mirror his stance, keeping my expression carefully neutral. "I apologize. There was a situation that needed immediate attention, and wasn't thinkin'. I called on the guys to come help and they came, so if anyone's to blame for it, it's me."

Dixon's jaw clenches, his gaze hardening. "I don't care about thatbullshit, Doc. If you need help, we'll fuckin' help you. You took the van without clearing it with any officers or patches. That shit doesn't fly here and you fucking know it. If you need help, you ask for it. Club property isn't just yours to take any damn time you feel like it."

I drag a hand down my face, exhaling heavily.

Fuck it, might as well come clean. "It was Mandy's stepfather. The scumbag ended up in Vegas and was stalking her. I had to handle it."

Dixon's eyebrows shoot up to his hairline. "Handle it how exactly?"

I take a deep breath, meeting Dixon's steely gaze head on. "The fucker got a job at Bernard Industrials. They set him up with a condo in the same building as Mandy's place. Too much of a coincidence, if you ask me."

There's a knock at the door and Turmoil steps forward, drawing Dixon's attention. "I wasn't eavesdropping, but I did come here to talk to you too. Doc's right. Bernard found the asshole affordable housing, which just happened to be where Mandy lives. Seems pretty fucking fishy."

Dixon rubs his chin, processing this new information. "Bernard Industrials...are we certain Sally Bernard owns it?"

"Oh, Sally Bernard owns it," I supply, watching the realization dawn on Dixon's face. "And we all know that vindictive bitch has had it out for the club ever since Lunatic got killed."

Dixon nods slowly, the pieces starting to fall into place. "So you think Sally planted Mandy's stepdad here to fuck with you? Get under the club's skin?"

"It adds up," Turmoil chimes in. "Sera shows up out of the blue, then this prick conveniently lands a cushy job and pad in Mandy's building? Not buying that it's a random twist of fate. Then we know Sera's mom found her out and all that, we got Sera out of that hellhole...but I think her mother had shit in motion already, and I don't think Mandy's step-father will be the last of 'em."

I clench my fists, anger simmering in my veins.

If that conniving cunt thought she could send my girl's demons after her, she's got another thing coming.

I will never let anything bad happen to her. Her or Kash.

I'll burn her whole fucking world down for them before I let anyone lay a hand on what's mine.



Dixon must sense the fury radiating off me because he places a firm hand on my shoulder. "We'll get to the bottom of this. No one fucks with the Reapers Rejects and gets away with it. Especially not some stuck-up British bitch with a score to settle. Still, don't ever take shit from the club without clearin' it with someone again, or you'll have hell to pay."

I nod, jaw tight. "I'm sorry about that, Dixon, truly." I turn to Turmoil. "Thanks for having my back today, man. I owe you one."

Turmoil waves me off. "Nah, you'd do the same for any of us. That's what brothers are for." He flashes me a grin. "Plus, I can't wait to see the look on Sally's face when she realizes her little scheme blew up in her plastic ass."

A short bark of laughter escapes me.

Leave it to Turmoil to find the humor in this fucked up situation.

But he's not wrong.

When the club is done with her, that stone cold bitch will wish she never set foot in Vegas.

I give Dixon a stern look, but my seriousness overweighs everything else. "I don't want Mandy knowing what we did to her stepfather," I mutter under my breath.

Dixon eyes me curiously, taking a final drag from his cigarette before flicking it in the ashtray "What did you do?"

I meet his gaze directly. "What I had to do. He's out in the desert now where the scorpions, coyotes, or wild dogs will take care of him."

Understanding dawns in Dixon's eyes and he gives a curt nod of approval. He claps me on the back. "All right boys, enough business talk for now. Let's get our asses to the dinner table before the girls come looking for us and bust our hides. You know how Indra gets when her food starts getting cold."

We all share a knowing chuckle.

Dixon's ol' lady may be small, but she's got a fiery temper to match that fiery hair of hers.

And ain't nobody wants to be on the receiving end of it.

As we make our way into the main area of the clubhouse, the mouthwatering aroma of roasted chicken and garlic bread wraps around us like a warm hug.

My stomach lets out an appreciative growl, reminding me I haven't eaten a damn thing since breakfast.

We all head back out to the main area and I return to my seat beside Mandy.

She arches a brow, "What was that about?"

I shrug, "Nothing too important, baby."

My fingers trail absently over Kash's peach fuzz hair as he suckles eagerly at the bottle, tiny hands pawing at the sides.

The kid's got a healthy appetite, just like his old man.

Mandy watches us with a soft smile, love shining in her eyes. "He's been fussy today, fighting sleep. I think he was waiting up for you."

"That so, little man?" I stroke a finger down Kash's round cheek. "Keeping your mama on her toes already. Atta boy."

Mandy rolls her eyes playfully, bumping her shoulder into mine. "Like father, like son. You're both determined to run me ragged."

A wicked grin tugs at my mouth. "Don't pretend you don't love every second of it, sweetheart. Besides, I can think of far more fun ways to wear you out..."

Color blooms on Mandy's cheeks and she ducks her head, peeking at me through long lashes. "Behave, Doc. There are children present."

Chuckling, I loop an arm around her shoulders and tug her close, relishing her warm curves pressed against my side. "Never been much good at behavin', baby. You know that."

We sit like that as the chatter swirls around us, I take Kash from her arms.

Mandy's head is tucked into the crook of my neck while Kash dozes off in wonderland.

For the first time all day, the restless itch under my skin settles.

We settle in to eat, Mandy urges me to give Kash back to her.

I know better than to argue with her, so I hand him back.

Mandy deftly juggles Kash and her own plate with the skill of a mother who's learned to multitask like a pro.

The conversation flows easily around us, the usual loud bullshitting and crazy stories.

Jolt regales us with the story of this crazy bitch he hooked up with last week, complete with wild hand gestures and exaggerated facial expressions that has the table roaring.

Spark chimes in with his own exploits, him and Zoe sharing heated looks that tell me they'll be tearing up a room later.

For the first time in days, I feel myself relax, the tension bleeding from my muscles.

This is what I need—my brothers, my family, the familiar pulse and energy of the clubhouse wrapped around me like a worn leather cut.

Everything else—the shit with Mandy's stepdad, worrying about Ma, club business—it all fades to background noise for a little while as I let myself just live in this moment with my favorite girl and our beautiful boy in my arms and my chosen family surrounding me.

After dinner, Mandy and I retreat to the trailer we share with Shiver, Kash snugly tucked into my arms.

The rest of the club are down in the clubhouse, getting their fill of booze and bullshit, but tonight I just want to be with my family.

Our trailer is a sanctuary away from the chaos of club life.

It's simple and clean, a big bed taking up most of the space with a small crib set up in the corner for Kash.

We finally traded in that bassinet for something a little more permanent.

I settle Kash in his crib, watching as his little chest rises and falls with peaceful

slumber.

There's something powerful about being a father, something primal that kicks in when you see your own blood sleeping peacefully under your protection.

I turn around to find Mandy already changed into a comfy oversized shirt of mine that barely reaches her mid-thighs.

My heart skips a beat at the sight of her looking so casually sexy.

Her eyes meet mine across the dimly lit room, her hazel eyes glowing softly under the moonlight that peeks in through the window. "Daddy, I just wanna sleep in your arms tonight."

My chest tightens at the vulnerability in her voice, the raw need to be held.

"C'mere, sugar," I tell her as I pull back the worn cotton quilt on our bed.

She crawls in beside me, tucking her head under my chin and draping a leg over mine.

My arms wrap around her naturally, pulling her close against my chest.

As she snuggles into my warmth, I bury my nose into her hair, inhaling the sweet scent of her vanilla shampoo.

It's a comforting smell, familiar and homey.

"I love you," she whispers, her breath tickling the hairs on my chest.

My heart thumps hard in response.

These three words never fail to send a thrill down my spine, no matter how many times we say it.

"I love you too," I reply, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

The world outside our door could go up in flames and I wouldn't give a damn, all that matters to me is these two: my girl and my little man.

### CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Mandy

I'm lounging on the leather couch in the clubhouse, shooting the shit with Sera when her phone chimes with an incoming text.

Her red lacquered nails tap the screen and her gray eyes flick over the message, widening slightly. "Shit. My mum's been spotted in Montana, according to my grandfather," she tells me, her posh British accent tinged with concern.

I sit up straighter, my heartbeat quickening. "Montana? Why the hell would she go there?"

Sera shrugs, setting her phone down. "Mmm, only one reason. Knowing my wicked witch of a mum though, it's not good."

She chews on her red-painted bottom lip, looking worried.

A knot of dread forms in my stomach.

Sally Bernard is a fucking loose cannon hellbent on destroying the Reapers Rejects and getting twisted vengeance for her dead husband.

Her popping up in Montana spells nothing but trouble.

My mind starts racing, thinking about Kash and the rest of the club.

The stakes just keep getting higher and the danger is ramping up to insane levels.

I'm not a ride or die biker bitch like some of these other ol' ladies—I don't get off on the adrenaline of MC life.

But I know without a shred of doubt that I would rain down unholy hell on anyone who tried to hurt my man, or my little man.

Sera notices my distress and reaches over to squeeze my hand. "Hey, it'll be all right. The club will handle this shit, they always do."

Her words are meant to be reassuring but there's an undercurrent of uncertainty in her voice.

Before I can respond, the clubhouse doors bang open and Damon comes striding in looking pissed as all hell, barking into his phone.

"You got it. I'm sending some guys up, probably be there within the next few days," he growls before hanging up.

He takes in the tense scene—me and Sera huddled together on the couch, matching grim expressions on our faces.

"I take it you heard," he says gruffly, scrubbing a hand over his bearded jaw. "Your cunt of a mother has surfaced up in Billings apparently."

Sera nods tightly. "Gramps just texted me. No idea what fresh fuckery she's up to now."

"Just wants to be another pain in my ass," Damon mutters.



He looks tired, the stress and strain of dealing with this bullshit clearly wearing on him.

Just then, Doc and Shiver emerge from the kitchen, Doc carrying two steaming bowls of ramen.

The delicious scent of the broth and noodles fills the air, making my stomach rumble despite the stressful situation.

Those two have been spending more time together, working on mending fences after all the drama surrounding me.

Doc sets a bowl down on the coffee table in front of me, dropping a quick kiss to the top of my head. "Thought you could use some comfort food, baby."

I give him a grateful smile, the small gesture warming my heart.

This thoughtful man is mine and I'll be damned if I let anything happen to him.

"Shiver," Damon barks, pulling his attention away from the bowl Shiver was about to dig into. "You and Jolt are gonna be heading up to Montana tomorrow. Sally's been spotted there and I need boots on the ground up there ASAP."

"Whatever you need, Prez," Shiver says without hesitation, setting his bowl aside.

There's a hardness to his eyes, a lethal edge that comes from being a stone cold type of man. "Me and Jolt will handle shit."

Damon looks to Sera again. "Any clue what your mother would want in Montana? Why the fuck she'd go there of all places?"

Sera shakes her head slowly. "I think this may be part of her mad plan. She wanted to systematically hit every charter, bring the Reapers to their knees." Her words send a chill down my spine.

"Fuck!" Damon explodes, slamming his fist against the wall.

The raw fury and frustration emanating from him is palpable.

Shiver stands, squaring his broad shoulders. "Like I said, we'll take care of it. I'll go get my shit packed so we can head out first thing."

As I watch him walk away, a sick feeling churns in my gut.

This is really happening.

The danger is ramping up and shit is about to get very, very real.

I glance over at Doc, seeing my own worry reflected in his intense blue eyes.

He pulls me into his arms and I go willingly, needing his solid strength in this moment. "We'll get through this, Mandy," he murmurs against my hair. "The club is ride or die. We take care of our own, no matter what."

I burrow closer, breathing in his comforting scent of leather and smoke and man.

"I know," I whisper.

And I do know, deep in my bones, that I've found where I belong with Doc and the Reapers Rejects.

I grip Doc's shoulders, tension coiling through my body as I watch Booger stride

purposefully into the main room of the clubhouse.

His normally jovial expression is stony as he makes a beeline for Sera.

"Got a sec?" he asks, jerking his head toward the hallway leading to the dorms.

Sera glances up from her phone, arching one perfectly sculpted brow. "Of course."  
Rising gracefully to her feet, she follows him out of earshot.

Unease skitters down my spine.

Something's up, I can feel it.

Doc must sense it too, because his arm tightens around my waist.

"The fuck's going on now?" he mutters under his breath.

I just shake my head, eyes glued to Booger and Sera's retreating forms.

A minute later, they return, Sera's face an expressionless mask while Booger looks downright grim.

He makes straight for the bar where Damon is nursing a whiskey, leaning in close to talk to him in low, urgent tones.

Damon's eyes narrow and his jaw clenches tight.

Fishing his phone from his cut, he punches in a number and brings it to his ear.  
"Zane? We got another problem..."

As he starts pacing, barking orders into the phone, I turn to Sera. "What's going on?"

Did you get news about your mom?"

She sighs heavily, sinking onto the couch beside me. "So, she's not just in Montana, she's pulled in another club to be her muscle"

"Shit." I scrub a hand over my face.

This is bad.

Sally Bernard is the last person we need skulking around, stirring up more trouble. "Do you know which club?"

"Booger said they're called the Corrupt Kings MC." Sera's lips twist bitterly. "She's probably spinning her web of manipulation and deceit to turn them against you lot."

A spike of fear lances through me, but I force it down.

Doc clears his throat, "The Corrupt Kings are already against us. We've had a longstanding issue with them for many years.."

"Holy fucking shit," I murmur, unable to believe just how crazy this is getting.

Shaking off the chilling thought, I change the subject. "How are things going with getting her old companies all transferred over to you and your grandad?"

"Should be finalized by end of day," Sera replies with a satisfied smirk. "Which means the bitch is officially cut off. No more making decisions on behalf of the businesses."

I can't help but smile at that.

Karma's a bitch named Seraphina and she always collects her due.

The reality of just how serious this situation is becoming sinks into my bones like lead weights.

Everything with the club, the depths these people will go to protect their own and annihilate their enemies...it's simultaneously terrifying and awe-inspiring.

I may not be a fighter by nature, but I would burn the whole fucking world down without hesitation to keep that precious boy safe.

Although...a fierce surge of mama bear protectiveness roars to life inside me at the mere thought of anyone trying to lay a goddamn finger on Kash.

Doc's warm palm cups my cheek, drawing my gaze away from the chaos and up to meet his vivid green eyes.

They shine with something, but I'm not sure what.

Though, I know he'd burn the world down before he let anyone hurt me.

I press a grateful kiss to his calloused palm.

"Hang tight, sweetheart," he murmurs. "I'll be right back."

With that, he strides over to join the war council forming around Damon, his broad shoulders set in a tense line.

Shiver claps him on the back in solidarity before following him.

I wrap my arms around myself, suppressing a shiver.

This is it.

This is my fucking life and it's terrifying.

I'm just going to have to suppress those thoughts for now.

Spark comes walking up to me, eyeing the group of men over by the bar. "Hey, I wanted to talk to you. Zoe told me Doc's cool with you two shooting, the whole women thing or whatever, but how does he feel about me in that scenario?"

I almost forgot about Spark.

Zoe and I shot the other day, but we didn't include Spark.

He chuckles lightly, "Your expression tells me you haven't talked to him about it. I'm gonna do that, though, okay? I don't want it puttin' any strain on your relationship and it feels like the right thing to do."

I shoot him a soft smile. "Thank you, Spark. I really appreciate that."

## Page 20

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am*

Doc

New Year's Eve...

The clubhouse is packed, wall to wall bodies grinding and bouncing to the heavy beat blasting from the speakers.

Flashing lights strobe across the room, casting shadows on the rock and wood walls.

Leather cuts, tight dresses, tattoos and piercings everywhere I look.

It's New Year's Eve and the club is throwing one hell of a party to kick off another year of raising hell.

I grab a beer from the bar and scan the room, taking in the familiar faces of my brothers and their ol' ladies mixed in with the fresh meat, the club girls looking to hop on the back of a bike for the night.

My eyes land on Sera across the room and I freeze.

Even in the dim light, I can see her eyes are glassy, those pouty lips pursed into a frown.

Something's not right.

I weave through the crowd toward her, ignoring the loud nature of everyone around us.

When I reach her, she doesn't even glance my way, just keeps staring off into space with that troubled look on her face.

"Hey, something going on?" I ask, leaning in close so she can hear me over the thumping music.

She doesn't respond for a long moment.

Then she turns to me, sadness etched on her beautiful face. "My grandpa didn't show up. He was supposed to be here tonight."

I know how much that old man means to her.

He's the only family she's got left that's worth a damn.

I put an arm around her shoulders, pulling her into my side. "You wanna go check on him? Make sure he's all right?"

Sera nods, searching the space for her man.

In the strobe lights, I catch Turmoil's eye across the room.

He sees the look on Sera's face and makes his way over. "What's up?" he asks gruffly.

I give him the rundown. "Her gramps didn't show. We should go make sure the old man's okay."

Turmoil nods. "Yeah, good idea. Babe, let's go see how your gramps is. Who knows, that ol' bachelor could have a couple of ladies over."

It warrants a laugh from Seraphina, but it isn't a genuine one.



She's worried and we can all see it clear as day.

As we head for the doors, weaving through the party crowd, I have a bad feeling twisting in my gut.

Something isn't right.

I just hope the old man didn't fall and break a hip or some shit.

The last thing Sera needs is more pain in her life.

I swing my leg over my bike, Mandy climbing on behind me.

Sera hops on the back of Turmoil's.

We take off into the night, the Vegas lights blurring by as we roar down the highway, heading for the old man's gated community.

I grip the handlebars tighter, jaw clenched, as that sense of dread deepens in my bones.

We pull up to the sprawling mansion and there aren't any lights on.

Odd, I'm certain he probably has a light or two on out front, or even in the back at all times.

I cut the engine, head swiveling, taking a hard look at the place.

It's too damn quiet.

There's not even any staff bustling around.

"Doc..." Mandy's voice is tight with worry behind me as she climbs off the bike.

I'm already striding toward the front door, Turmoil and Sera on my heels.

I don't bother knocking, just test the knob.

It's unlocked.

The heavy wood swings open with an ominous creak.

Sera calls out, her voice echoing in the dark foyer. "Grandpa?"

No answer.

Turmoil pulls his gun from his waistband. I do the same. "We'll check it out," I mutter to the girls. "Stay put."

Of course, Sera doesn't listen for shit.

She pushes past me, heading straight for her grandpa's study.

Mandy hurries after her.

"Fuck," I curse under my breath, exchanging a dark look with Turmoil.

We prowl through the mansion, scanning the shadows, on high alert.

Then Sera's blood-curdling scream rips through the heavy silence.

We sprint for the study, hearts pounding.

I stumble to a halt in the doorway, Turmoil slamming into my back.

Sera's on her knees, wailing in agony, Mandy's arms around her.

I stare at her gramps, or rather what's left of him.

He's slumped over his desk, blood and brains splattered on the wall behind him, deadeyes staring at nothing.

Bile rises in my throat as I holster my gun.

Turmoil rushes over to his woman.

He drops down next to Sera, gripping her shaking body, pulling her into his chest.

She clings to him and Mandy comes over to me, sad-filled eyes that hurt for her friend.

I know things are fresh, but we have to act. If there are others here, we need to get them help. "Did you find anyone else?"

Instead of answering me, he turns and gives me a sorrowful expression.

Turmoil's ashen face tells me everything I need to know—the rest of the staff didn't make it either.

This was a fucking slaughter. An act of war.

And I got a sick feeling the bloodshed is just getting started...

"I—I can't believe..." Mandy murmurs, dragging a hand over her face. "I can't believe someone would do this to their own family."

I meet her gaze, jaw clenched.

It doesn't matter if you're blood or not in situations like this.

Sometimes, power gets to people's heads... and it obviously has with Sally.

Sera's sobs have quieted, but she's still trembling in Turmoil's arms.

He strokes her hair, trying to offer some semblance of comfort.

God, I don't think any of us will be able to ease her pain.

Mandy is the voice of reason, her eyes wide and haunted. "We need to call the cops,"

She staggers to her feet, wiping at her tear-streaked face with shaking hands.

"No," she says, her voice like shattered glass. "No cops."

"Sera..." I start, but she whirls on me, eyes blazing with a fury that takes my breath away.

"This was her ," she spits, each word dripping with venom. "My mum. She did this, and I will not have the bloody cops getting to her arse before I do!"

Turmoil steps forward, placing a gentle hand on Sera's shoulder. "We'll find her," he promises, his tone low and deadly. "We'll make her pay for this."

Sera nods, a single tear slipping down her cheek.

"Where's Alfred?" she asks suddenly, her voice barely a whisper.

Alfred was the butler, a loyal man who served her grandfather for decades.

He was like family to her.

Turmoil grips her hands tightly. "Sera..." he starts, and even though his voice is gentle, I can see the grimace on his face.

I know he doesn't want to break anymore horrible news, but she needs to know.

"Sera... Alfred... along with the rest of the staff were found in the kitchen..."

His voice trails off, but Sera urges him to give her more information. "How? How did they die?"

Turmoil swallows hard, looking into his ol' lady's eyes. "Execution style, bullets to their heads. It was quick."

A gasp wrenches from Sera's throat.

She stumbles back against the wall, her face pale under the overhead light.

"They did that too?" She asks, her voice trembling with rage. "They killed them all as well? They had no part in this. Absolutely none."

Yeah, no shit.

I don't say it aloud, because she doesn't need to be told the obvious right now.

Instead, I put my arm around Mandy's waist as we watch in silence.

Sera's gaze is wild as she looks between us, something dangerous and unhinged glinting in her eyes.

"She'll pay for this," she seethes through gritted teeth. "She'll fucking pay."

No arguments here.

The room falls into a morbid silence again, the violence that had been committed here just hours ago looming over us like a dark cloud.

I start thinking about what needs to be done. “I’ll call Damon, get him to send some people out to take care of the bodies. Sakura can sign the death certificates and get all of that sorted.”

Mandy narrows her eyes and looks at Sera. “Wait—with your gramps dead... what does that mean for you both overturning the businesses, getting your mom out of them?”

Sera looks at Mandy, and if looks could kill, this would be it. “It all depends on his will. If he left the shares to her, she’d have the majority. If he changed his will recently and left them to me, nothing would change.”

God, I know Sera had a plan to turn things over with the businesses as a way to fuck over her mother.

I pray to God that her grandfather left everything to her, because if not, Sally will have yet another way to screw us.