



Duchess (Royal Harlots MC: National New York Chapter #1)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: The Duchess is revving up her bike and getting her ladies ready to ride.

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DUCHESS

F ifteen Years ago...

I was going to kill that son of a bitch!

My hands were trembling, and not from fear, but from rage. White hot, throat-clenching fury. Who the fuck did he think he was? And doing this shit right under my nose! I was going to rip his balls off, shove them down his throat, and watch him choke on all the lies he fed me these past few years.

The city lights of Los Angeles blurred around me as the wind sliced across my face, my Harley roared between my thighs as if it, too, could feel my rage.

My knuckles were white on the grips, and my heart was pounding louder than the engine.

Betrayal tasted like bitter bile in the back of your throat, like a mix of smoke and blood you just couldn't swallow.

Alan...no, fuck that shit, his name was Serhan .

Another fucking lie I'd been spoon fed. Serhan Kaya. A Turkish charmer with eyes like dark velvet and a smile made to melt the panties off all gullible women, myself included. He was the reason I ended up here, thousands of miles from home. He told me he loved me. Said I was his salvation. Told me he'd make me a queen in this city of demons. Instead, he made me a fool.

I wasn't just any woman. I was Stephanie fucking Winters!

Daughter of Leo "the Guardian" Winters, founding member of the Royal Bastards MC.

I was raised on loyalty, Harleys, and loaded guns.

I was considered royalty in a world of outlaws.

My dumbass brother Colton Winters, better known as Colt, was once the VP of the RBMC.

But he had quickly burned his crown, spitting on it and my father's reputation when he betrayed Elrik Jameson, the current President, and the son of the man my father called brother.

And while the club fell into chaos around Colt's betrayal, I did what I thought was the smart thing to do.

I ran.

Unfortunately, I was looking straight and ran directly into the arms of the devil himself.

Alan told me his boss was a millionaire Turkish businessman.

Said he needed someone with a brain for numbers, someone who could make financial chaos look like order.

And he had painted the job like a dream.

High pay, no questions, under the radar, clean.

But the first time I stepped into their so-called office, a luxury penthouse reeking of cigar smoke and sex, I knew something was off.

The books weren't just messy, they were riddled with bloodstains in the margins. Offshore accounts tied to ghost companies. Payments were made in cash, gold, or sometimes favors that made my stomach turn. I didn't need a background check to know this wasn't a business.

This was blood money. Still, when I confronted him, ready to burn the whole thing down, he grabbed my hands, dropped to his knees, and begged.

Told me they'd kill him. That I'd be the only reason he lived.

And when he looked up at me with those pleading dark eyes, a whole lifetime of gut instinct got drowned out by the part of me that still believed in saving people.

The part of me that had fallen in love with him.

So I ignored the alarms screaming in my head, and I agreed.

They started small. A few discrepancies here and there.

Round a number up, shift a decimal down, plug in a shadow vendor no one would ever question.

I was good at it. Too good. The kind of good that makes dangerous men take notice.

Within months, I wasn't just balancing crooked ledgers; I was moving money through shell corporations, converting black funds into legitimate assets, and

covering their tracks so cleanly that it looked like fucking art.

They trusted me. Gave me access to files I had no business seeing.

Names. Locations. Trades. Shit that could put people in the ground or buy their silence for a decade.

But I was careful. Always careful. I never left a trace, never trusted a soul. Not even the sleek, shark-smiling men who offered me gifts wrapped in threats. Only Alan. He was my blind spot. My weak link. The one person I thought would never turn on me. The only one I let see behind the curtain.

But tonight? Tonight I got the call. Some busted up, rail thin piece of gutter trash called me from a blocked number, giggling as she asked me what I was doing with her man. Sent me pictures too. Of his cock. His hands on her tits. His mouth on her neck. Eight months, she said.

Eight fucking months!

I veered off the highway, nearly clipping the concrete barrier, and gunned it toward downtown. Toward the apartment we pretended wasn't ours, tucked between a needle exchange and a bodega that sold expired condoms.

I yanked the helmet off my head, barely aware of how hard I tossed it into the saddlebag.

The garage was dimly lit, and the scent of oil and gasoline filled the air.

The building itself was a converted textile mill turned high-rise lofts, all exposed brick, nestled in the cracked heart of Downtown Los Angeles.

The kind of place where nobody asked questions and everyone had something to hide.

Our unit was one of a handful with direct garage access.

There were no cameras, no doorman recognizing your face, just a steel elevator with sticky buttons and a humming overhead light that never stopped flickering. Perfect for people like Alan.

My hair whipped wildly around my face, sweat clung to the back of my neck, but I didn't stop to breathe.

The fury simmering in my chest needed somewhere to go, and my boots gave it a rhythm as they pounded against the concrete floor, each step echoing off the stone walls.

With each footfall, I vowed to make him bleed for every lie he'd ever told me.

The elevator creaked up to the eleventh floor. As the doors slid open, the sound of Hip Hop thundered down the hall. I paused. That was not our style. Not his style.

I spotted the neighbor coming out of her apartment. She was some yoga, thirsty-looking chick with too much gloss and not enough brain.

"How long's the music been playing?"

"Like, two hours? You should turn it down. People are pissed."

I forced a nod, pulling my keys from my leather backpack. Every instinct in my blood screamed at me to stop. To turn the fuck around because something was wrong.

But did I listen? No . I never fucking listened.

I slid the key into the lock, my fingers trembling as my nerves were suddenly on edge. I took a deep breath before giving the key a slow twist of the wrist, hearing the lock click open. I pushed the door open, bracing myself for whatever waited behind it.

Instead, the moment I opened the door, a tidal wave of sound slammed into me.

The music was deafening, a pulse of bass that filled every crevice of the apartment.

The scent hit first. It was that scent of thick copper and cordite.

Then came the deafening silence behind the sound.

The kind that presses into your ears and makes your stomach drop.

It hit me like a punch to the chest, swallowing me whole, dragging me under before I could even catch my breath.

I stepped inside, my backpack hitting the hardwood floor with a hollow thud, and the door slammed shut behind me. My lungs suddenly refused to work as my eyes adjusted to the dim, flickering light.

There he was. Laid out like a sacrificial lamb in the middle of the living room, arms splayed wide, legs twisted unnaturally.

My eyes landed first on his face, his eyes were wide open, staring up at the ceiling, but there was no life left in them.

It was just a dull, glassy stare that cut straight through me.

I felt as if the world had stopped spinning for a split second. The chaos of the music still pounded in my ears, the coppery tang of blood assaulted my nose, but all I could see was him. Alan. My lover. My betrayer. A man I thought I knew, reduced to a corpse at my feet.

Blood was everywhere. The floor. The wall. The fucking ceiling. His brains were splattered in a Pollock horror show. Red on white.

I didn't scream right away. I couldn't.

I walked toward him, feet slipping slightly in the sticky puddle. His mouth was ajar. Like he was trying to say something. His fingers were curled. One foot was twisted wrong. His temple...fuck, there was no temple. Just a hole. A black fucking hole.

My fingers slid over the volume knobs and I managed to shut off the speakers. But the silence that followed was unbearable.

"Alan..." My voice cracked, barely a whisper.

I dropped to my knees beside him, reaching out to touch his face, hoping he might blink. Hoping it wasn't real. But death is cold. And he was colder.

The phone shook in my hand as I dialed 911. I sobbed into the line. Gave them my address. Told them there was blood. So much blood. And then I hung up.

And then a voice inside my head, my father's voice, growled loud and clear...

Run, Stephanie.

RUN.

This wasn't a mugging. This was a message. Clean. Professional. Final. Alan had fucked up, and if whoever this was found me here, I was dead.

I stumbled back, blood on my hands, knees wet from kneeling in the mess. I looked down at my jeans, and they were soaked in the blood of the man I once thought I loved.

Love? What the fuck did that even mean anymore?

The mess they had left in the apartment wasn't random.

Furniture had been overturned, drawers yanked open and left hanging, and paperwork was scattered everywhere.

Whoever had done this wasn't just here to kill him; they were here to find something.

Something Alan had been hiding. And by the looks of it, they would stop at nothing to get what they wanted.

I ran to the bedroom, tore open the stash drawer Alan kept hidden, and grabbed anything I thought was of importance.

A burner phone, paperwork, his checkbook, my passport, and I stuffed them all into my backpack.

I stuffed any cash he had lying around in my boots.

By the time the sirens lit up the street below, I was gone.

It suddenly felt like I had no out. My entire world ended right here with Alan's. The only question that kept repeating in my head was how the fuck was I going to survive

without him.

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Duchess

Three weeks later ...

Dark gray clouds filled the sky above, looming over me as I stood alone in Evergreen Cemetery.

The scent of damp soil curled around me as I stared down at the freshly dug hole where my so-called boyfriend was now buried. My boots were soaked from the wet grass, my hands cold, and I was shivering not from the cold, but from the image of Alan's dead stare that was now ingrained in my head.

Three weeks.

That's how long it had been since Alan, or rather, Serhan Kaya, the man I thought I loved, went and got himself killed.

Now here I was, standing over his grave, watching the black casket descend, surrounded by five weeping women who all thought they were his one and only.

The tears, the whimpers, the dramatic sobs, it was all a fucking joke.

And they didn't even care that he had made us all look like fools.

They were all a bunch of fake sluts anyway with their plastic tits and thousands of dollars in botox that made their faces look more like scared porcelain dolls.

They were pawns, every last one of them, dressed in black and too stupid to see the game he had played on us all.

But me? I wasn't just a pawn. I was the one he sacrificed.

Because I cared .

Because I gave my life for this asshole.

I gave that man everything. My loyalty. My skills. My body. My time. My goddamn soul . He promised me forever with lips that lied prettier than most men breathe. Told me I was his only, the only one who ever really knew him, understood the monster underneath the charm. And I believed him.

But I wasn't enough.

Why would I be? Nothing was ever enough for Alan Brown.

He was a sociopathic, compulsive liar. I knew that from the start, yet I let him manipulate me into believing he loved me.

I let the way he touched me override every red flag, every gut scream, every sign that this man was danger wrapped in a pretty suit.

I let him use me because, in truth, riding his dick was better than seeing any truth.

In the end, I blamed myself for believing in his narcissistic ass and for allowing myself to fall into this dark world he created. Now he was dead and I was left with the mess, a mess I had no idea how to escape.

Alan was the Turks' most trusted middleman. He was considered a mover, he brought

in the kind of goods that didn't come with barcodes or receipts.

Guns. Women. Stolen art. Blood diamonds.

High-risk, high-dollar shit. He was the one who made it disappear and reappear wherever the highest bidder wanted it.

His job? Transport the product, clean the paper trail, and make sure nothing ever pointed back to the bosses.

He never got caught, never got traced. A ghost with a slick smile and a passport for every continent. All I knew was that he was fucking good at it.

I kept retracing his steps and his movements the last few weeks, but I just couldn't see where things went wrong. Something had shifted. He'd been nervous the past few weeks, staying out late, taking calls in other rooms, watching the door like the devil himself might be standing on the other side.

The only one who reached out to me after his death was Caleb Killic.

Caleb. The Turk with too much money and too many secrets.

Alan's best friend, if men like him even had friends.

More like a handler, a shadow always lingering at the edge of every deal.

He said he wanted to know details. How Alan died, what the cops knew, what I knew.

But I saw it in his eyes. He wasn't asking.

He was hunting . And his eyes were already locked on a new target... me.

I avoided him for as long as I could, ghosting his calls, skipping every place I used to haunt.

I even switched grocery stores, just to avoid catching his eyes in the cereal aisle.

But deep down, I knew it was only a matter of time before he came for me, and when he did, he wouldn't knock before ripping my world apart.

As much as I wanted to disappear, I was never the type to blend into the background, especially not when I stood beside these plastic-perfect blondes who were tossing themselves over his casket as if they had some tragic love story.

Their bodies were all silicone and high-gloss lips.

Me? I had hips that tested the seams of my jeans, thick thighs that didn't need filters, and curves that came with history and heat. I was messy, emotional, and unapologetically loud in a world that told girls like me to shrink. I was real. And real doesn't come with extensions and a receipt.

I stared at the shallow grave, wondering how love could go from sweetness to bitterness in the span of a moment.

My mind drifted back to those nights when Alan would wrap himself around me, whispering promises that he never intended to keep.

I remembered the weight of his arm draped across my waist, how he always said I made him feel real, feel seen, as if my body and soul had been his sanctuary.

And I hated myself for missing him even now, for wanting to believe some part of what he gave me had been real.

I barely heard the heavy footsteps before I was yanked out of that memory and thrown into the cold harshness that was my reality.

My boots scraped across the wet grass as I was dragged backward, away from the small crowd of people.

I could have screamed, but I knew who had come for me before I even laid eyes on him.

He slammed me back into the thick trunk of a gnarled oak tree, the bark biting through my clothes and into my spine.

I hissed and tried to shove him off me but Caleb's hand crashed into my chest, firm and holding me captive against that tree.

The breath left my lungs in one sharp exhale, but it wasn't pain that held me upright, it was rage.

A blistering type of rage that was ready to detonate at any second.

"Get the fuck off me!" I snapped, my voice sharp enough to draw blood.

"Did you think I wouldn't find you?" he growled at me, his voice low and brutal.

I arched a brow, the smirk on my lips letting him know I didn't scare so easily. "Honestly? I figured you'd send one of your Barbie dolls after me."

He stepped closer, not amused. "This isn't a joke, Stephanie."

"No," I said, my voice low. "It's not a joke, Caleb. It never was. You come here acting like you're owed answers, like you've got some moral high ground."

But here's the truth you hate more than anything that you're not in control of this, and that terrifies you.

Doesn't it? You only show up when your empire starts to crack, and I'm the one thing you can't fix with a threat or a bribe. "

His hand twitched at his side, holding himself back, but I held my ground. "Careful now, Caleb. You might break a nail."

His jaw ticked. "You always had a smart mouth."

"Better than a fake smile and a hollow conscience. Now either say what you want to say, or get the hell out of my face."

He took a step closer, wrapping his hand around my throat, tightening it just enough so I understood who held the power between us. "Do. Not. Push me."

It pissed me off that my body reacted like it did to his threat.

A dark shiver ran down my spine as heat pooled in places that had no goddamn business heating up under his touch.

Dangerous was not the word I'd use for Caleb Killic.

A massochistic, threatening, murderous bastard, would be just a few select of the terms I'd use.

I truly hated Caleb Killic.

Maybe it was just that he was too damn pretty.

He was the kind of man who made women stupid.

Six-foot-two of chaos wrapped in black designer suits.

Midnight blue eyes so intense they could pierce steel.

A beard trimmed to perfection, sculpted jawline, and jet-black waves, cut short, with every strand perfectly placed on his stupid, handsome head.

He smelled like oak, sage, and power. And worst of all, he knew exactly what he looked like.

Yeah, he was pretty, but pretty didn't mean shit.

All I knew of the man was that he was the no bullshit type who mostly kept to himself.

I knew he was well off. You could pretty much smell the money coming off his expensive Prada suits and sleek gold watches.

He was the type of man to always have a pretty new toy hanging off his arm.

Tall blondes with big boobs and blue eyes were his type.

Some were so skinny I tended to offer them food whenever they were around.

California bombshells who were only after one thing, fame and money.

As soon as they opened their mouth, you'd flinch and beg them to never talk again, afraid you'd get dumber just from hearing them speak.

I never did understand why a man as intelligent as Caleb couldn't find a woman to match his brains.

But one didn't underestimate a man like Caleb Killic. He was rich enough to buy entire neighborhoods, and cold enough to burn them down when he got bored. He was always watching, always calculating. He didn't trust me. Never had. And I sure as hell didn't trust him.

"Stephanie. We both know you know things. So I'm going to need you to start talking."

"I know lots of things, Caleb. I especially know how much you get paid each month and I have the number to your account memorized."

"Bitch, do not fuck with me. What do you know?" His hand slid up, fingers curling lightly around my throat. I knew he could feel my pulse against his skin, steady and full of restraint.

I didn't flinch. I never had, and I wasn't about to start now. I tilted my head back slowly, meeting his eyes with a look that dared him to tighten that grip. "What do I know? You mean aside from the fact that you're a spoiled watchdog in a silk suit playing mobster?"

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His jaw locked, the muscles along his throat working overtime as he stepped in even closer, narrowing the space between us until all I could smell was his cologne. "This isn't a game."

"That's the problem, Killic. It's always a game with you. Always a strategy. Always a move. You show up, play hero, and expect people to bow. But not me. I don't kneel unless I want to."

He grabbed my chin, hard enough to tilt my head but not enough to leave a mark. "You think you're clever. That you've got it all figured out."

I smirked, voice low. "No, Caleb. I know I'm clever. You're just pissed Alan trusted me more than he ever trusted you."

He didn't answer right away, and that told me everything. His silence screamed betrayal.

"Who was he working with? Who was he selling to?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"I know what you did," my voice broke slightly, and I swallowed that pain down.

He gave me a slow, sexy evil smile. "And what did I do?"

"You were supposed to protect him," I said. My voice didn't rise, but it carried weight. "Instead you set him up for that last meeting, like a lamb going to slaughter. And now you're mad you're not the one holding the knife."

His grip faltered for a second, then returned. "Watch your mouth."

"Or what? You'll slap me around until I say something you want to hear? Grow up, Caleb. You're not the boogeyman. You're just another rich prick in tailored pants who got his feelings hurt."

He grabbed me by the lapels of my jacket and slammed me harder against the tree. I made a mental note not to flinch. "Who was he working with, Stephanie? Who was he fucking with?"

I narrowed my eyes. "Apparently every slut in California."

He looked over his shoulder at the sobbing harem still clinging to the edge of the grave like they'd ever meant a thing to Alan. Caleb exhaled slowly through his nose, nostrils flaring.

"I didn't mean pussy," he muttered.

"I don't give a shit what you meant," I spat. "I don't know a damn thing. So unless you're planning to kill me, let me the fuck go."

He didn't move.

"If you're hiding something, Duchess..." My alias in his mouth made me want to scream. It was the name I used when making dealings on the black market for the Turks. It was a name I didn't want Caleb Killic knowing. So I pulled out the card I held in my back pocket.

"What? You gonna bury me next to him? Let me remind you who I am. My last name still means something, even if you pretend it doesn't."

The muscles in his face went rigid as he realized exactly who I was referring to.

The name alone was enough to make men pause.

The Royal Bastards MC. To some, they were ghosts with guns.

To others, they were a force of reckoning.

For me, they were my lineage, my curse, and on days like today, my only lifeline.

Rancid, the current president, had taken something raw and sacred and bled it dry from the inside out.

Word on the street was that he was a killer in every sense of the word.

Cold, calculated, and had no remorse. He was the kind of man who didn't just murder his enemies but made examples out of them. I'd seen images of what he'd done to some of the patches.

Good men I'd grown up with. How he left their bodies in public alleys or nailed to warehouse doors as a warning.

He ruled with paranoia and violence, trusted no one, and turned what was the brotherhood into a syndicate of fear and bloodshed.

Whether the rumors were true or not didn't matter, Rancid cultivated fear like it was currency.

He had single-handedly destroyed what the Royal Bastards once stood for.

My father, Leo Winters, one of the founding brothers, had built the club on loyalty

and never let that die.

But after my brother's betrayal, when he turned his back on Bulldog's son and walked straight into enemy arms, everything changed. The club splintered, fractured under the weight of all that death. It saddened me to think that the people I loved were still there...putting their lives on the line to fight for something they'd already lost.

Caleb didn't know the details, but he didn't need to. He knew my last name carried weight, and that it was kept safe by men who'd kill for me without question. That was enough to keep him and his Turkish goons at a distance...for now.

"If anything happens to me," I whispered, stepping into his space, "they'll come for you first."

We stood there, inches apart, hatred pulsing between us. His body radiating heat, his cologne invading my senses. My fists clenched at my sides, aching to punch him, or maybe do something a lot worse.

"One of these days you're gonna press the wrong button, Duchess."

"Stop calling me that." I gritted out.

"What, you don't like that I know your secrets?" He leaned into me, grazing the backs of his fingers over my cheek.

"I know everything that you do, Duchess." He whispered against my lips and I dug my fingernails into my palms, trying to keep myself from shuddering.

From the moment I became the Turks' bookkeeper, I had access to things most people weren't even allowed to whisper about.

And Caleb hated that someone like me, had gotten to the core of their operations.

I knew the names behind the fake identities, the real destinations behind rerouted shipments, the exact amounts skimmed from deals, and how they cleaned it all to look like legitimate trade.

I wasn't just moving money, I was moving power.

I understood the gears of the well-oiled machine better than most men sitting at the top.

And Caleb? He watched me like a hawk, shadowed my every step, and never stopped questioning my loyalty, even when I kept their books cleaner than any fake accountant they'd ever hired.

He said he was a bodyguard, but real bodyguards didn't wear designer Italian suits or own a fleet of vehicles that screamed wealth and indulgence.

Caleb was more than muscle. He was the one who kept the Turks' hands clean while dragging others through the mud.

He enforced silence, erased loose ends, and made sure nothing ever touched the real bosses.

And for a while, that meant watching me.

Every day. Every step. Every move I made.

But no matter how closely he looked, he never saw the full picture. Because I never let him.

I shoved past him, my shoulder slamming into his chest with enough force to feel satisfying.

"If you find something..."

"You'll be the last to know," I threw over my shoulder, not looking back.

"I'll hunt you down, Duchess!"

"Touch me again, and next time, I won't give a warning," I added without turning.

I walked to my bike, ignoring the heat still clinging to my skin from his touch.

I put on the cherry red helmet and slid onto the low seat.

The bike fit my ass like a glove, and it felt good to feel the engine revving between my thighs.

This is where I belonged. I let the throttle scream down the hill, wind wiping away the remnants of Caleb's voice.

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I took off down the winding roads of Evergreen Cemetery and towards downtown L.A.

I could still feel Caleb's eyes on my back even as I crossed the gates and made my way into rush hour traffic.

Something about the way he looked at me, the way suspicion coiled behind those cold ocean eyes, made it clear I needed to stop waiting. I needed to disappear, but how?

I needed to find out what Alan left behind before someone else decided to clean up his mess and bury me in the process.

I pulled down a side street and parked the bike across from the back door of Alan's place on the Northeast side of the city.

His place of business was on the first floor above a brewery.

It was a shifty place, and it always smelled of stale beer and piss, but it was private and out of sight.

Alan knew he was always being watched, which is why he chose this place.

We had my apartment on Sunset Boulevard, but for the most part, he spent his days here, in his private office.

I hadn't been back to the apartment since that night.

But after seeing how nervous Caleb was, I thought I should make my move now before things got more intense.

My first thought was that if I wanted answers, I needed to see Alan's latest transactions.

There was only one place where I could find them, and when I did, whatever movements he had made, I could retrace them to find out what the hell he'd been up to.

The back stairwell groaned beneath my boots, each step creaking as I approached his floor. I kept my shoulders squared, my blade tucked beneath the hem of my jacket, and my senses sharp. There was no telling what I was going to find on the other side of that door.

The apartment door was cracked open, the wood splintered at the edge, and the lock had been broken clean.

I paused, listening. No sounds. No movement.

But everything in me buzzed. Debating whether to just take my losses and run, but my curiosity always got the best of me.

I carefully made my way into his place. It was completely destroyed.

Paperwork was thrown everywhere, his bookshelves had been knocked over, the furniture had been ripped through.

I made my way towards the back hallway where the main office was located.

Everything was gone. His computer, his files.

..it was all gone. My desperation grew as I stood there, staring at what was.

The apartment still smelled of him.

Even after all these weeks, even after the chaos and the forced silence that had become my world, Alan's scent clung to the walls.

Musk, old leather, tobacco, and the faint, bitter tang of blood money.

It seeped into the cracked floors and the stained couch cushions, as if the place wanted to hold onto that memory.

Inside, it looked like a hurricane had ripped through it. Files were strewn everywhere, and the furniture overturned. They had completely ransacked the apartment. It was clear that whoever had done this wasn't just searching for something, they were sending a clear message.

It took me a second and a blurred, tear-filled vision to finally see it In the far corner, behind a toppled bookshelf, I saw it.

A fracture in the wall, barely noticeable unless you knew where to look.

My fingers traced the edge, and the panel shifted.

A hidden door that led to a space where no one else had been.

I stood at the entrance, staring into the dark room.

Grabbing my cell phone, I turned on the flashlight and walked through.

I searched for a light switch which I couldn't find.

Instead, my flashlight landed on a small desk lamp, which I turned on.

The space was small. I saw the cot first, and memories crashed over me.

Alan had brought me in here once, maybe twice, always under the cover of night, always in a rush.

But I remembered the way he had pressed me down onto that cot, the way his mouth had devoured every inch of me, desperate and greedy.

My wrists pinned above my head, his voice low and filthy, whispering how I was his as his cock drove in and out of me.

It wasn't love. It was ownership, hunger, and a kind of brutal need I hadn't wanted to name.

And I let him. Because for a moment, I felt like I had power over him, even if it was just his body begging for mine.

Now that same cot sat cold and empty, stained with old ghosts, and all I had left was the fire in my gut and the secrets he had left me. In the center of the room sat a small wooden chair, a table, and on that table was a closed laptop.

"What were you up to?" I whispered to myself, rushing over to the seat, and prayed the laptop would turn on. When it did, I released the breath I was holding. The password prompt stared back at me, and there was only one word I could think of.

Lazarus.

He was obsessed with the story of Lazarus and how God had raised him from the dead. He always said that one had to believe in miracles to be in his line of work, and that maybe one day he'd rise from the dead.

He'd been so very wrong.

The laptop unlocked, and a collage of images popped up.

Video surveillance, warehouse stills, unmarked crates, wire transfers.

I searched deeper and suddenly found what I was looking for, the goldmine.

An offshore account. Password protected.

Buried behind layers of false identities.

My breath caught in my throat as the numbers lit the screen. I nearly fell off my chair.

Twenty million dollars.

Alan had over twenty million in that hidden bank account, and I had just gained access to it.

He had been skimming off the top of every deal made.

He'd been stealing from the Turks for years.

Small cuts. Fractional amounts. But it added up.

A fortune stared back at me, all soaked in blood. And a betrayal that guaranteed death.

Something must have gone wrong on this last transaction for it to have gotten him killed. The Turks did not forgive easily when it came to money, love, and family. I learned that quickly. Whatever Alan had done was bad, really bad, and now I had access to it.

That last meeting? It had Caleb written all over it. No struggle. No broken locks. Whoever killed Alan had been let in, offered a drink, maybe even a smile. Then they pulled the trigger.

I knew Alan had secrets. I knew he was hiding more than women. Something darker. Something heavier. I'd catch him talking to himself at night, adding locks to the doors, checking the street late at night. His nerves were fried. His skin was always damp with sweat. He was unraveling.

Alan never told me what kind of debt he owed Caleb.

Just said it was a life for a life. Said it with that crooked smirk and a glint in his eyes that always made me feel like I was being played.

But I stayed. I believed. And maybe that made me just as much a fool as he was.

Caleb didn't believe in favors. He believed in leverage.

And Alan? Alan was a pawn in a game he never had the brain or the balls to win.

I had a feeling that his death had been a setup, or a lesson, and Caleb Killic had something to do with it, but at this point, I didn't give a shit. My priority was to get the fuck away from the Turks. Alan left me in the hands of the devil, and I wasn't going to let him win.

I sat back, mind racing. This wasn't just about money. This was about survival. If

they found out, they wouldn't ask questions. They'd slit my throat and dump my body in the ocean. I couldn't return the money. That would still paint me as guilty. And I damn sure wasn't about to let them take it.

I could easily return it and the product, but what good would that do me. It wasn't like these people wouldn't look at me and say I wasn't in on it. And besides, I wanted to escape them. I needed an out and twenty million was beyond that.

I needed to know who he was selling this shit to, and I needed to move this product quickly and quietly without the Turks finding out.

The money was in a secure account for now, but I needed that moved as well and there was only one person I could think of, who could help me with creating a new account and securing that money in a place where the Turks wouldn't find it.

Twenty million was a lot of money and if they ever found a trail it would be my head on the chopping block.

I thought for a second as to what I was doing.

I was a smart woman who knew she should run, but instead I decided to take a risk.

Either way my life was in danger. I could go to my father for safety, but I wasn't sure how he'd respond.

It was probably best that I handle this on my own.

The less people who knew about this, the better. And with twenty million in my pocket, I had a whole new life ahead of me.

No one had to know.

No one would be the wiser.

I could leave quietly, without a trace.

I slammed the laptop shut, the click of it echoing louder than I expected in the tense silence.

My pulse pounded in my ears as I scanned the room, my eyes sharp as I searched for cameras or wires.

There weren't any blinking red lights in the corners.

Just the stale remnants of his secrets and a pounding in my chest that wouldn't stop.

I didn't feel safe .

My fingers trembled slightly as I tucked the laptop beneath my arm, cradling it against my ribs.

Every nerve in my body screamed for me to move, to run, but my boots felt nailed to the floor.

This wasn't just a machine. It was damning evidence worth millions.

I could feel the weight of it. Twenty million dollars and twenty million ways to get myself killed.

Whatever Alan had been doing, he'd gone too far. And now I was left behind, holding the final piece of a puzzle no one else had figured out.

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Yet.

I took the laptop, tucked it beneath my arm, and headed out. Whatever Alan had been planning, whatever betrayal he thought he could get away with, it died with him.

But the fallout? That was all mine now.

And if Caleb Kilic thought I was going to roll over and let him fuck me over the way he fucked Alan, then he didn't know a damn thing about the woman he was playing with.

A noise broke the silence and I froze. That heavy silence fell over me. It felt measured. Intentional.

My breath caught.

I spun around, adrenaline surging, heart thundering in my chest. But I didn't even get the chance to scream.

A hand caught me, and another wrapped around my waist. I was hauled backward, slammed against the wall hard enough to rattle the drywall and send a shudder through my spine.

My shoulder ached from the impact, the laptop slipped from my arm, but I didn't let it hit the floor.

My boot caught the edge, and I kicked it away toward the far corner, where I knew he

couldn't grab it without going through me first.

His body was a wall of solid muscle, and the unmistakable scent of expensive cologne and danger hit my nose. Then my eyes locked on the man pinning me against the wall.

Caleb.

His breath ghosted over my cheek, his voice growling low at my ear. "What the hell are you doing, Duchess?"

My fingers curled into fists, but my body betrayed me.

Heat surged through my veins, tangled with fear and fury.

My skin burned beneath his touch, and I hated it.

Hated that even now, I noticed the strength in his grip, the warmth of his chest pressed flush to mine, the way his voice made something in me snap.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" I shot back, my voice unsteady, but laced with venom. "Cleaning up the mess your boy left behind."

He spun me, caging me in with one arm as the other slammed into the wall just beside my head. His face hovered inches from mine, jaw tight, midnight eyes furious.

"You shouldn't be here."

"Neither should you. And yet, here we are."

His gaze dropped to my mouth for a fraction of a second before snapping back to my

eyes. "What was on the laptop?"

I smiled. "Wouldn't you like to know."

He stepped closer, eliminating the sliver of space between us, pressing his body to mine in a silent threat that felt far too intimate.

"You playing games with me, Duchess?"

"You think I don't know what kind of man you are? You think I don't see you for what you really are?"

His hand moved to my throat, firm but not cruel, a warning written in the way his thumb dragged over my pulse point.

I should have been terrified. Instead, I was wet.

"I'm not afraid of you, Killic," I whispered.

His lips curved, not in amusement, but with something darker. Something possessive.

"That's your first mistake, Winters."

And then his mouth crushed mine, and all of it, the rage, need, fear, power, erupted in that kiss. Harsh. Brutal. Raw. A collision of two people who should've killed each other but were too consumed with tearing the rest apart first.

His lips were hot and punishing, dragging over mine with brutal insistence.

He took what he wanted and as his tongue slid between my lips I realized he was claiming everything I hadn't realized I'd kept locked away.

He tasted of heat and cognac, with an edge of devilry.

Because that's what he was, the devil himself.

My fists curled in his shirt, desperate to shove him off, but instead they tightened, pulling him closer as my back slammed harder into the wall.

My skin burned beneath his palms as he gripped my hips, his fingers bruising, dragging me tighter against the length of him.

I could feel how much he wanted me, how deep that hunger ran, and it lit something wild in me.

I tried to fight it. Tried to stay cold.

But his tongue tangled with mine and I melted against him, even as the voice in the back of my head screamed that this was wrong.

He growled into my mouth, like he knew I was slipping. He felt it. The war raging under my skin. And I hated him for it. Hated that he knew exactly what buttons to press. Hated that I still wanted him after everything.

I bit his lower lip, hard enough to taste blood.

He pulled back, eyes burning, breath ragged, and I slapped my palms to his chest again.

"This doesn't mean anything," I hissed.

His lips were swollen, his jaw clenched, and when he smiled, it wasn't sweet.

“It means everything, Stephanie,” he breathed. “And we both fucking know it.”

“Fuck you,” I snapped back.

"This isn't over," he snarled.

"No," I snapped back, swiping the laptop from the floor. "This is just the beginning."

We stared at each other, both shaking, both knowing we'd just crossed a line we could never uncross.

My hands trembled, not from fear, but from the fire still coursing through my veins, the kind that only came from touching someone you shouldn't.

His eyes held mine, stormy and wild, and I knew we had stepped into something neither of us could control, something dark and destructive that had already taken root.

As I turned to run, every instinct screamed that I hadn't escaped him, not really. Caleb Killic wasn't the kind of man you walked away from. He was the kind that followed you into your dreams and turned them into nightmares.

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Caleb

The rain didn't come, but I fucking wanted it to.

I wanted something to break open, something to soak the dirt and drown the silence because the weight pressing down on my chest hadn't let up. Alan's death was building a quiet, calculated rage within me.

A kind of anger that had been simmering under my skin for far too long.

He had been a goddamn idiot. A reckless, dumb as rocks bastard with a smile that made people forget the knife he kept behind his back.

I should have let him rot years ago, life debt or not.

I owed him for pulling me out of Istanbul when the knives were already drawn for my throat, but the price of that debt had ballooned into something I never intended to carry this long.

He should have been smarter. He should have kept his dick in his pants and his hands off things that didn't belong to him. And now he was gone.

The Turks don't kill their golden boys without warning.

Alan had been stealing from our family, from me, someone who took him in.

Who gave him a new life, a new home, and introduced him to my family, and he

threw all that away for a few million dollars.

My grandfather considered it a betrayal, and his order was executed just like any other would have been.

Because if you didn't go through with what Emir Killic ordered, you'd be found in a ditch somewhere, only after your body parts were meticulously detached from your body.

And if it were his family, he'd be brutal.

Your name would be forgotten, and the only one allowed to mourn your death was your mother.

You'd be buried out back with the dogs, and he made sure your name would never be spoken about again.

He was ruthless, a visceral human being who would do any and all type of harm without blinking an eye.

And he had been watching and waiting to implement his revenge.

When my grandfather gave the order, he had stated the kill be executed by his youngest grandson.

His way of having me prove myself was in killing my best friend.

Alan never saw it coming. There was no struggle.

No warning. He simply opened the door and I fired.

Empathy was for the weak, but as I watched my friend's blood drain from his head, I knew there was no turning back.

My soul had been sold, and my life had been bound to the Turkish Mafia and owned by the devil himself.

I was chained to this fate a long time ago.

I was fourteen when I saw my first execution.

My father slit a man's throat in front of a marble fireplace while sipping Arak and humming a Turkish lullaby under his breath.

He told me it was justice. I didn't flinch.

I didn't cry. I just watched the blood stain the rug and the body twitch.

That's when he knew I'd be useful.

By sixteen, I was delivering messages that ended in bodies. By twenty, I was in too deep to climb out. They called me a bodyguard, but that was just a polite way of saying I kept things clean. I made people disappear. I made assets behave. I was the blade they used when diplomacy failed.

What does this mean for a man like me?

It means I have gained a large number of enemies in this world. Enemies that want to destroy anything I'd built and ruin anyone I love. I knew the risks when Alan didn't. Now he was dead, and I was moving up in the system.

I stared at the casket even after the crowd had left.

The wind was sharp, cutting across my cheeks, and the burden of what the silence brought with it, settled on my shoulders.

I clenched my fists in the pockets of my coat, the leather gloves stretched taut over knuckles that were meant for violence.

And then there was her.

Stephanie fucking Winters.

She had no right standing there looking like a sex kitten wearing those black sunglasses; her lips were a bright red, an invitation for more.

Her long, dark hair grew wild in the wind, sexy curves poured into black denim, fist clenched at her side.

She was holding her rage back. A rage that matched my own.

I knew every inch of her. I had memorized the way her ass swayed when she walked, the sharp flick of her eyes when she was about to lie, the way her breath caught whenever I got too close.

I hated how much I noticed. How much I wanted her to notice me.

She was poison. Beautiful, burning poison.

But I didn't trust her. I never could. She was too calm. Too collected. Alan might have died in a pool of his own brains, but she hadn't even shed a tear. That told me more than any police report could.

Stephanie knew something. Maybe not everything. But enough. And I was going to

find out exactly what.

When Alan brought Stephanie into the fold, when he let her touch the books and sniff around in places she never should have been allowed, I knew he was sealing his fate.

And yet...

Goddammit, she was magnetic.

The first time I trailed her, I watched her walk out of a bank in Echo Park, hips swaying, boots clicking against the pavement as if sounding off a countdown.

She didn't look back, didn't flinch, didn't check her surroundings.

She knew I was there. And she loved it. The little smirk at the corner of her mouth told me everything I needed to know.

She was built for trouble.

She paused at the crosswalk, took a short look over her shoulder, and dared me to follow.

I should have turned back. Should have let someone else handle her.

But I didn't. I followed her into that underground bar.

I watched her laugh and press those curves against Alan, knowing the entire time my eyes were on her.

I watched her dance in that short dress, hypnotized by the way her body curved to the sultry beat of the music.

Her legs toned, thighs built to destroy men, and tits meant to feed them.

Fuck! I hated her for it.

I hated that my fists clenched when Alan touched her. I hated the way she looked in red. I hated the sound of her laugh. The way she bit her lip. The way she could tear a man apart with her words and leave him hanging on a thread, hoping for more.

I wanted her. Badly.

But I couldn't have her.

So I watched. I cataloged. I waited. I didn't know what the fuck I was waiting for. But now Alan was dead, I needed to find the missing product, and she was the last loose end.

"You're going to tell me what I need to know, Duchess," I snarled at her.

"Stop calling me that," she gritted, eyes wild as she met my gaze.

Those eyes made my cock throb. I wanted to pin her down beneath me and have her look at me as I forced my cock inside of her sweet pussy.

"What, you don't like that I know your secrets?" I leaned into her, grazing the backs of my fingers over her cheek.

"I know everything that you do, Duchess." I whispered against her lips, feeling her body stiffen against me.

I gave a slow cynical smile, knowing full well her pussy was wet and as needy as she made me.

She never broke, never gave me what I needed. Which meant the only way I was ever going to get it was to follow her sweet ass.

I knew every move she made. And I knew she'd be back here tonight. I knew she wasn't going to stay away. Time was running out and whatever it was she was going to do, she wasn't going to wait on it. She was too clever for that. Too dangerous.

Back at Alan's apartment, I broke through the police tape and made my way inside. Blood was still splattered on the floorboards and couch cushions. I made my way to the window and watched the street.

You needed to have patience in my line of work. It didn't help to get anxious or want to rush things; that's how mistakes were made. Instead, you wait in the shadows to see them slip up, and that's when you strike.

Two hours later, I saw the motorcycle slip into an alley across the street. A few minutes later, a curvy figure dressed in all black emerged. She scanned the empty street before crossing it and heading toward the building.

I watched from the shadows as she slipped inside.

I could instantly tell she was here to look for something.

Something I desperately needed to get to, and she was going to lead me right to it.

So I waited and I tracked her moving across the living room toward the bedroom.

I was calm, slowed down my heartbeat as I moved when she moved.

I saw the panel opening, I saw her enter the room, and I also saw her grab the laptop.

She thought no one had followed her, but I knew she was expecting me. That was the sick dance between us. A toxic push and pull we both got off on.

I moved when she stepped into that hidden room. Slipped inside the door just as she hit enter on a screen I couldn't see. The floorboards creaked beneath my weight, and she paused, scanning the area.

Quickly, she picked up the laptop and ran out the door.

She barely made it past it when I was on her.

She spun around, her hand already halfway to the gun I knew she kept tucked in the back of her waistband.

I caught her wrist, slammed her against the wall, and pressed my body flush against hers.

I pinned her against the wall, my hand in her hair and my breath at her ear, but she didn't fight me. She only seethed at me.

"What are you doing here, Duchess?"

What do you think I'm doing? I'm cleaning up the mess your boy left."

"Liar. You have no idea what you're getting yourself into." I growled.

She smiled, soft and slow. "No, Caleb. You just don't know what I'm capable of."

Fuck.

I always knew I was in trouble, because the woman I hated most in this world might

be the only one who ever truly saw through me. And I didn't know if I wanted to kill her... or keep her. And that scared me more than any Turk ever could.

"What are you hiding?"

She smiled. Not afraid. Never afraid. That's what made her lethal.

"You think I scare that easy? You forget who trained me?"

Her chest rose and fell against mine, heat bleeding through her skin into mine. My hand was still on her wrist, her pulse hammering beneath my thumb.

"I know you found something," I said.

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"I should break your fingers. Torture you until you give it to me."

"Do it. But if you want what I found, you better start using something other than your threats, cause those don't work on me."

I dragged her closer. Our lips, just inches apart.

Her hot breath hovered against my mouth as her scent of sweet lilies filled my lungs.

My hand slid from her wrist, up her arm, over her shoulder, and around her throat.

She didn't move, but I felt her shudder against me as I squeezed.

A small whimper fell from her lips, and I thought I was going to lose it right then and there.

“You're not leaving here alive, Winters. We both know that. Give me what you found, and I may make your death quick.”

"You can try. But you won't survive what comes next," she whispered.

I grunted in approval. “You will fear me, Duchess.”

“I am not afraid of you, Killic. I never was.”

"That's your first mistake, Winters."

I kissed her. I don't know why I did it, but I kissed her.

Hard.

Violent.

I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, but the sound of her moan getting lost in my mouth made my cock jerk, and I wanted to take her right there against that wall.

She bit my lip, clawed her nails into my chest like she wanted to tear me apart and take me all at once. I slammed her back against the wall, one leg between hers, grinding until she gasped.

I broke the kiss, leaning back just in time to see her cheeks flush, the redness running down across her plush tits.

I let my eyes take their time lingering on those globes, wanting to tear them out of her tank top.

My gaze was distracted by the way she licked her kiss-swollen lips, and then they

traveled up to meet the rage in her eyes.

Her anger only made me grow harder for her.

“This doesn’t mean anything,” she hissed at me, that sweet venom lacing every syllable.

But those words? They lit something inside me. She made me feel this rage mixed with a heartbreak so deep it hurt my fucking chest. And then it filled with a hunger so vicious it curled in my gut and whispered ruin her just so I wouldn’t have to feel this ache clawing at my ribs.

“It means everything,” I growled against her mouth, my voice like gravel, my lips brushing hers, wanting another one of those kisses. “And we both fucking know it.”

“Fuck you,” she spat out, the fire flashing in her eyes.

God, she was beautiful when she hated me.

“This isn’t over, Duchess,” I snarled, every syllable dripping with promise.

She bent to grab the laptop from the floor, her breath uneven, eyes steady on mine, thinking I might stop her, might pull her back into what we’d just started.

But I wasn’t going to. I was going to let her run because the thrill was in the torment. The torment of knowing damn well that I wouldn’t stop until I had her pinned down beneath me, breathless and begging for her life, right where I wanted her to be.

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Duchess

Obsidian's place was the kind of chaos that made sense only to her.

Every cord, every wire, every neon-lit gadget looked like it had been salvaged from a cyberpunk apocalypse.

The scent of coffee grinds, burnt plastic, and something sweet...

maybe patchouli, maybe just her perfume, but it clung to the air like static.

The low hum from the dozens of machines filled the space, vibrating through my boots and into every one of my nerves.

Her apartment was one floor above a boarded-up pawn shop in East Hollywood, and it looked like a bunker mated with a nightclub and gave birth to a war room.

"So do you think you can help me?"

"You brought me a hot laptop, probably with a tracker on it, into my home, and now you ask for help!"

"Come on, Obsidian, help me out here."

"You don't fuck with shit like this, Stephanie. This is how people like us get killed."

"Yeah, well, this is how I see us surviving."

Black Obsidian's real name was Elizabeth Pemberton. She was a hacker by trade. The woman knew the ins and outs of a computer like she knew the palm of her hand. She could open back doors to banks, create new identities, and had access to any surveillance camera in the world.

The Turks liked to use women to handle their most private affairs.

Why?

Because we were considered expendable and easy to kill.

We also scared easy, in their eyes. So both Elizabeth and I were used as pawns with a target on our heads when things went wrong.

The only problem with that, was that they didn't know who they had hired.

I was rebellious as fuck and grew up knowing how to work my way around men like Caleb Killic and the Turks.

When I first met Elizabeth, she had been afraid to speak to me.

I couldn't blame her. They'd been tracking and molding her since she was sixteen.

But as time passed by, we grew closer, until we both realized we were in the same boat with no escape.

We were both under the watchful eye of the Turks and there was no way out.

At least that's what they made us believe.

But Elizabeth was smart. Smarter than any Turkish mobster, and she had all sorts of

tricks up her sleeve that helped to make sure our conversations always remained confidential.

Her apartment was a fortress of surveillance cameras and noise canceling equipment.

She was the only one of us who could actually become invisible, yet she was too afraid to.

The Turks had her little brother threatened and she would do anything to keep him alive.

If we were gonna do this, then I needed to convince her that he'd be safe.

"You're fucking insane!"

I nodded. "Yeah, well, it comes with the job. And it also comes with dating a douchebag who left me with nothing. Everything is right here in this damn laptop, Obsidian, and you're the only one who can help me. Are you in or out?"

"I'm not like you, Stephanie. I don't have a family who has the firepower to watch my back. I've got a little boy who's counting on me."

"And he'll be safe. I promise I will keep him safe.

But I need your help right now. You're the only one with the access.

This can't wait. Right now, Killic is trying to figure out what the hell Alan was hiding.

All we need to know is hidden in here. We have twenty-four hours tops before he catches up with me. "

“How can we trust that he hasn't already found you?”

“Because he let me run,” I said quietly. “He likes the chase.”

“What he likes is your curvy ass. If you're not careful he may just catch you one of these days.”

“Over my dead body.”

She shrugged. “He may just enjoy that.”

She gave out a nervous laugh before she placed a hand on her forehead and plopped down in her chair behind her desk.

LED lights coiled across the ceiling in shifting violet and red tones, casting her leather-strewn desk in a surreal glow.

A pair of old-school speakers flanked her triple-screen monitor setup, low techno beats thrummed through them like a steady pulse.

Obsidian curled herself into her purple game chair, dark hair piled up in a messy twist, glasses sliding down her nose as she cracked her knuckles and cracked her neck like she was about to dive into a cage fight.

Sighing, she turned to me. "My brother's life depends on you."

I nodded. "You can trust me."

“I hope so,” she whispered.

I placed a hand on her shoulder, squeezing it reassuringly. “Do it.”

The moment she plugged in, a cascade of encrypted prompts lit up the screen.

She muttered something about dead-man switches and foolproof firewalls, but none of it stopped her.

She was a codebreaker. And Alan's so-called secure files never stood a fucking chance.

I watched as she worked her magic. Her manicured fingernails danced across the keys as each stroke brought us closer to finding out his secret.

Hours passed.

Her muttering turned into a slew of curses in not just one language.

I was pretty sure I heard Russian and Spanish there as well.

She shouted at one point, flipped the bird at the screen, then downed a shot of something clear from a flask she kept in a lit up skull-shaped cup.

I sat across from her on a battered leather couch, picking at a tear in my jeans, watching every tic in her body.

I could tell she didn't like what she was finding. Her jaw was tight, her back stiff.

"What is it?" I asked nervously.

Slowly, she leaned back, shoving her glasses up and pinching the bridge of her nose. Her dark eyes found mine and they looked sharper than the knife I kept strapped to my thigh.

“I’ve secured it,” she said, voice raspy from too much caffeine and not enough air. “Now what do you want to know?”

I stood, stretching the tension out of my shoulders, and walked to the screen. “Those surveillance stills. The ones Alan had hidden. Can you tell me where they came from?”

Obsidian cracked her knuckles again and began hammering the keys. The glow of the screen flared brighter, lines of code racing faster than I could read. Her fingers paused, clicked, and a new window opened. The screen flickered once... twice... and then a satellite image popped up.

It was a birds-eye view of a shipping yard. Crates lined up with shadows of figures moving between them. Time-stamped and geo-tagged, the images were fresh. Less than forty-eight hours old.

"It's an abandoned shipyard in East Los Angeles."

"Can you get access to those cameras?"

She smirked smugly and I rolled my eyes at her but leaned in as she clicked on the screen. "Already on it."

The video footage came up and we both watched as crates were being brought up to the garage doors. One after the other.

"Are those motorcycles?"

"Holy shit," my eyes went wide as I realized millions of dollars in assets were locked up in that garage. “He was watching the drop.”

She turned in her chair, eyes wide now. “No, babe. He wasn’t just watching it... he was planning to intercept it. He logged everything. Crate numbers, routes, shipping manifests. Alan was about to rip the Turks off big time.”

My stomach turned to stone.

And the worst part? He almost pulled it off.

Obsidian tapped another few keys. “Looks like a lot of money, babe. But there’s more in here. You want it all?”

I nodded slowly. “I need to find out how Alan was moving this product and exactly how much is in the account. Can you dig in deeper?”

“I can try to retrace his steps, but it may take a few hours.”

“We don’t have a few hours.”

“You gotta gimme some time, Steph. This isn’t easy.”

I sighed. I had very little patience but right now, my life depended on her.

She went to work as I paced her apartment nervously.

Caleb could barge in at any second, asking questions and threatening us for answers.

He wouldn't kill us, not right away. But he would torture until he got what he wanted. He'd already cornered me, and I was glad I didn't have any information to give him. I had to admit he wasn't a good liar, and now I knew more than I should.

My thoughts were interrupted by Obsidian's yelp. “I found it!”

“Whatcha got?”

“Motherfucker stole twenty-million dollars!” She twirled in her seat to look at me, her eyes wide.

I nodded. “Yeah. Can you get into the account?”

“Easy enough but it looks like Alan was in on it with another source,” she began to type in code again as I slowly stepped away. “I can’t pinpoint who though. All I can see are outgoing messages, not incoming. Whoever he was talking with knows how to hack the system and become invisible.”

Alan had betrayed their trust and Caleb had been onto him. I would bet those fucking twenty million dollars that Caleb was the one who put that bullet in Alan’s head. If not Caleb then someone in that family did. Someone found out and wasn’t saying anything. Or they were keeping it under wraps.

“Shit!” I slammed my hand on the desk and stared out the window.

From Obsidian’s apartment I could see the bare rooftops of the Los Angeles clubs and restaurants in the distance. The city landscape glimmered.

I had a shipment of motorcycles that belonged to the Turks, and I had no idea how to get rid of it. On top of that we were dealing with some heavy hitters if they were able to move that type of product.

“Oh fuck,” Obsidian murmured.

I leaned in over her shoulder just as the screen flickered, a black chat box suddenly appeared. The cursor blinked back at us, steady and taunting.

One question appeared.

Going dark?

The cursor simply blinked as both Obsidian and I glared at the screen.

"Type something," I nudged her.

"Fuck that, it's your show, you do it."

Our attention went back to the screen as yet another message came through.

Are you willing to play a game, Duchess?

Duchess was how I signed off on transactions in the black market. No one really knew that name unless you were doing business with the Turks.

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I yanked the computer toward me and proceeded to respond. "Does it have anything to do with Lazarus' game?"

Three dots appeared and the tension in the room was heavy as we waited for a response. I referenced Alan's obsession with Lazarus hoping for a bite.

I see you've been researching.

"And I'm assuming you've done your own research since you know my name."

I also know what you look like, beautiful.

I stared at Obsidian, and she yanked the laptop away from me. "Fuck, he can see us!"

"How?"

"The damn laptop has a camera." She covered the lens and turned to me angrily.

"Listen, Sis, I have no time for this. What the hell is Lazarus' Game?"

I hesitated and she narrowed her eyes on me. "Talk or this relationship ends here."

"Alan used to talk about it. He was obsessed with the story of Lazarus rising from the dead. He'd reference it constantly so I mentioned it as bait."

We both stared at the screen and Obsidian began to bite her nails. "Looks like he fell for it."

I see you have a beautiful assistant as well.

...

You're not easy to find, Black Obsidian.

"How the fuck do they know who I am?" She murmured, staring at the screen, looking entirely frightened.

You have something I want.

The messages continued to come in.

"And I presume you want it back?" I responded.

Precisely.

"How?"

All I want is for the shipment to be handled with care. Just like Lazarus has done for me in the past. I've got the clients waiting to get paid on their investments. All you have to do is find a buyer and get me the profit.

"I'm not Lazarus."

"Who is Lazarus?" Elizabeth whispered to me.

"It's Alan." My fingertips hovered over the keyboard.

No, you are not. You are the Duchess, and you get shit done for the Turks, am I wrong?

“ They are the Turks!”

“We don’t know that.”

“Yeah, well, then how do you explain how they know all that info if they’re not!” Elizabeth shot up from her seat, anxiety riding in her voice. “They know who we are and they’re distracting us to kill us.”

I want to do no such thing.

The message popped up and both our hearts skipped a beat.

“Fuck! He can hear us.”

Yes I can. Every word that comes from those beautiful lips.

"What do you want?" I asked them.

We just want your help. Finish this job and we’ll leave you alone.

“Who do you mean by, we?”

My clients. Wealthy clients who expect a specific product which was promised to them.

“Your job got Lazarus killed.”

I’m well aware of that and I am sorry for your loss.

“How do I know I can trust you?”

I waited, and a minute later a link popped up. Obsidian's eyes narrowed. "It's an invitation," she whispered.

"For what?"

"A meeting."

My fingertips shook as I clicked the link. A black curtain and a chair with a desk appeared.

"What is this?"

Suddenly, a man appeared wearing a black mask with a blue neon skull face. He was broad shouldered and tall. Obsidian gasped as he leaned forward into view.

"Killian," she whispered.

He tilted his head to look at the camera and I could almost feel Obsidian melting into the chair next to me.

"Who is Killian?" I whispered to her, knowing full well he could hear me.

"Let's just say he plays the game just like me. One of the few who could easily make someone disappear."

"Good to know," I replied, turning my eyes back to the screen.

"It's nice to officially meet you ladies. I felt negotiations should be done face to face, to make things fair and as a sign of good faith." He stated.

I smiled. "Gutsy move, but I don't think a mask qualifies as face to face."

“I can’t let all my secrets out of the box, now can I?”

“I suppose not,” I whispered, cautious in how I was going to handle this.

Obsidian sighed beside me, placing her chin in the palm of her hand. I rolled my eyes and waited for him to speak.

"We know what you can do, Duchess. What you both can do. We want to work with you. I need a middleman and you need a way out, so how can we help each other?"

“I need a guarantee.”

“Do this job for us and we may do business again in the future. These clients of mine are willing to pay a pretty penny for certain items.”

Elizabeth nudged at my leg. “Do it,” she whispered. “We have nothing to lose, and maybe he can help us.”

Obsidian slid closer to me, appearing on the camera. “We don’t want the money. Instead, if we do this, can you help us disappear.”

He considered it for about half a second and then nodded. “You got a deal.”

I placed the video on mute and pulled her toward me. “Are you crazy? Who the hell told you I didn’t want that money? And you also don’t know who those people are. ”

“I know him . I’ve heard of him for years. He works mostly for himself. I think we can trust him.”

“How?”

“He’ll make our tracks disappear and give us that brand new life you talk about so much. He could shield us from anything and he’ll also be able to protect my brother.”

Her eyes gleamed with the hope that I would say yes, and in turn I couldn’t deny her. Taking the video off mute, I turned towards the man on the screen.

“I’ll help you run this job and you help us get the Turks off our trail.”

“You got it and as a show of good faith, you can keep the money. As well as the twenty million Lazarus earned.”

My eyes narrowed, he knew everything about us. I had a feeling he was worse than Caleb.

“Oh, and Black Obsidian?”

"Y-yes," she stuttered like an infatuated schoolgirl, leaning in to look at him.

I shook my head and placed my arms over my chest as he spoke to her. "I've been wanting to meet you for a long time. You're a ghost in this world, did you know that?"

Her eyes widened. "I am?"

He nodded. "I look forward to learning your secrets. If you're willing to share them with me."

Before she could respond, I turned the laptop towards me. "No secrets Killian. We do this job for you and we're done. I'll get you a buyer as soon as I can."

“Twenty -four hours, Duchess. Any longer and I’ll have to look for another mover.”

“You’ll have an answer before that,” I shut the laptop down and turned to Elizabeth.

"What are we getting ourselves into, Stephanie?" She looked at me wide-eyed.

"Something we should have done a long time ago. Can you create an anonymous account?"

"Honey, I can do anything." She flexed her fingers.

“You want to know how I’m going to help you?”

She nodded and I pointed at the screen. “I’ve got twenty million ways of helping you.”

“Fuck! What the hell are we going to do with all this money?”

That was the question of the hour. What was I going to do with it, and how was I going to get rid of it without the Turks knowing about it.

“It doesn’t matter. What matters is it’s mine now. It’s ours. And with it we can have a new life.”

“Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me?”

“Because you deserve to be free. We all do.”

I grabbed my jacket and helmet and headed to the door. “Open an untraceable account and move the money, then pack up whatever you can. I’ll pick you up in two hours. You won’t be back, so pack only what you need.”

"This is crazy!"

"Crazier than working for the Turkish mob?"

"Well, n-not exactly."

"You want to survive this?"

"Yes."

"Then call your brother and let him know someone is coming for him. I'll let you know who as soon as I can."

I left Elizabeth's place and called one other person. The only one who had cared enough about me to try and save me from Alan's grasp, right before I fell into the hands of the Turks. I wasn't sure if she'd help me, but it was worth a try.

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

The last I heard was that Rhea Barton had been managing the famous Rouge Roulette, a high-end strip club located in Downtown Los Angeles.

Roulette was the name given to her by her Uncle Derek Masterson, one of the founding members of the Hellbound Lovers MC.

Her father was Nick Barton, President of the HLMC.

Let's just say, my girl was well-connected.

The name fit her. Knowing Rhea was like playing Russian Roulette.

You just never knew when she'd go off. She'd been my best friend all through college.

We'd been brought together by fate, and the sound of a revving V-Twin engine turned us both the fuck on.

She was a business major while I majored in finance, which meant we had several classes together.

When she heard I was brought up in the Royal Bastards MC, she was all about knowing every detail of my life.

We had that in common: the motorcycle club life, and the dream of creating our own

club one day.

It wasn't a far-fetched dream, just one that never came to be when we parted ways.

We had been inseparable until I met Alan two years ago.

Things went sour then, and I hadn't heard from her since.

I could only pray Rhea wouldn't reject me.

I couldn't do what I had planned, without her.

It was a reach. But maybe, just maybe, I could make her dreams come true.

Cheesy right, but fuck did I hope it worked.

As I entered the bar area I smiled. The Rouge Roulette was just how I imagined it. An old Russian restaurant turned into a strip club. Staggered stages were placed along the front of the bar while more private stages rose above the floor connected to private rooms along a staircase.

The place smelled of money and booze as dollar bills floated onto the stage while a pretty little thing swirled around on the pole showing her ass to every seedy businessman who wanted a taste.

I smirked, knowing they'd need to pay high dime for one of these girls to spread their legs for them, let alone fuck them.

"Can I get you anything, Sweetheart?" The young bartender with the light green eyes winked at me and I smiled at him seductively.

"Actually," I leaned in, whispering, as if telling him a secret. "You wouldn't happen to know where Rhea Barton is, would you?"

He pointed to the top of the stairwell. "You're welcome to go on up but she's not seeing anyone today."

"We'll see about that," I whispered, as I made my way up the winding staircase.

At the top of the steps stood two bodyguards.

They barely looked at me as I approached, but I could feel them stiffen on either side of me.

Testing their limits, I reached for the door and one of them reached out to me, placing his hand around my wrist. They were quick to react which made me think they'd be perfect for what I had in mind.

"Can we help you, ma'am?"

Except for that. I was just called ma'am by a man old enough to be my father. I sighed in frustration. How I hated that word. "Can you please tell Rhea that an old friend is here to see her?"

"What old friend?" The other man leaned in, finally assessing me.

"Name's Stephanie Winters."

The door flew open and on the other side of it stood a beautiful bombshell of a woman. She'd gotten curvier since the last time I saw her, and she'd perfected the art of makeup, but she was still my best friend.

“Hands off her,” she stated to the guy at my right before those big hazel eyes stared right back at me.

I smiled awkwardly as I stood there in my leather jacket and ripped jeans. Not much different than when she’d left me. Suddenly, she engulfed me in a big bear hug.

In a whisper only I could make out she said, “Where the hell have you been?”

Grabbing me by the hand, she dragged me into her corner office and sat me down. The space made me smile. It was extremely contemporary with white couches and a white shaggy rug where a giant silver Lab lay staring at us both.

I stared back at his big hazel eyes, and she laughed. “Don’t mind Legend, he won’t bother you.”

She handed me a brandy glass and smiled. “Not unless I tell him to.”

I rolled my eyes and continued to make my way around her office, detailing her large glass desk and leather chair. The office looked right out onto the floor where you could see the dollar bills flying.

Roulette came and stood beside me. “Girls get all they make on stage. I get what comes in at the door and the bar. Their job is to make sure those men spend money at that bar, or the private lounges.”

“Looks like you’ve got a good deal here.”

“It’s alright. It’s all owned by the Hellbound Lovers. My Uncle helped me purchase it.”

“I’m sure he’s thrilled with what you’ve done with the place.”

She laughed. “Not much he can do. It makes money and they get a cut. It's also a safe haven. Anyone who steps on Hellbound Lovers territory gets the benefits of not getting killed.”

I nodded. “Good deal.”

I sat down across from her on the couches and set my brandy glass down on the pure black concrete coffee table that sat in the center of the room.

“Why are you here, Stephanie?” Roulette was good at being blunt and addressing the elephant in the room.

I paused for a moment before responding. “I need your help.”

She frowned and scooted up in her chair. “What’s wrong?”

“Alan got himself killed nearly twenty-four hours ago.”

“Well, shit. Always knew he was bad news.”

I gave her a stern look. “Thanks.”

“He may have been bad news but he left me with a shit ton of money. Money that technically isn’t mine. Money I’m pretty sure he’d been skimming off the top from jobs he did for the Turks.”

“Fuck.”

I nodded. “But there’s someone else. Alan was working with a man; Obsidian calls him Killian. He’s offered the Duchess a deal to set up a secured pick-up location to get rid of the product, in exchange for help in getting the Turks off our ass.”

“The Duchess?”

“It's a code name I go by when handling money for the Turks in the black market. I didn't want to use my real name although Alan shit on my privacy when he gave security my entire identity when I first started.. Let's just say he fucked me over in more ways than I could count.

I now have to sell a stolen Turkish shipment worth millions that Alan hid in a warehouse in Los Angeles.

I need to do this without the Turks knowing, without the cops finding us out, and I need to do it quietly and quickly before time runs out.

I get these clients what they paid for, and I get my freedom.

But I can't do it without your connections. ”

“Motherfucker!”

She stood and began to pace. “How much money?”

“A lot of money.”

“And what are you going to do with all that money?”

“I haven't thought that far into it yet.”

“What was in the shipment?”

“Motorcycles. Top of the line.”

“Holy shit,” she looked back at me. “Harleys?”

I nodded. “Probably. I spotted a couple Cyclone Roadsters, some Ducati, a StreetFighter.”

She turned to me. “That bike goes for nearly eleven mil!”

“I told you. It's a lot of money. Whatever we sell, we get a cut.”

“How the fuck did he get his hands on those?”

“Alan moved shipments for the Turks. I’m assuming their connections were used. All I know is he has that stolen product which is probably why they put a bullet in him. And I’m next if they find out I know where it is and haven’t handed it back to them.”

“If I do help you, what’s to say they won’t put a bullet in me?”

“I can't guarantee your safety, Rhea. But I can make you disappear after.”

“This is beyond...”

“Crazy, I know. Listen, I’m good with money, Rhea. And Obsidian is amazing at what she does in hacking systems. She could give us a whole new identity. A whole new life.”

“Who says I need that, Stephanie?”

“You will if you want to ride with me.”

She stopped pacing and looked down at me. “Ride?”

“I’ve been thinking about this for a long time. You remember the Royal Harlots?”

She smiled. “The club name we’d chosen to use. Yeah, I remember it.”

“I’m doing it, Rhea. I’m gonna build the club and I want you to be my VP in all this.”

“Are you crazy?”

“You know you’re not the first one to ask me that in the last twenty-four hours.”

“You’re going from the Mafia to God knows what type of business...”

“I haven’t figured that one out just yet.”

“Ha!” She guffawed, raising her arms in exasperation. She shook her head. “I can’t do this. You need to leave now.”

I leapt out of the seat and rushed over to her. “Come on, Rhea. This can’t be all you want in life?”

“It’s what makes me money.”

“We can have so much more,” I whispered to her, almost begging her.

“Why me?”

“Because you’re the only person in this world who had my back once. The only person I fucking trust with my life. I was just too stupid to see it and I fucked up. I’m here to make amends.”

“Your father is going to flip the fuck out when he realizes his daughter created a

motorcycle club.”

I moved my head side to side in agreement. “He may, and the Harlots may just look like a means to escape, but it’s not. We’ll make our world. Either way, I need a business and I need your business ideas.”

“Bitch, is that all you want from me?”

“You’ve got the business mentality; I’ve got the numbers. What more can you ask for?”

“First, what are we going to do with that shipment?”

“So you’re in?”

“I’m probably as crazy as you are, but I’m willing to hear you out.”

“Okay,” I shook my head, excitedly.

Rhea thought for a moment and then sighed. “You can count my uncle out, he won’t buy hot items like that. What about your connections?”

I shrugged and then something clicked. I looked up at her and raised a brow. She stared at me and without me saying a word, she realized what I was thinking and began to shake her head.

“It’s a bad idea, Steph.”

I bit down on my lip. “You know he’s the one resource we have who may be interested in buying.”

“Making deals with someone like that could go sour fast.”

“Rancid is a piece of shit who will get his hands on anything of value, Rhea. Colt could convince him to buy it.”

“You haven’t talked to your brother since that shit went down.”

“I know. And as much as I hate him for what he did to Jameson, and to my father and his good name, he is still my brother. And goddamn it he owes me.”

“Are you going to tell your dad?”

I gave her a side glance. “He’ll kill me.”

She nodded in agreement. “Yeah, but at least you could give him a heads up on what your plans are. Just in case.”

“I’ll talk to him eventually. Right now, we have our priorities. I’ll get in contact with Colt, and we’ll figure it out. For now, handle your business here.”

I got up to leave when I remembered the most important thing. “Hey, do you think the HLMC could do me a favor?”

“It doesn’t hurt to ask.”

“There’s a little boy. Obsidian’s little brother. They have her threatened with killing him if she leaves. Is there a way they could help?”

Roulette nodded. “They don’t play when it comes to children. I’m sure they could help in that area. Let me make a few calls and I’ll keep you posted.”

“Thanks, babe.”

“Oh, and Steph,” she called out to me as I waited for the elevator.

“Yeah?”

“Watch your back! I’m not going to your funeral, bitch.”

I laughed as I got on the elevator. She was a crude bitch, but I loved her.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

The warehouse reeked of stale oil, must, and rusted steel.

Alan had nearly thirty million dollars in new assets buried beneath stacks of unmarked crates on the outskirts of East L.A.

, and I had a ticking clock strapped to my chest. Every second I waited was a chance for Calen Killic to start poking his nose where it didn't belong.

I knew that when I moved, I needed to make sure I wasn't being followed. I had one move left, and I hated that it led me back to the one person I swore I'd never speak to again.

My thumb hovered over Colt's name. Colton Winters had been named the VP of the Royal Bastards at the same time Elrik Jameson had been named President.

Unfortunately for Jameson, Rancid took his vengeance and made him a murderer.

He exiled him, and as of now, no one had heard from him.

On the other hand, his supposed best friend maintained his title by doing God knows what under Rancid's demands.

The worst part about it all was that Colt Winters was my older brother, and the last thing I ever said to him was to drop dead for shaming the family.

That was five years ago. But blood was still blood, and right now, blood was all I had left.

The phone rang once. Twice. Three times.

Then his voice filtered through the line. He sounded somewhat hesitant, and his voice slightly cracked as he spoke my name. "Steph?"

A part of me twisted at the sound of it.

So familiar and yet so distant. Despite everything he was still my brother, we had been close, and it had all hurt.

Especially what he'd done to our father.

I didn't know his motives, he kept those to himself, but the least he could do was help me out. He owed me that.

I swallowed the lump in my throat and responded. "I thought you weren't going to answer."

"I thought you'd never talk to me again." He said quietly.

I almost didn't. I almost let pride keep me from making this call. But pride didn't mean shit when you were staring at a future that would be cut short in mere hours.

"I won't lie," I said. "I thought about it."

There was a long pause between us with a bunch of unsaid feelings that continued to weigh on us.

"How are you?" He asked.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, not really wanting to get into it with him. "I didn't call for small talk, Colt. I need your help. I'm in deep shit."

I stood at the window, the glass smudged with soot and dust. I pressed the phone tightly to my ear, staring blankly at the flickering streetlight across the street from the building.

The warehouse was located in the middle of nowhere and well hidden, but I couldn't let my guard down.

I kept scanning the street for any sign of movement as paranoia had slowly seeped into my head in the last few hours.

And I knew deep down in my gut that Caleb had eyes on me.

My breath came in shallow pulls as I tried to figure out how to say everything without giving too much away, or sounding like the scared girl I swore I'd never be again.

But Colt knew me. He'd always seen through my shit.

And even though it had been years, I knew he could sense the fear.

I couldn't help the shake in my voice, or the forced edge in my tone that I tried to keep steady.

"I got myself into something," I finally said, my words tight and low. "Something I can't get the hell out of alone."

There was silence on his end. Not the judgment kind. He was just waiting for me to

finish. He always did that. Waited until I let it spill and I always did. I eventually broke.

My breathing became ragged as I told him everything.

I let him know about Alan's death, the Turks, Caleb.

Everything. I even told him about the goddamn laptop that felt like a time bomb waiting to reveal me and our location.

My hands shook as I held the phone, my chest tightening with every word I managed to push out.

I told him about the accounts, the warehouse full of hot goods that no one was supposed to know existed, the kind of information that people were murdered over.

I told him about Alan's stash, his betrayal, his death, and my place in all of it.

By the time I stopped, I was pressed against the cold wall, knees weak, knuckles white around the edge of the windowsill. And Colt hadn't said a damn word.

My voice cracked once. I hated that. But it was the truth bleeding through, and he knew it, because this wasn't just me calling in a favor. This was his little sister calling for protection.

His silence at the end was heavy, but I waited patiently for his response. Finally, he broke the silence.

"What are you planning to do with it?"

"I don't know yet. But I need to move it before the Turks catch on to what Alan had

going on, " I muttered, still peeking out the window. "You think Rancid might bite?"

Rancid's reputation wasn't just street rumor, he had made a name for himself in the dark circles I dealt with.

His name carried weight among the Turks and everyone from the Italians to the Mexicans knew that Rancid would do anything for money.

He liked to traffic girls, he trained them, buried them, and was vile enough to sell the dirt above their graves.

He was a disgusting pedophile. And anyone who was anyone knew that Rancid didn't just buy product, he controlled it.

If I was going to put my life in anyone's hands, it needed to be someone who had more power than the people I was running from.

And in this world, that wasn't a long list. Sadly, Rancid sat right at the top of it.

"How much product is it?" Colt asked finally, voice clipped.

"We've got at least thirty million's worth."

"Fuck, Steph. That's a lot of fucking money. I don't think he'll go for it. Maybe half of that."

I hissed at him. "Don't try that haggling shit on me, Colt. I know Rancid's movements, I watch everything. He's got the funds. What I want to know is if it's worth taking the risk on. Will Rancid buy the items or not?"

He paused, and I imagined him pacing back and forth in whatever hideout the RBMC

called home now. Probably scratching at his stubble while doing the math in his head.

“I can’t guarantee it but I’ll see how I can sell it to him.”

I nodded, although he couldn’t see me. “Thanks.”

“Are you going to be okay?”

It took me a second to respond. “I know you think I was dumbass for leaving.”

“Not exactly... but yeah. I’m sure Mom and Dad will welcome you back.”

“I don’t want to come back, Colt. Just like you made your decisions in life, I’ve made mine.”

“That’s not fair...”

“Yeah, life isn’t fair, Colt. It wasn’t fair for Jameson either.”

“I’m not going to get into that, Stephanie.”

“Then don’t ask questions and just help me. You owe me that.”

He sighed before responding. “Gimme an hour and I’ll have a response.”

“Thank you.”

“And Stephanie...”

“Yeah.”

“About Jameson...”

“Yeah.”

“It’s not what you think.”

“I’m not the one you need to tell that to.”

I quickly hung up the phone and left the warehouse, careful not to have anyone follow me. Although I could still feel him everywhere.

That hour was hell.

I had gone back to Obsidian's apartment because at the moment, it was the only space where I felt safe. I couldn't go back to my apartment, let alone Alan's place.

At least with Obsidian, she'd have eyes on anyone within blocks of the apartment.

She would warn me if she saw anything suspicious.

Especially if it led up anywhere near her safe space.

Her apartment always smelled like incense and burnt coffee.

It was an industrial-sized condominium with concrete floors and brick walls.

The faint hum of electricity was sort of peaceful with everything going on around us.

The curved screens were either on surveillance cameras or in chat rooms. Different colored neon wires snaked across the floor, and sealed documents were shoved into crates labeled with obscenities.

I paced the large apartment, my heels scraping against the concrete floor as that godforsaken tension continuously coiled in my spine.

The silence was loaded. It was too quiet, too still, and it made the hairs at the back of my neck stand on end.

Every pass by the window, I glanced out into the darkness.

Obsidian had put out the streetlight on purpose.

She said her cameras had night vision, and the light only blocked them.

"You doing alright over there?" Obsidian's voice rang out.

"As good as I'm gonna get... I guess," I whispered that last part of the phrase. Almost scared to jinx it all. I literally figured I was never going to sleep deeply again.

I ran through scenarios. What if Rancid said no? What if Caleb found out first? What if Colt turned on me? What if one of the Turks came here and shot us all up?

I continued to pace the apartment, waiting on my brother to come through. As soon as the hour hit, we were both sitting side by side staring down at the screen.

"Are you sure he's going to call?"

"Give him a minute."

When the phone finally buzzed, I snatched it off the table. My brother's face appeared and Obsidian gave a small laugh. "Damn."

"What?" I asked her as I put the phone to my ear.

“He’s cute is all,” she whispered.

I rolled my eyes and answered. "What’s the word?"

Colt exhaled sharply. "Rancid’s interested. But he wants to meet you first. Wants to make sure this deal is clean."

"It’s not."

"We know that, but he doesn’t need to know that."

“Who, bro. Livin’ on the edge, huh?”

“Do you want my help or not?” I unwillingly stayed quiet as he continued. “He wants to talk. Not in person. He wants to do a secure video call. Tonight."

That gave me a little breathing room but brought me a whole new level of paranoia.

"Send me the link," I said, my voice low. "And make sure it doesn't get traced."

"You’ll be safe on this one. He doesn’t do anything without one of his men securing everything. I’ll call back in ten minutes."

I ended the call and turned to Obsidian, who was already on her feet, grabbing her laptop.

"We doing this here or moving to another site?" she asked, already pulling up a shell system on her laptop.

"Theres no time. He said ten minutes. A video call. Besides, less eyes, less questions."

Obsidian nodded and got to work. I pulled up a chair beside her, my nerves fraying with every click of her mechanical keyboard.

"This link's bouncing across six proxies," she said.

"Okay, what does that even mean?"

"It means that no hacker, not even Rancid's little tech bitch, will be able to track us "

"That's good." I nodded nervously.

"Turn down the lights. This son of bitch doesn't need to see our faces."

Five minutes later, my brother's face appeared on the screen. I was surprised to see him. He'd aged in the last few years.

He looked grim, lined with hard years of club loyalty, or better yet betrayal.

Rancid was a shadow behind him, seated on a worn leather couch, flanked by armed bikers, and a woman with a snake tattoo winding down her throat, sitting on his lap.

He tapped on her ass as I came on the screen and pouting, she got up and walked off.

"You must be the infamous Duchess," Rancid drawled.

I leaned into the camera, letting just my voice cut through the screen. "And you must be the bastard who pissed on the Royal Bastards patch."

His smirk widened. "Colt, you didn't tell me she was feisty. Women like that give me a hard-on. I bet you look as sweet as you sound."

“Wrong. I’m not sweet at all, on the contrary, I’m poisonous to men like you.”

The tension was thick, but I couldn’t let Rancid take the upper hand. Colt cleared his throat nervously, lowering his voice and his head. Coward. “Tell him about the deal.”

“This will be fun. Yes, let’s talk about that deal.” Rancid pressed.

Obsidian kept the feed clean and Colt’s eyes flickered nervously between screens, while I laid out every detail of the inventory, drop locations, percentages, and timelines.

Rancid didn’t flinch. He watched me with the calm of a man who’d slit throats before breakfast. Each term I offered was another coil of barbed wire closing around my neck, and I knew it.

But I kept selling it and the bastard kept eating it all up.

“This is solid,” he said eventually. “Clean. Smart. I like the way you work, Duchess.”

My stomach twisted as he leaned in closer, his voice menacing. “You make me wonder what else you’re good at. I hope this won’t be the last time we work together. I like a woman who brings this much heat to the table.”

“The product needs to be moved tonight, it can’t wait.”

“Colt will handle it. Won’t you Winters?”

“Yes. Yes, Sir,” he stuttered.

I swallowed the bile rising in my throat and forced a smile. “You’ll get access to the product as soon as I get my money. But after this, we’re done. I don’t plan on doing

any more deals with anyone”

Rancid gave a low chuckle. “No one’s ever done in my world, sweetheart. But we’ll pretend you are if that makes you feel better.”

“It does,” I stated. “The sooner you make the transfer, the faster I can get this shit off my hands and into yours. And Rancid...”

“Yeah, Princess,” he smiled smugly.

“You fuck me over and I’ll come after you personally.”

His deep amused chuckle was the last thing we heard before the screen went black. I sat in silence, my breath tight in my chest. I’d just handed my soul to a devil meaner than the last. Rancid had me in the palm of his hand now, and there was no forgetting it.

“You think he’ll come through?” Obsidian asked worriedly.

Suddenly a ping came in and we both glanced at the screens. Killian’s hacker name popped up. “Nice work ladies. I suggest you check your account.”

Obsidian quickly opened a new window and sure enough, staring back at us was not only twenty million but an additional eleven million dollars. Obsidian almost yelled out, covering her mouth as her eyes danced with glee. She simply stared at me in amazement, grabbing my hand.

“Ho-ly shit,” she whispered.

“So are you gonna come through for us or what, Killian?” I asked.

“Lay low. I need forty-eight hours and I’ll get you both the fuck out of there. Oh and Duchess?”

“Yes.”

“It was a pleasure doing business with you.”

The screen went black and I looked at Obsidian. We needed to disappear. And fast. Because once that product moved, and once the dust settled, the real hunt would begin, and this time, I wouldn’t have Alan or Colt to shield me from these wolves.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

My phone buzzed before the sun even had the decency to rise. The voice on the other end sounded nervous as it stuttered.

“S-Sir.”

“You better have something important for me, Ahmat. I don’t have time for your shit.” I grumbled into the phone as I slowly got up from the comfort of my King-sized bed.

Ahmat had been another little weasel that my grandfather had put to follow me.

I knew exactly what he was doing, informing my grandfather of all my movements by pretending to be loyal to me.

He’d thrown me under the bus a few times, thinking I’d never find out, but I had a loyal few strategically placed in the syndicate.

He’d pay sooner or later. It was only a matter of time.

"She led us to the warehouse as you said she would," Ahmad whispered, as if telling me a secret. They all knew better than to deliver a half-truth, which meant what he was saying had to be accurate.

I leaned back in my chair, the leather creaking under the tension coiling inside me. "Was she aware she was being followed?"

"No, sir. She moved like she thought she was in the clear. We kept our distance. No tails were burned."

"Where is she now?"

"A place called Rouge Roulette, in downtown L.A. Some underground strip club. It's owned by the Hellbound Lovers Motorcycle Club."

The Hellbound Lovers were considered a safe haven for anyone who entered their establishments, which were aplenty in the Los Angeles area.

But between them and Death Row Shooters who managed the docks, it had become a burden for the family.

The Turks did not like to follow rules and we were constantly having to back down to these damn bikers.

But they ran on territories so you fought fire with fire.

The Bloody Scorpions had been hired to make sure our shipments and businesses weren't fucked with. It was a true, bloody nightmare.

"Sir?" I didn't respond. Just let the silence stretch long enough to make the bastard uncomfortable.

"Send me the address." Then I ended the call and stretched, cracking the tension from my neck.

I made a quick call downstairs to one of the house servants. "Have the driver wait for me out front."

I changed quickly into a black jumpsuit with a hoodie, grabbed my jacket, and headed down.

The warehouse was buried deep in East L.A., surrounded by miles of nothing. No cameras. No patrol. Just rusted chain-link and industrial silence. When I pulled up, I already felt the tension settling heavy in my gut. The men I sent stood like statues, avoiding my gaze.

Ozan waited for me by the warehouse. He was my grandfather's right hand man. He was in charge of the financial affairs and the one who found out that Alan had been stealing from us.

"What did you find?" I asked him.

"We haven't gone in yet." He responded, shortly.

He was a man of few words, but deep down he was as brutal as they come.

I'd seen him rip men's throats out and feed them to their wives.

Beside him stood Ahmat. The weasel who had initially called me.

I walked to the heavy steel door. My boots echoing off the concrete as I crossed the yard, every step getting me closer to the end of this bullshit deal.

I gripped the handle, yanked the door open, and was met with a gaping void.

Nothing. No crates. No containers. No evidence of the millions in product that were supposed to be here. Just dust, oil stains, and the distant scurry of a rat.

My fists clenched. My blood went hot. "You told me she led you here."

"She did, this is the place. I watched her enter and stay for over twenty minutes. Then I followed her out."

I turned slowly, letting them see every ounce of fury behind my eyes. "Did you bother to check if the product was here?"

Silence.

Rage surged through me and pulling my gun out of my waistband, I aimed and fired one shot into Ahmat's head. I then grabbed the nearest man by his collar, slammed him against the steel wall so hard the building shook. "Do I look like a man you want to disappoint twice?"

He stammered. "W-We thought..."

"You don't get paid to think. You get paid to deliver."

"I don't think killing your grandfather's most trusted men is the answer." Ozark's voice cut through my rage.

I slightly turned my head, not fully looking at him. "Did I ask you?"

I let the man drop and stepped back, breath hissing through clenched teeth. I stared out across the warehouse, my vision tunneling. She moved it. Somehow, somewhere. She outplayed me.

Duchess.

The name tasted like blood and lust in my mouth.

"What will you do with her?" Ozark asked, prepared to give my grandfather my

response.

I had to be careful here. I didn't want her dead, not yet. I wanted to torture her. Toy with her before I stabbed her heart, like she was currently stabbing mine.

I turned to the rest of the men. "Bring her to me. I don't care how. I don't care who sees. You drag her out of that club in front of God and every devil. But you bring her to me, tonight. And I want her alive."

They all nodded, scattering like cockroaches.

"I hope you are prepared to kill her," Ozark stated as I walked past him. "She is a traitor."

I ignored him. He thought he could manipulate and control me, but he had no idea who he was talking to. Nobody told Caleb Killic what the fuck to do, especially not some henchman.

And she... She thought she could disappear. Thought she could pull one over on me.

But I had her scent now. And once I started to hunt her, I was never going to stop until I put her on her knees and made her beg me to stop.

I pulled up a chair in the middle of the abandoned warehouse and I waited until her eyes fluttered open. "Wake up, Sleeping Beauty."

She closed and opened her eyes slowly, and I could see her pupils constricting as they adjusted to the light that swung from above us and cast shadows on her features. A flicker of recognition moved past them, and then I saw a glimpse of fear which gave me such satisfaction.

“What? What is this?” She struggled against the chains on her wrists.

“Hush, now, Princess. I don’t want you to get hurt. Not yet, anyway.”

"What am I doing here, Caleb?" As she went to stand, the restraints on her wrists and ankles held her back down.

Looking down at herself, a look of panic crossed her features, and I leaned back against the wall, arms crossed over my chest, the feeling of satisfaction and lust settling in my loins.

For a brief moment, I enjoyed this panic-stricken version of this powerful woman.

But just as soon as I saw it, I went to her, like her loyal dog, existing only to give her comfort.

She looked down at me as I crouched before her. “Do. Not. Touch me,” she seethed. Her breath came out ragged, tits straining against her tank top. I yearned to see them bare.

I reached up and softly brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. “You look good tonight, Duchess,” I teased.

"Why, Caleb? Why are you doing this?"

"Because I asked you to be honest with me, but that doesn’t seem to be the case here."

"What good will honesty do now?"

"Probably none. There’s no undoing the damage you’ve done to yourself, or to me, for

that matter. But nonetheless, I want the truth. I need it."

She shook her head and then glanced around the empty space. "Where am I?"

"Los Angeles. I know it's empty now, but the place should look familiar. Weren't you here just last night?" I kept ignoring those big doe eyes as she scanned the room, the way she licked her lips. She had betrayed me, stolen from me, and was now lying to me.

"What?!" She struggled once again against the chains.

"Don't do that, you'll hurt yourself."

"How in the fuck did you get me here?" She glared at me.

"There's nothing I cannot do, Stephanie. Nothing that will ever stop me from bringing you to me. I want you to be aware of that."

She looked at me wide-eyed, those eyes of hers burning with the urge to cause pain.

"Don't look at me like that, tatlim . Haven't you hurt me enough?" I whispered.

"Fuck you, Caleb! Man the fuck up! You want me to believe you're doing all this for what? Honesty? Truth? Don't make me laugh. You just can't handle the fact that a woman beat you to it?"

I yanked on the chair, my grip on it causing the wood to creak as I shifted it towards me. "Watch your tone, Princess. I am not Alan!"

She looked directly into my eyes as she spoke. "No, you are not. I am well aware of that. You're worse. Because at least Alan showed his true colors to me. You, on the

other hand, keep them hidden. You keep them buried in that dark soul of yours."

I dropped to my knees before her, sweeping my hands up over her jean clad thighs.

"It's true." I whispered, lifting her hands so that the chains hooked onto a pulley system.

"What is this?" Her eyes widened in fright as she looked up.

"I live in the dark," I whispered as I undid the chains that bound her ankles to the chair.

I took a step back as she tried to kick at me. I had to admit she surprised me at how tough she was. She took any chance she could to fight me, and any man had to admire that. There was no fear in those beautiful eyes, just her will to survive.

"I'm right where you put me."

Grabbing the pendant control that hung from the rafters, I pressed the red button. It was satisfying watching the pulley elevate her ass above the chair, her legs still kicking in the air. She was helpless and she knew it.

I walked up to her, her body fighting against the chains I'd personally wrapped her in. Chains that tied my soul to hers.

I smiled to myself as I brought my hands up to stroke the soft silk of her tanktop. She struggled against the chains, and I glanced up at her face, holding her stare as I gripped her black silk and tore it open. Her yelp of surprise left a sweet echo in the emptiness.

"You won't get away with this," she growled.

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"I don't want to," I whispered hoarsely as I let my lips linger on hers. Her lips trembled while I trailed my fingertips over the soft swell of her tits, leading a path that ended along the soft flesh of her waistline.

"Don't touch me, Caleb."

"Or what?" I dragged my nose along the slender expanse of her neck.

"I'll kill you."

Her statement held a chill of a warning in its depths, but one I wasn't swayed by in the least. On the contrary, it made me want to put her on all four.

"Empty threats don't work on me, Duchess."

"They are most definitely not empty." She gritted the words out as she flinched away from my touch, only making me all the more determined to make her see that the Duchess belonged to me.

I smiled against her lips as I tugged open the top button of her jeans and yanked the zipper down. She gasped as I slid my hand into the waistband of her panties and found the soft wet spot between her thighs.

"No, they are not," I stated as her breaths came out in short, jagged puffs while I circled that tight little bundle of nerves she'd kept hidden from me for so long.

"You'll never be safe again, Duchess."

"The fuck I won't." She tried lifting her body and kicking out, but I took a step to the side and smiled as I watched her pretty tits bounce against the silky bra.

Grabbing her around the waist, I drew her into me, biting down on the curve of her breast and loving that tiny yelp of shock she gave out from the pain I issued on her flesh.

I looked up at her as I dragged the bra cup down over the plush globe and licked at the taut peak. She looked away as I bit down on the nipple, her body jolting from the slight pain I caused.

"You won't live beyond this week, Caleb Killic."

I growled, my anger simmering as she continued to instigate me. Taking the waistband of her jeans and panties, I yanked the clothes down to her ankles, loving as she gave out a savage, angry cry.

Walking around her, I slid my hand along the curve of her ass, and as I watched her body sway, I gave her a sound smack.

And then another one as she swung back toward me, the sound mixed with her enraged shout as I spanked her over and over.

The sound of flesh being slapped echoed around us, and the way her body arched from the impact was erotic and toxic.

I let her swing back into my chest, her pretty heart-shaped ass filled with my handprints. I let my cock nestle between her cheeks as I sunk my nose into her neck and slipped my hand around her waist, dipping it once again into her now drenched core.

"I'm going to make you mine, Duchess."

"I'm going to kill you, Caleb."

I slid my finger into her pussy and her head fell back against my shoulder. I nipped on that sensitive part of her neck and pinched her nipple as I began to finger fuck her, my thumb gliding along her clit in slow seductive circles.

"Not before I make you scream for me."

"Never," she whimpered as I slid another finger into her as I bit down on her tender flesh.

My mouth on that part of her was her destruction, coercing her body to react instinctually. Her hips danced against my hardness as I slid my fingers in and out of her.

"I promise you. By the time I'm done with you," I slid my fingers out and slid them against her lips, coating them with her juices. "You will scream for me to save you."

Gripping her hair, I pulled her head back and slipped my tongue into her mouth, tasting her as I defiled her body. She tasted like sweet sin and her wanton groan signaled just how badly she enjoyed this.

Breaking the kiss, I licked at her lips. "Cum for me, Duchess."

"No " she whimpered and jolted as my thumb dragged across her clit.

"Cum for me as ordered," my fingers played at her clit, flicking it in rapid succession.

She fought me for a few seconds, but her body soon betrayed her.

Without any warning, her body shattered.

Her hips danced in the air as she white knuckled the chains.

Her lips parted and I waited for that scream that never came.

It was a silent execution that only made me want to punish her more.

Before she could recuperate, I gripped the needle in my hand and placed it at her neck. The orgasm had put her in a complete trance. One where she didn't even notice the danger she was in, nor did she seem to care.

As I dug the sharp needle into her flesh, her eyes widened, and her lips began to move quietly. I pressed my ear to them to listen to her.

"There will be no mercy in your death, Caleb. I promise y..."

I smiled as she drifted off into a drug-induced sleep. "I wouldn't expect any less from you, Tatlim."

By the time she'd awaken, she'd think this was a wet dream, and I would stay on her mind for days to come.

"I'll see you soon, Duchess."

I kissed her forehead softly as I tugged her pants up over her waist. Stepping out of the warehouse, I lit a cigar and took a satisfying puff, watching the smoke linger in the cool breeze.

One of them I'd sent out stood by the door waiting for my orders. "Bring her down and make sure she's safe in her bed before the sun comes up."

"Yes, Sir." He disappeared through the door, and I made my way to the car.

By the time she realized what had actually happened, my plan would be in place. She'd be coming after me soon, and I'd be more than ready to accept the consequences.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

I woke with a gasp and the taste of tobacco clinging to the back of my throat.

My body was drenched in sweat and sticking to the leather on the couch.

I wasn't in my bed and definitely not in my room.

My heart kicked hard in my chest as I sat up slowly, my head swimming and my mouth dry, as if I'd been through a long night of binge drinking. Everything looked different, and for a second, I forgot where I was. If it wasn't for the cluttered vanity full of colorful makeup and glass perfume bottles that I could see through the bathroom door located adjacent to the living room, I wouldn't have recognized that I was at Roulette's.

The apartment sat high above Downtown L.A.

, tucked inside one of those luxury high-rises with polished marble floors and floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the glitter and grime of the city below.

The space pretty much said, I'm single and I don't give a fuck.

It was decorated with white leather furniture, gilded mirrors, and the faint scent of roses clung to the air.

A massive vintage pin-up poster of Roulette herself, mid-pose in a red corset and thigh-high stockings, hung on the far wall, her smirk said she was up for anything.

I threw back the blanket she had given me the night before and I slowly attempted to move.

Every inch of my body groaned in protest as I swung my legs off the couch.

Pain echoed in my joints, and in the pull of every tendon, there was a raw burn threading deep through my muscles.

The soreness wasn't just the kind that came from strain, it felt as if I had been run over by a freight train.

I rose slowly, blinking through the thick fog that settled behind my eyes, as I staggered toward the bathroom.

My bare feet dragged across the cool tile floors.

I pressed a palm to the bathroom door for balance.

It took me a second to steady myself, my breaths coming out shallow and uneven.

The second I flipped the light switch, the brightness pierced through my haze, forcing me to squint.

My fingers found the edge of the vanity, and my nails dug into the wood as I raised my eyes to the mirror.

I looked at myself, blinking away the blur that was impairing my vision.

I pressed my palms to my eyes and once again looked.

There I was. Looking pale as a ghost. My lips were nearly purple and chapped, and

my hair was tangled from sweat, the pillow marks on my cheek told me I had slept deeply.

But that wasn't what made my gut twist. There, just above the curve of my shoulder, was a puncture wound.

It was faint but precise. A purple bruise encircled it and I gently reached up and touched it.

I squinted from the sharp pain. "What the fuck..."

The room tilted again. I grabbed the counter, knuckles white, and then as I stared at the floor, the memories crashed in and for a moment, I didn't know if I was remembering a dream or if it had been reality.

A man's hands were on me. They were rough and commanding.

A very familiar mouth devoured mine, teeth catching my bottom lip and pulling moans from my throat that I'd never willingly emote. His breath was hot against my neck as he burnt his kisses on me, branding me. My wrists were bound in leather...no, chains. I slowly fell to my knees, pressing a hand to my head. I remembered my body arching back while I pleaded silently for something I couldn't understand.

The sound of his voice whispered filth into my ear, claiming every inch of me as if I owed him something.

Then there was the sharp sting of the needle.

My limbs went limp as his weight bore down on me, and my mind spiraled into something hot, and helpless.

I hadn't just been taken. The son of a bitch had drugged me!

He had done whatever the fuck he wanted to with me and made sure I'd remember it the next day.

And worse of all? My body had betrayed me.

It had actually responded to him. It gave in to him, trembling as he forced a wave of pleasure through me.

And now here I was, shaking in front of a mirror, too furious to cry.

My grip on the vanity cracked with a loud snap as the old wood gave slightly beneath my fingers. My reflection wasn't mine anymore, it was a stranger's face, full of fury and venom and something fragile beneath it all.

Caleb Killic had broken into me and left his scent clinging to my skin. And then he had me sent back, like damaged goods. His last move in a twisted game I hadn't realized I was playing until now.

The scream tore from me before I could stop it.

It came from deep in my chest and clawed its way up from the pit of my stomach.

The sound echoed off the tile walls, loud and full of rage, leaving my throat raw as I gasped for breath.

I pressed my fists to the counter, trembling, not from weakness, but from the surge of violence that lit up my spine.

I didn't cry. I couldn't. I was too far gone for tears.

That's when I heard the door slam open.

"Stephanie!" Roulette's voice rang through the apartment, sharp and commanding. Her heels clicked across the hardwood and then into the bathroom. She stopped in the doorway, her expression shifting from concern to alarm as she took me in. "Jesus, what the hell happened?"

I didn't turn to her. I couldn't. The reflection in the mirror already showed her everything she needed to see.

"I'm going to kill him," I said, voice low, trembling. "I'm going to slit his fucking throat while he sleeps."

Roulette stepped forward, her hand landing softly but firmly on my back. "Breathe, baby. You gotta breathe. This isn't how we play this. You know better."

I turned to her, eyes blazing. "He drugged me. He used me. He..." I could barely make the words out. "The fucker made sure I'd remember it. Every goddamn second of it."

She inhaled sharply, but her face remained composed. "What did he do to you?"

I winced as I tried to get up off the floor. "He touched me."

"Aaaand..."

"And I fucking gave into him, Rhea! I basically said, do whatever the fuck you want to me!"

"You were drugged!"

I shook my head. "No. I wasn't. Well, yes I was but afterward." I looked up at her, grabbing her hand. "And that's exactly what he wanted me to know. He wanted to fuck with my head. To make me the one to blame."

"So, who the fuck said he won. You feel that anger," she slammed her palm against my chest nearly making me fall back. Grabbing me she steadied me. "You use that. You take that rage, and you make it count. But not now. Not like this."

I shook my head, backing away. "I shouldn't have ever trusted that he wouldn't come for me. I thought I had control. I thought I could handle Caleb fucking Killic."

"He's playing a game, Steph. You think he's not expecting this reaction? You walk into his trap now, he wins. We stick to the plan."

I turned toward her, seething. "What plan? I can't breathe in this skin knowing he had me. I can't exist in this body when I know he..."

Roulette pulled me into a tight hug, forcing me to stiffen against the touch until the tension broke. "We disappear. Killian's already setting things in motion. Obsidian's got the laptop. We wait for her call. And when the time's right, we end him. On our terms. Not his."

My breathing slowed. I hated it. Hated the logic in her voice. Hated that she was right. But most of all, I hated that I still felt Caleb on my skin.

"I don't think I can let this go, Rhea." I clung to her.

"Fuck. Me," she whispered, holding me tight, knowing damn well that we weren't going anywhere until he paid for what he did to me.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

We stayed.

It had been five long years of this cat-and-mouse game with a monster.

Despite the threats, the bodies, the midnight whispers that warned me to run those first couple of years, I didn't.

I couldn't. Running would have meant Caleb Killic and the Turks had won.

So I stayed. And I turned every breath I took into a middle finger aimed straight at his heart.

Roulette and Obsidian fought me at first. They were afraid, and that was understandable.

They threatened to leave on their own, to never speak to me again, but they couldn't.

Not after what I had done for them. And they weren't loyal because of the money, but because they knew I was hurting, and they were risking their lives to help me.

I won't deny I was stupid for staying, but they also understood that I couldn't let them win.

It would show weakness, and we couldn't afford it, not with what we were planning on executing.

So we decided not to hide. Not in the way you would have expected us to.

Members of the Death Row Shooters MC had helped us get Obsidian's brother out of the hands of the Turks.

He had been given a new identity while Obsidian's name had been wiped off the Turks registrar.

Rhea's name was clear, and she already had an unhinged reputation in Los Angeles.

She had more protection on her than anyone I knew.

And me? Killian had helped me disappear as promised, but not in the way most people vanish.

In order for me to implement what I had planned, something drastic had to be done.

So we simply reshaped the narrative. I don't know who he called or how he did it, but there was only one way for me to disappear.

He orchestrated my death like a goddamn concerto.

A motorcycle accident, blood samples planted, dental records altered.

They even staged a closed casket funeral.

There had been word that the Turks thought I was gone.

But Caleb?

That fucker never believed it.

And I knew it. Because we had watched it all unfold from the safety of my brand new hidden penthouse tucked above an abandoned theater in the Arts District of Downtown L.A.

, a place no one dared to look. Obsidian had hacked the church's security feeds and patched them into our system.

The grainy black-and-white images on the screen showed him, stalking down the aisle, a look of suspicion on his face.

He approached the coffin slowly, one gloved hand already reaching for the lid.

But the Hellbound Lovers had been ready.

Members of the club stood guard, guns tucked beneath leather jackets as he approached.

The second his fingers brushed the edge, they surrounded him, weapons drawn.

Guns cocked, tension flared, and a warning was carved into every second that he did not back down.

After what seemed like an eternity, he assessed the situation and backed away, but not before he scanned the pews.

It looked like he was expecting me to rise from the dead and call his bluff.

He didn't believe it. Not as the few strangers who attended, paid to bawl their eyes out, stood next to him, nor when the casket was put in the dirt.

Not for a second did he believe it. And that was exactly the way I wanted it.

I wanted my death to haunt him.

That was the beginning of his obsession.

After that day, he hunted me like a man unhinged, and I welcomed the fucking chase.

I craved it. I made a game of it just like he had made a game of me.

He didn't rest, nor did he have mercy on anyone who got in his way, and I didn't expect any less of him.

He was rage and obsession dressed in designer suits and bulletproof lies. And I loved every second of it.

I stayed buried in the shadows of Los Angeles, only ever resurfacing to fuck with his so-called Turkish empire.

I watched him grow in the Mafia, become an actual name that was mentioned in Forbes Magazine and the stock market on the news.

His dark high-end deals could easily be tracked in the black market.

And yet, even with all his power, I made sure I hit him where it hurt.

Slicing into his profits, and bleeding the Turks dry, one transaction at a time.

They never knew what hit them. We created fake manifests rerouting shipments into dead zones, where with the help of the Death Row Shooters, we hijacked and stripped hot products down within hours.

I torched his deals by bribing warehouse foremen and rigging contracts to implode.

His Turkish allies?

I embedded girls inside their clubs, eyes and ears in every booth, collecting secrets and leverage until the moment was right.

When they walked outside, we made sure they never came back.

One by one, they dropped like meat in the gutter.

Always close. Always brutal. Always leaving a trace of chaos without a single fingerprint.

And not once did they ever see my face. Yet all the while, I watched from the shadows as he lost control.

He never stopped chasing, and I never let him catch me.

I loved the way his fury tasted on my tongue, the way it kept him up at night.

I wanted him sweating in anxiety. I wanted him to show his weakness. I wanted him one breath away from madness. And I was planning on keeping him there until the end.

In the meantime we found a way to build our own empire.

I kept my promise to Rhea. And together, we began to build the Royal Harlots MC.

It was slow going at first, like any club, but we had gathered a few girls whom we trusted.

Rhea, or Roulette which was her chosen roadname, was my VP.

Elizabeth continued to use her hacker name and as Obsidian she became our Tech, but she preferred Black Hat and that was fine by me.

We had a few prospects lined up, including Calypso.

She was a wild child but had a good heart and initiative.

Demise was our War Lady. And she looked the part.

Short blonde hair, tattoos inked all over her body and a look of pure vigilante in her eye, she was the Rouge Roulette's head of Security.

Because she had shown her loyalty to Rhea and myself those first few years, she'd easily been given the title of Sargent at Arms in the Royal Harlots.

We were headed in the right direction and we had the backup of two of the two most respected MCs in Los Angeles.

The Hellbound Lovers and their President, Wolf Stone.

As well as the Death Row Shooters and their President, Reaper. We lived by a code and we took no shit.

Our reach went deep and we had our hands in every pocket and eyes in every alley.

We laundered millions through strip joints, restaurants, crypto scams, and high-end businesses masked in glitter and tits.

With Rouge Roulette as backup we slowly began to own the exclusive nightclubs in Downtown, L.A.

Many of them frequented by the Turks themselves.

We couldn't let the millions just sit in the bank, so we invested in properties.

Upscale massage parlors with locked back rooms, boutique crypto consulting firms, and an art gallery that doubled as a laundering front for both us and the Death Row Shooters.

Everything was carefully worked and calculated.

The Turks hated us, local MC gangs liked to test us.

Being an all female MC was not an easy feat, especially one that could be respected.

Although Rhea and ____ held their connections in the HLMC, I still had not reached out to mine in the Royal Bastards MC.

Hell, we had stayed inconspicuous, fearing that Rancid, their President, would either want to take our money or would want to destroy us like he had so many others.

Either way, we did what we could with what we have, but recently the girls were growing fearful.

There were rumors at the Rouge Roulette that the Turks were catching on to our game and that they were asking questions.

Particularly about the Royal Harlots. Who we were, what business we had here, and what were we dealing in.

With the questions came the threats, and the girls grew fearful every day.

“We’re fucked,” Rhea stated, slumping down into a chair.

“I’m tired of tip-toeing around these sons of bitches. Let’s just take them out.” Demise sighed.

“If only,” Obsidian rolled her eyes and looked at me. “What are you thinking?”

I paused, leaning against my desk and looking down at my feet. “I don’t like it,” I said quietly.

“Your gut feeling is telling you to run, isn’t it?” Rhea asked.

“I don’t run,” I snapped.

“Yeah, we know that.” Rhea agreed, a cynical note in her tone.

“Don’t you think you’ve fucked with him enough. Just take him out already, that way we can move on and get the hell out of this city.” Rhea continued.

“And go where, Rhea?”

“New York. We can expand, get more prospects.”

I let my gaze fall to the floor. She wasn’t wrong. We would never get anywhere constantly watching our backs and hiding.

“Why don’t you contact, Colt?” Obsidian chimed in.

“My brother and the Royal Bastards are off the table. Or do you want Rancid to come after us? If you think my brother has the balls to protect us from that monster, your dead wrong.”

“Rancid? The President?” Demise asked, raising her head from the shot she was pouring.

“That’s right. Why, babe?” We all turned to look at her.

“Nothing. I just heard from a client that Rancid was out. They mentioned some new guy.”

I leaned away from my desk and walked over to her. Placing my hand over her glass, I stopped her from pouring and got her full attention.

“Exactly what did you hear, Demise?”

Demise lifted her eyes to meet mine. “One of my regulars... he said Rancid's being hunted down by the CIA. Word is, he got caught up in trafficking something, or someone, maybe. And that there’s already a new President taking over.”

I stiffened. “A new President?”

“Yeah,” she nodded.” She lifted the glass to her lips. “It was something that sounded like a whiskey, I think.”

My stomach dropped. My voice was barely a whisper. “Jameson?”

She nodded slowly. “That’s it.”

I turned away from her and grabbed my phone off the desk. My fingers trembled only slightly as I texted Colt.

Duchess: We need to talk.

His reply came seconds later.

Colt: You heard?

Duchess: So it's true?

Colt: Rancid's not going to survive this.

Duchess: And Jameson?

Colt: I had Knuckles call Jameson.

Duchess: Fuck.

Colt: I was gonna call you. Steph... he doesn't trust anyone. I'm just gonna warn you now, that you may hear from him.

Duchess: You told him!

"Motherfucker!" I yelled out, startling the group.

Colt: I had no choice. I had to regain his trust.

Duchess: So you put me, your sister, on the chopping block.

Colt: It's not like that...

Duchess: Just remember that I'm going to kill you when I see you.

I stared at the screen, heart pounding. Then turned back to the girls.

“Shit’s about to change, ladies.”

Before anyone could respond, the office doors slammed open. Paramore, a current prospect brought in by Demise, stormed in. Her face was flushed and her eyes wide with panic.

“Whoa! What the hell’s going on?”

Demise shot to her feet, hand sliding toward the pistol at her hip.

I rushed over and grabbed Paramore’s arm. “What are you doing here? Did anyone follow you?”

She gasped, still catching her breath. “No. I came alone. But... it's not good.”

"What is it Paramore? What's not good?" I spoke in a calm voice, trying to get her to calm down.

"It's Jinx. She's missing.”

“What do you mean missing?” Rhea asked, crossing the room.

“She left with a Turk last night,” Paramore said, voice cracking. “Older guy. Nasty looking. No one’s seen her since. We've called her, been to her place. It's not like her to disappear like that. She always tells us where she is.”

I looked at Rhea and when she glanced back at me, a moment of understanding slid between us.

We both knew what this meant.

The rumors were true, and the Turks had just made it personal.

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

I was up in the company offices speaking with some of the finance executives when Laura, my secretary, walked into the conference room.

"I'm sorry, Sir, but you're needed."

"Just tell them I'm busy." I waved her away and after a beat I realized she was still standing there.

"I'm afraid they were adamant on seeing you."

I watched as she raised her eyebrow and tilted her head, letting me know whoever was paying me this visit wasn't someone I should keep waiting.

"Excuse me gentlemen, this shouldn't take too long."

As I closed the door, I turned to her. "Who in the world..."

"It's President Killic."

My heart dropped.

I had been avoiding my grandfather for weeks. Not only was he not an easy man to get along with, but every time he was around, some shit went down. I wasn't in the mood for one of his tantrums, let alone, one of his tirades.

I knew that my circles weren't clean, and I had killed to defend my family, but I had also been kept in the dark about a lot of things. Business that I still saw traces of and questioned.

When Stephanie and Elizabeth disappeared, we knew something had gone wrong.

They were either in on it, or they found the product and ran with it.

Stephanie couldn't have built the empire she currently had when she had nothing to begin with.

Not unless Alan left her something she couldn't deny taking for herself.

Her funeral was a famously orchestrated shitshow.

One that my grandfather and his allies ate up.

I, on the other hand, didn't believe for a second that she'd died on me.

It just didn't make any sense. Weeks later, I was getting word that shipments were catching on fire, clients were being stolen, and my docks were being infiltrated by those seedy bikers.

I knew she was getting back at me for what I did to her, and I wouldn't have expected any less.

I figured she might slip at some point and reveal her location, but as the years passed by, I realized that would be a long reach.

With my grandfather in charge, she'd never come out of hiding.

It was a freedom she couldn't have. If he ever found out she was alive, he'd make sure she paid for everything she had taken, as insignificant as it now was.

It took me seconds to realize she was alive, years to realize that she had entered in this game with me, and when I'd find her, which I would, I was going to keep her for myself.

Opening the door, I walked into my office, careful not to make any sudden movements. He was still formidable and intimidating in his old age.

"What took you so long?"

I bowed my head and stood near the door as he berated me. "I don't like to be kept waiting."

I kept my gaze down, careful not to look him in the eye as it was considered a great disrespect.

"I apologize, Grandfather."

There was a long pause and I briefly shut my eyes as I heard him approach.

"Look at me," he ordered sternly.

I raised my eyes and focused on his nose. His eyes were black like his heart, and I couldn't bear to look at them. Besides, I didn't want him to see the hatred I had for him reflected in my own.

"Have you been hiding secrets from me?"

"No, Sir."

He took another step towards me, bringing him toe to toe with me.

He slammed his fingers on my temple angrily. "Think, Caleb. Why would I come all this way to ask you that question?"

My eyes finally slipped down to his and the hatred burning in them startled me. "I have not been keeping secrets,...Sir."

He narrowed his eyes on me, and the sudden slap across my cheek caused me to stumble. I shook it off and stood up straight right where I'd been standing.

"No secrets, Sir."

He slapped me again, the sting burning along the expanse of the side of my face. I was prepared for that blow. And I barely flinched. I knew that angered him, and with his anger came another blow. This one made me taste copper.

"I know that you've been playing games with that traitor."

"I don't know what you are talking about, Grandfather."

"Do not lie to me! The whore! The one you helped escape!"

"She is not a whore! AND I helped no one escape!" Anger and shock at finding out that he'd discovered Stephanie, rang out in that shout.

"She is what I say she is!" His shout reverberated against the walls as he raised his hand to smack me, only this time I raised my arm, stopping the impact.

He pressed against my arm with all his strength but as I towered over him, we both knew who would win. Afterall I was not only younger but also stronger. And that

only proved to anger him further.

“You’re useless, Caleb. You always were,” he pressed down harder, turning red in the face from his rage.

I never understood why he put me in this position.

I wasn't the one who was supposed to take over.

My younger brother Sam had been up for the chair since birth.

He was the perfect golden child, that is until he decided he wanted to leave the family.

One day he was with us, the next he was gone without a trace.

It had made no sense to me, why Sam would just disappear like that but I received no answers.

My grandfather had been devastated. It was the first and only time I ever saw him have feelings.

After Sam left, he decided that I would be the one to take over.

But if I knew then that it meant he would never give me the title until he was dead and buried, then I wouldn't have taken it.

There had been a couple times in these last few years that I wanted to take him down myself, but I held back out of respect, or maybe it was my goddamn submissive nature.

One I wanted to bury deep. I lived to get his approval, but I wasn't Sam.

I wasn't who he wanted me to be and I was tired of taking his shit.

"You dare raise your hand to stop me from issuing the punishment you deserve?" he barked, voice deep with the gravel of decades' worth of sins.

I didn't flinch. "You forget yourself, Grandfather. And you forget why you placed me here. I'm not your lapdog anymore. I'm the CEO of this company, and any movements within this family go through me now. I make the decisions, here. So no. I do not answer to your orders."

His face twisted in fury, and for the first time I relished in my defiance. I watched with satisfaction at the tremor took hold of his clenched fists, the vein in his neck pulsing with the urge to strike.

I turned my back on him.

Let him seethe.

I paused at the mirror across the room, adjusting the collar of my shirt, brushing a smear of blood from my chin.

He would've dislocated my jaw if I hadn't blocked the blow.

The bastard still had bone in him, I'd give him that.

But it didn't matter. Not anymore. I wouldn't let him taste my pain.

That's how he won. That's how he fed ... off the pain and defeat of others.

“I’m not keeping secrets,” I said, coolly, without turning. “But you are.”

His silence pressed against the room like a loaded gun.

Then he gave out a low, guttural chuckle which irked me.

“You think you’re ready for this world, boy? You think wearing that tailored suit and pushing your cock into boardroom execs makes you powerful?” His boots scraped against the stone floor as he approached.

“It makes you weak and it makes this company weak.”

“You have no idea how to handle a business, let alone keep under the radar. This isn’t back in your day when killing gave you a reputation, or when you can buy any cop. You have to have money to have power!” I shook, as my voice thundered around us.

“And yet, I had to handle something you didn’t have the balls to.”

I turned, just enough to see the dead in his eyes.

“She was just another slut,” he said, voice like smoke and rot. “Told me the Duchess gave the orders at the shipping docks. Whispered the name Stephanie Winters. Said the bitch was still alive.”

My gut tightened.

“What did you do?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

He smiled. Not with his mouth, but with his madness.

“She had a sweet mouth, that one. Sweet cunt too. Gripped my cock like she wanted

to keep it. Begged like they always do, until the truth spilled out.” He leaned in, breath rancid with power and bourbon.

“I slit her throat while she came. Made my cock explode watching her die. Took a bit to get her off me, her cunt had clenched down on me, trapping me inside her.” He laughed, a void in his eyes. “It was worth it.”

My fists clenched at my sides, the rage bleeding into my vision.

“You sick fuck.”

“She gave me everything I needed,” he interrupted, unbothered by my disgust. “I always knew about your obsession with that woman. Always knew there would come a day you would betray your family for that whore.”

“I said...Do. Not. Call her that.” My voice was low with a warning of violence.

“Ozan’s already cleaning the mess. And I’ve sent orders to erase Stephanie Winters. For good this time. No more loose ends.”

He stepped closer, until our breath mingled, his seething and predatory, mine sharp with control.

“You’re still green, boy. Still chasing shadows and trying to fuck your way through power.” He pressed a finger to my chest. “Don’t make the mistake of thinking your title protects you from me . I built this empire from blood and ruin. I’ll bury you in it if I have to.”

“I already knew this is what you would do. Always rash, always shedding blood.. Putting us on the radar of every fucking police station in the Los Angeles area. You have no idea what you are doing old man. You’re a senile son of a bitch.”

His gaze faltered as he realized I wasn't affected. At least not in the way he wanted me to be.

"You dare disrespect me?" He seethed.

"I've heard that Stephanie Winters was alive for a while now. All rumors because she's never been spotted. So I went hunting for her until I found facts."

"Facts?" he asked, like the word offended him.

"Yes, I suppose you got proof of her existence from this slut you fucked. Or did you just take her word for it?"

He looked unnerved as I continued. I sat at the edge of my desk and pulled out the envelope Leon, my right-hand man, had given me.

"Ohhh, Grandfather. You can't go through life fucking sluts for information.

Don't you know they lie as soon as you promise them their life back.

"I threw the insult back in his face and watched him clench his jaw.

Maybe his teeth would shatter, I thought.

"I on the other hand, did do my due diligence. See you work smarter in these situations, Grandfather. Keep yourself hidden until you're ready to strike."

"Ozan said..."

"Ozan, Ozan, Ozan..." I cut him off. "Ozan isn't the only trusting man around here. I have a few waiting and willing to bleed for me."

I grabbed my lighter and pulled out the slim vanilla-tasting cigar from my pocket. Lighting it, I sucked in the smoke and then let it linger in the air as I slowly puffed it out.

“The slut had no reason to lie,” he murmured as he opened the envelope, I handed him.

“Did you at least ask her where she was. A location, a home address, a phone number? Anything?”

Slowly, he pulled out the photographs Leon had taken for me. One showed a woman stepping out of a black SUV in the rain, her profile obscured by a hood, but the curve of her jaw and the tilt of her chin were unmistakable to me. To another, they would not have known who she was.

Another showed her at the docks, shadowed by crates and container stacks, her back turned, blurred but familiar.

A couple more were distant shots of a figure speeding off on a motorcycle.

No plates, no face, just the shape of her legs gripping the bike like second nature.

And the last, too close for comfort, was her walking into a building we thought had been buried years ago.

“Does that look like Stephanie Winters to you?” I gave him nothing concrete. Nothing definitive. Just enough to make him doubt it all.

“The woman knew her name.”

“Well, you were given misinformation because nothing is set in stone yet. We’ve

been lied to before, or don't you recall?"

I took another puff and watched my grandfather throw the photos on the couch. Furious, he pointed a finger at me. He had that deep-seated hatred pouring out of his words.

"If you are lying to me, I will kill her, and then I will cut off your balls and bury them with her, where you left them."

I puffed on the cigar once again. Giving him the impression that I didn't give a fuck, but deep inside I knew he'd do it. He'd keep his word.

"I'll be back soon, Caleb. Don't think that because you have this office, you run things. You're just a pretty face for the cameras. In the end, I'm still the Boss." He turned to leave, but my words held him back.

"Sending Ozan won't help; she'll just go deeper into hiding."

He turned his head slightly, speaking over his shoulder.

"The order has been given, and I know he will find her. Something you couldn't do. But don't worry. When he does, I'll make sure you hear her screams before I slit her throat."

The room turned to ice. And still... I didn't move. Because reacting meant he'd won.

I flung the item closest to me against the wall as the door slammed shut behind him.

I hated him more than he knew. Ever since he forced me to execute the one person who was closest to me.

I held no remorse for that kill, he should have known better, but my anger was with me.

I was angry at myself for allowing myself to be manipulated by my family.

Emir did what he did as a lesson to not trust anyone who wasn't blood.

But although I still didn't fully trust my Duchess, he would not touch one hair on her head. I'd give my life before he took hers.

That was a promise I silently made to her. As much as she thought I was the enemy, I was only here to protect her. The only way she'd survive was to stand by my side and be my Queen. All she had to do was give in.

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

The tension was rising in the Royal Harlots.

There was still no word from Jinx, and the girls were scared.

I was worried that they'd find us. I'd sent out a few prospects to ask around, but I told them to watch their backs.

You just didn't know who was watching, and if it was the Turks, then they were hot on my trail.

The phone rang, and when I saw my brother's name, my gut tightened. He had fucked me over once already, but I needed to know what he wanted now.

"What do you want?" I answered tartly.

"Jameson wants to see you." He replied.

"What?!" I leapt out of my chair as my brother sprang the news on me.

"Why, Colt?"

"He's been making his rounds and talking to the Presidents of the chapters. He's getting a feel for everyone. He knows you're not a threat, but he still wants to speak with you."

“Does Dad know about this? About me building the Harlots?”

“Not yet. I asked Jameson to keep the family out of it.”

"Shit, Colt! I don't know if I want to see him."

"You can't avoid him. Not Jameson. I told you there were going to be consequences for being a Harlot. I'm surprised you were able to avoid Rancid for so long."

"That's because I beat the shit out of one of his men after he nearly killed one of my girls. I think I made it pretty clear they couldn't fuck with me."

I heard his smirk, and I narrowed my eyes. "Don't test me, Colt."

"He'll be in Los Angeles tonight, and I'm going with him. Don't defy him, Sis. He's different. He's got a plan laid out; I just can't figure it out just yet."

"Do you have any idea how many men followed, Rancid. Including yourself. He's probably taking out the trash." I couldn't blame Jameson. He deserved all the vengeance he could get.

"Even if it means your brother gets the brunt of it."

"Fuck, you're the first one on my shit list, why not his?"

“Nice,” he grunted.

I paused for a second, taking it all in. Either way I looked at it, it didn't hurt hearing him out, and besides, having a Bastard for an ally might not be such a bad idea.

“Fine, if he wants to see me, we can meet at the Den. It's Death Row Shooters'

Territory. I'll put your names on the list. I'll text you the location."

"I'll text you the meeting time. Don't be late."

I mimicked him as soon as the phone went dead. He always brought out the little sister in me. But as soon as I set the phone down, this feeling of dread came over me.

Rhea strode in as I hung up the phone. Seeing the distressed look on my face, the look on hers immediately fell. "They found her?"

I shook my head, knowing she could see the concern in my eyes. "Elrik Jameson, the President of the Royal Bastards MC, wants to see us."

"Fuck. What for?"

"Colt opened his big mouth and let him know about what we have going on here. I'm assuming that he wants to know that I'm loyal to the patch. And I presume he also wants to know what in the hell I'm doing with an all-female MC."

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

"I'm not sure yet. It depends on how much respect he has for me and what I've built. I'll be meeting with him tonight, and you, my love, are coming with me."

"What?!"

"For eye candy," I teased.

"Don't fuck with me, Duchess."

"Exactly. I need you, as the Harlots VP, to make sure they know that."

She smirked and shook her head. "Just let me know when to be ready."

I had a good relationship with some of the chapters in the RBMC.

Colt made sure of that when I initially started all this.

But Jameson was another storm altogether.

I didn't know what to expect of this meeting.

All I knew was that I needed to get my shit together because Elrik Jameson wasn't about issuing forgiveness at the moment.

I had to be on my game in order to get what I wanted.

The young man I once knew was now gone. In his place was a tattooed, blue-eyed hunk of a man with a deadly stare and true vengeance in his eye.

"Duchess," he greeted me as Colt walked in behind him. My brother also looked much older. He'd grown out his blonde hair, gotten a lot more muscles than I remembered, and his hazel eyes stared back at me expectantly.

I wanted to greet him properly, but there were too many witnesses, so I simply cocked my head at him, and he did the same.

"Jameson," I reached to take his hand, but instead he came over to me and wrapped his arms around me.

"You've grown up, Stephanie Winters."

I tugged on his leather jacket, "You got old, Elrik Jameson."

It was as if time had never stopped. We were back at being young teenagers trying to manage living in a clubhouse.

When we were younger, we'd get bullied a lot in school.

People liked to judge us, others shunned us for the life our parents lived.

So all we had was each other, especially in high school.

We were inseparable back then. It was good to see he hadn't forgotten that.

"Shit happens to a man when he gets exiled."

"So I've heard. Never believed a word of it. Glad you made it out alive."

He grunted. "After hearing what you've been through, glad you did too."

"Barely," I whispered.

I turned and introduced Rhea, who seemed shocked at our interaction.

"Nick's granddaughter?" He asked, reaching out to her for a handshake.

"That's right," she squared her shoulders, standing at her full five-foot-seven stature.

"He was a good man. He used to ride with my dad. Had him visit a couple times."

Rhea glanced at me as her shoulders slowly eased. We weren't expecting an empathetic President.

Colt came around and placed a hand on my shoulder, squeezing it lightly. "See, I told

you it wasn't so bad," he whispered.

"We'll see," I whispered back.

"How you doin' Reaper? Seems like the Den has gotten some work done since the last time I was here." Jameson placed a hand on his shoulder before taking a seat near him at the end of the conference table.

We were in Reaper's back offices, hidden from eyes and ears, in a completely soundproof room.

Reaper chuckled. "Let's just say business has been good.

"Good to hear."

Rhea and I took our seats across from them and quietly waited for Jameson to say something. I still didn't know what to do here, because I didn't know what he wanted.

He leaned forward, elbows on the table, and stared at me. "The Royal Harlots MC. Tell me about it."

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything. But first... tell me, Duchess. How'd you come across all the money to build it?"

"We've got several entities including the Rouge Roulette here in L.A."

He nodded as I spoke about the profit and about how I'd gotten to where I was. In turn, I told him about Caleb Killic and the Turkish Mafia.

“And you think you can handle them?”

I nodded. “For now,” I uttered. Not telling him how close they were to finding me.

"How have you been able to hide this long?"

"There's a friend who's been able to keep us under the radar. Let's just say Stephanie Winters no longer exists. She hasn't existed for a long time."

"I'm about to put an offer on the table which could benefit us both. I won't penalize you if you don't agree to it, but I think it's in your best interest to at least consider it."

"This isn't part of your vengeance plan, is it? cause I'm not really in the mood to be used as a pawn in your plans. I had shit to do with whatever happened to you."

He smirked. "I see you've been well informed."

I shrugged. "I'm not stupid, Eirik. I know why you came back. I'm rooting for you and hell, I'll help you take those fuckers out, but don't ever for one second think I'm gonna let you or anyone ruin what I've built."

He raised his hands. "I'm asking for a partnership. I help you; you help me."

"Okay. Let's hear it."

"We've got a new business we're looking into, and money is coming in. More money than we thought we could handle. I was looking at several investments and your Royal Harlots came up."

"Oh? And what sort of business?"

"I'll let you in on that when you've gained my trust. For now, I just need your word that you agree on spending a little extra money on your clubs and sending some my way when you can."

I narrowed my eyes on him, realizing what he was asking. "You want to use our businesses to launder your profits."

"And you get a percentage, including access to anything you want from the Royal Bastards MC."

I paused. "Anything?"

He nodded. "Anything, Stephanie."

"Back up?"

He nodded, and my wheels started to spin. "For the entire Chapter?"

He chuckled. "Within reason, but yes."

"And full affiliation," I asked.

"Now you're reaching."

"You're the one who came to me, remember."

Sighing, he knew I had him. I held my breath until he propped his hands on his hips and hung his head in defeat. "You drive a hard bargain, but okay."

I looked at Rhea, who simply shrugged. Leaning in, she whispered into my ear. "It's not a bad deal. He's pretty much offering protection, and we need it right now. Don't

be stupid, Stephanie.”

I looked at Colt who nodded at me, but I was still unsure. I’d built the Harlots with my own sweat and tears, just to have it taken away by some President of another club. It didn’t matter if it was the Royal Bastards, nor that one of them was family, I didn’t trust any fucking man.

“I’m not taking your club, if that’s what you think, Duchess.” He assured me.

I looked up at him, shocked that he’d read my mind. “Then what are you doing?”

“I’m simply making a partnership deal.”

“Partners?”

He nodded and I sighed. “Do I have time to think about it?”

Both Colt and Stephanie shook their heads, but Jameson smiled. “If you didn’t, I’d question it.”

“Good, then I’ll let you know in the next couple days.”

As I shook his hand on it, he gave it a tight squeeze and a slight tug, pulling me in to whisper in my ear.

“Don’t be stupid, Duchess. This is a good deal.

And the way things look for you, girls going missing and all, you won’t be able to handle things alone for much longer.

No matter who you have as backup. I know who runs the Turks, and he’s a fucking

monster. He'll stop at nothing, Duchess."

He released me and I stepped away, staring back at him in shock. I quickly realized he knew a lot more than he had said. I followed all of them out of the Den and when we were finally outside, Colt came over to me, dragging me away from Rhea so we could talk privately.

"Are you insane?"

"Why didn't you tell me that he knew about Caleb and my girls?"

"Because I didn't know. Besides, Jameson has men everywhere. I'm sure he checked you out before he came out here. If he's trusting you enough to make a business deal, then I suggest you take it."

"I don't need to make business deals with anyone, Colt. Your sister can fucking handle herself."

"Don't be stubborn!"

"Don't be a fucking mat!"

"You know absolutely nothing about what I've been through in that club for Jameson, for Dad. So you shut your mouth, and you listen to me for a second. You cannot handle the Turks alone."

I glared at him for a few seconds, feeling my blood start to boil. "Jameson came to me with a business deal. Now I will think about it. Period."

I walked away, leaving him standing there as I grabbed Rhea and we headed to our motorcycles, which were parked down the street.

“Are you sure about this?” she asked.

“He wants to use our businesses, Rhea. Are you willing to give up Rouge Roulette?”

“Of course not.”

“Then let me think about it.”

She glanced at me before putting on her pink helmet, and we both revved our engines and took off. We both knew things were about to change, and not entirely to what we expected.

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

The Den was clean in a way that made you second-guess your own filth.

Not a speck of dust on the black marble floors, not a smear on the deep red velvet walls.

Everything gleamed under low golden lights.

It was tailored for the wealthy, controlled for the sinister, and seductive for all.

It was the kind of place that didn't scream money, it whispered it through every polished surface and cigar-scented breath.

Reaper, or Ryan Simon to those who bothered with his real name, ran this club like a military fortress.

It had a reputation for keeping secrets.

No press was allowed in. Phones and cameras were left at the door.

There were absolutely no leaks. Whoever walked through those doors became a ghost the second they stepped inside.

Suits filled the booths; mobsters, CEOs, arms dealers, and foreign dignitaries who needed a place to take out their sins, without leaving a trail.

Crystal chandeliers cast muted light over leather seating with backs tall enough to hide any dealing.

Women worked the floor like they owned every man in the room, dressed in lace and leather that clung to curves designed to distract.

They didn't beg for attention; they demanded it.

Every sway of the hip, every flick of a heel, all calculated to pull secrets from the mouths of the powerful.

You didn't come here to forget your sins.

You came here to indulge in them, and the women knew it.

The booths were semi-private, curtained with heavy drapes when discretion was needed.

Further back were the luxury rooms. Those were soundproof, locked tight, booked by those who could afford secrecy.

Nothing here was accidental. Every inch of The Den was made to house power, deals, and appetites that weren't meant for daylight.

It wasn't just a strip club; it was a business empire's neutral ground. And tonight, it was mine.

Killic Consolidated Holdings. That's what the world knew me as.

The pristine face of a billion-dollar Turkish conglomerate.

Clean, efficient, yet ruthless. They didn't know it was built on blood and bricks laid by the Turkish mafia generations before I ever put on a suit.

They didn't know I was being groomed to inherit everything.

They didn't know the monster who ran it.

I leaned back in the cracked leather booth, sipping a whiskey I didn't taste, answering in clipped Turkish as the Yakuza pitched something about ports and distribution chains.

My jaw ached from clenching it too long.

My body felt too tight in this suit, my nerves thrumming under the skin like a loaded wire.

My mind was on her. My Duchess.

I hadn't slept since the night my grandfather came to see me, since he showed up like the plague, determined to ruin my life.

The girl he'd killed had given him a name.

Her name. Stephanie Winters. He didn't say it outright, but I saw the way his mouth twisted when he mentioned her.

And I knew. Knew he'd sent Ozan sniffing after her, and if that bastard found her first, there'd be no mercy.

No hesitation. She'd be gone before I ever got to see her again.

And yet here I was, stuck in a goddamn club, shaking hands and making deals with men I didn't give a fuck about.

I was wasting time and energy I didn't have on alliances I didn't want.

The Japanese were promising access, ports, and expansion.

I was nodding along, playing the part of the calm CEO, but inside, I was burning.

Every second spent here was a second too long away from her.

I had to find her. I had to get to her before they did.

Taking a sip of the whiskey, a movement caught my eye.

Two women stepped from the back hallway, flanked by Reaper and some tattooed, menacing-looking men. The younger woman looked concerned as they walked out, her eyes scanning the room like she expected something to go wrong. But the other...

My entire world slowed.

The tilt of her head. The way her body moved, fluid and sharp like a blade wrapped in velvet. That fucking walk.

Duchess?

She wore a leather jacket over a black tank top, low-rise jeans, and red Jimmy Choo boots. Her hair was loose, wild, like it was the night we shared that stolen kiss. I could still feel the softness of those waves as I fisted her hair in my hand. I could still taste her, even years later.

I signaled for Leon without breaking eye contact.

He was already moving.

I stood, grabbed the envelope from the table, and slammed a thick roll of bills onto the wood, the impact loud enough to shut them up.

It wasn't about generosity; it was about getting the fuck out.

I was done playing polite. I had what I needed, and nothing they said would stop me from chasing what mattered.

"Enjoy your night on me."

One of the Yakuza called out something sharp in Japanese. Probably about respect, or the lack of it. I didn't care. My eyes were already locked on the ghost I'd chased for the last five years.

I slipped out of the club quietly. I knew Leon was waiting for me outside the club.

As soon as I stepped out, he was waiting in front of the Rolls-Royce, holding the door open for me. I got in and told him to park across the street. I watched as Stephanie stepped out, followed by the two men and the woman.

She said her goodbyes to Reaper, her eyes flicking around the lot like she sensed something was off.

The other man stepped in, grabbed her arm like he had a right to touch her, and that was all it took for my fury to spike.

I gritted my teeth, hands curling into fists against my thighs.

Their conversation was short. Quick, sharp words were being exchanged, and I could read the tension in her stance.

She didn't like being handled. Good. She still had that fire in her.

She took hold of the other woman a moment later, muttered something, and they turned to leave, straddling their motorcycles.

She glanced back down the street, feeling something was off, and it was.

My eyes never left her as I told Leon to follow closely.

I never expected to find her here, of all places. But fate had finally decided to hand me something worth taking. This wasn't luck. This was the universe putting her back in my crosshairs. And I wasn't going to lose her again.

Downtown's Arts District. Gentrified grit. Old warehouses turned into overpriced penthouses for trust fund kids with too many secrets.

"So this is where you've been hiding," I murmured, watching from the shadows of the idling car.

The building was high-end. Too high-end for someone trying to stay dead.

I watched from the backseat as the two women stepped through the building's front entrance, the door closing behind them. Leon killed the engine but left the headlights off. We sat in the shadows across the street, silent, waiting.

I didn't take my eyes off that building.

She'd looked over her shoulder before going inside. Not once. Twice. Like she felt

me. Like she knew.

Ten minutes passed. Fifteen.

Every second made my teeth grind, every moment she was out of my sight dug deeper under my skin.

My fingers tapped against my thigh, restless.

I was already planning. Calculating entry points, elevator access, guard rotations.

Old instincts kicked in, the kind you couldn't scrub out no matter how many suits you wore.

She was in there. And I was done waiting.

Leon shifted beside me. "Want me to..."

"No."

He paused. "Sir..."

"I've got this. I know how to handle her. You just wait here for me. If I need you, I'll call for you."

He nodded once, then stared straight ahead.

Leon was the type of man who knew how to follow orders and not ask questions.

I'd spent years as the head of security for the Turks, and getting to people was my specialty.

I'd learned how to move like a shadow, how to disarm alarm systems in the dark, how to bypass biometric locks with the right tech and the right timing.

Observation, timing, and patience were my weapons before power ever made me a CEO.

I stepped out of the car and took in the building.

Cameras at the front, visible, but predictable.

I approached the side service entrance, slipped into the alley behind the dumpsters, and found the maintenance panel hidden behind a utility box.

Two screws, one slide, a custom key I still carried on my ring, and I was in.

The security system was decent, but not good enough to keep someone like me out.

I looped the live feed to freeze the hallway view and muted motion sensors just long enough to slip in through the rear service stairwell.

No elevators. No public access. You had to be smart and fast to do what I had done and not be seen.

I moved silently up to the penthouse floor, listening for any odd sounds, anything that might give me away.

When I reached her door, I didn't charge in like some impatient thug.

I watched. Waited. Clocked the rotation of the building's private security detail, counted the cameras, and noticed the added protection stationed two doors down.

Subtle, but not subtle enough for someone like me.

She had a man posted outside. Quiet, well-dressed, but too alert to be anything but hired muscle.

I doubled back, entered from the maintenance stairwell, and used the emergency access on the opposite side of the penthouse floor.

I slipped into a vacant service unit that shared an air duct with hers, an old school design flaw most developers overlooked.

From there, I disabled the secondary motion sensor near her door using a magnetic override. It gave me a thirty-second window.

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It took precision and timing, but when I twisted the handle, the door gave with a soft click.

Calculated. Controlled. Silent.

Just the way I liked it.

The air inside her penthouse was sweet and soft, laced with her scent. Lavender. A hint of gunpowder. My cock twitched and my chest tightened.

It was just past two in the morning. Everything was still.

I quietly made my way down a dark hallway, every step measured.

The place was massive, an open living space, high ceilings, polished concrete floors with thick rugs, and curated furniture that screamed money.

I also knew exactly where that money had come from.

From the outside, it looked like a regular apartment building, but inside, she'd most definitely made herself at home.

I moved room by room. Cleared the kitchen first, it was empty. Living area next. Silent. The office space beyond that showed signs of recent use, papers slightly shifted, a glass with lipstick at the rim. My pulse kicked harder.

A guest room sat across the hall, door ajar. I scanned it with a single glance, but it

was empty. No warmth. No presence.

Then I saw the last door at the end of the corridor. Closed. But not locked.

I turned the handle slowly, quietly, and let the door open on its own weight. And suddenly, there she was.

Alone and asleep. Completely unaware of who had just entered her privacy.

She looked so peaceful as she slept. One leg tangled in the sheets, lips slightly parted, hand curled under her cheek like she hadn't ruined me with a single look years ago. My Duchess. My fucking ruin.

I didn't want to wake her; that wasn't the plan. I wanted to torture her quietly. Maybe scare her a little. I wanted that fear to flow through every inch of those, knowing it was I who had induced it.

I stepped closer, my polished shoes silent against the floor as I closed the distance.

She was right there, completely vulnerable, and I was drowning in the sight of her.

Every inch of her skin was seared into my memory, every soft curve a punch to the gut.

I crouched at her bedside, fists clenched at my sides, my chest tight with everything I'd buried for too fucking long.

Obsession. Possession. Rage. Lust. It all bled together as I sat there, watching her sleep, needing to touch, needing to claim, because I couldn't walk away again. Not this time.

My fingers trembled, not with fear, but with restraint as I brushed the back of my knuckles over the curve of her cheek.

Her skin was warm, flushed with dreams she'd never remember.

Her lashes twitched, lips parted in a sigh that nearly broke me.

I leaned in, close enough to feel the heat of her breath ghost across my jaw.

"You don't even know I'm here," I whispered against her skin, letting my lips graze the corner of her mouth.

I should have walked the fuck out right then.

Should've dropped the coin and left her untouched like a decent man would have.

But I stopped being a decent man the night I kissed her.

I've done things I'll never atone for, buried men who stood in my way, and walked out of rooms soaked in blood.

This wasn't new to me, wanting something so bad it twisted me up inside.

But her? She was the one line I'd promised not to cross.

And here I was, crossing it without a second thought, because I'd waited too fucking long to breathe her in again.

I dragged the sheet down with the kind of control I'd honed over a lifetime of holding back, my hands rough but steady.

It wasn't reverence. It was need. Raw, unapologetic need.

Like uncovering a truth I'd spent too long chasing.

I wanted to worship her, to claim her. Mark her in a way no one else ever could.

Her breasts rose and fell in rhythm with her sleep, nipples tight from the cold or maybe just my presence.

I stared down at her as if she were some precious art piece unveiled in a museum, marveling at the one thing I could never own but would take anyway.

I ran my palm down the curve of her waist, over the soft swell of her hip, my breath hissing through my teeth as I clenched my fist to stop myself from doing what every part of me screamed for.

My forehead pressed to the mattress beside her, my jaw flexing as I fought the sick satisfaction that came from simply being this close.

I didn't care if I got caught.

I didn't care if she woke up and clawed my eyes out.

I just needed this . To touch her. To mark her.

I bent over her, breath uneven, fingers curling at my sides as I stared at the soft, unmarked slope of her breast. I kissed it.

I wasn't gentle, I could fucking care less. I was starved as I pressed my mouth against the flushed peak as if branding her with every ounce of my need. Then my tongue followed, dragging slowly over the taught nipple, hot and possessive. Her taste was

silk and sin, the kind of flavor that settled into your bones and made a man forsake gods. I stayed there, my face buried in her warmth, inhaling her scent like it was the only thing keeping me alive. I licked a second time, slower, deeper, and for a brief moment, I imagined she stirred, just a twitch, but it didn't matter.

I was already gone. Already ruined. And I knew, with sick certainty, that I'd do it again.

My hand dropped to my belt, the ache between my legs was now unbearable.

I released my dick into my hand, gripping myself, and began to stroke.

The movement was slow at first, watching her chest rise and fall, pretending, just for a moment, that it was her hand on me.

That those lips parted for more than just a breath, but to take my cock into her mouth.

My gaze roamed her body, knowing I owned it, every ridge, every curve, seared into memory and fed into my fantasy.

Each breath she took, each shift of her body along the soft sheets, made it worse.

Made it better. I let the tension build in me until I was shaking, my breath ragged, teeth clenched to keep from groaning her name as I smeared my precum along the base of my cock.

I didn't rush it. No. This was a ritual, a desecration of her body. A punishment.

Instead, I reached over and gripped the waistband of her panties, pulling them down until her pussy was exposed.

I groaned, leaning over to nudge my nose into her folds, taking in a deep breath of her scent. My cock jerked and my hand stroked in time with her breathing, slow and hypnotic, as if her body was the rhythm and I was merely keeping pace with a song only I could hear.

I let my tongue slide over just the lips of her bunny. Slowly burrowing it's way inside her, finally gliding over the silky part of her. Tasting her juices for the first time.

My strokes grew harder and rougher while my mind filled with dirty images of her beneath me, on top of me, tied to my bed, and begging to be ruined all over again.

I wanted to mark her, brand her, bind her in ways she didn't even know she craved.

The obsession curled through me thick with need and coated in vengeance.

I managed to stand up over her as I came with her name on my lips, silent but searing, spilling across my palm and hitting her plush tits.

It was as if the act itself sealed something sacred between us.

And as I stood there, heart pounding, staring down at the woman who had no idea what I'd just done, what I'd become for her, I knew I'd never be the same.

I took a step back, my chest still heaving, jaw tight with everything I felt and couldn't say. I adjusted myself, yanked the belt back through the loops, disgust clawing its way through the lust. I hated how deep this ran. Hated how I still wanted her after everything.

I reached into the inner pocket of my coat and pulled out the coin.

It was a heavy piece of gold, old and worn, stamped with the crest of my family.

It had been passed down through generations.

A symbol. A curse. I stared at it for a second too long before I dropped it onto the pillow beside her head.

Then I pulled out the note I'd written in the car, the ink still fresh, scrawled in my brutal, impatient hand. I slid it beside the coin, right where she'd see it when she woke.

Finders keepers, sweetheart. I always find what's mine.

Then I walked out of the room. Not giving a fuck who saw me.

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Duchess

The dream had sunk in deep, dragging me under this darkness made of lust and pain and everything I never wanted to admit I craved.

There was no easing into it, just the rush of heat, the slam of sweaty loins, and the weight of him, Caleb, pressing me into the cold, unfamiliar wall of a place that didn't matter. Nothing mattered but him.

His mouth crushed mine with the kind of hunger that split me open, his tongue forcing past my lips like he had every right to take it.

His hands were everywhere, fisting in my hair, gripping my ass, hauling me higher until my legs locked around his waist, my body begged without words.

I screamed as his cock filled me, thick and punishing, each thrust shaking the air from my lungs until I was choking on the pleasure, on the filth of it all.

I didn't just moan his name, I screamed it.

Again and again, as if it were a chant, a plea, or maybe my own personal curse.

His teeth sank into my throat, roughly, and meant to hurt.

His fingers bruised my hips as he held me in place and fucked me like I was the one thing standing between him and his destruction.

And I loved it. I hated that I loved it.

I hated that I gave myself over so easily, arching into every slap of his hips, clawing down his back like I needed to mark him just as badly as he marked me.

Every inch of me responded to him, to the danger, the violence, the heat. It wasn't just sex. It was surrender. It was annihilation dressed in sweat and skin and a kiss that still burned long after it was over.

And even in the dream, I knew it was wrong.

But that didn't stop me from begging for more.

A scream ripped from my throat, sharp and loud, echoing off the walls like a fucking gunshot as I shot up off the pillows. My chest rose and fell in fast bursts, heart racing, drenched in sweat.

I blinked through the haze, disoriented, my body still pulsing with the aftershocks of arousal and shame.

My sheets were tangled around my ankles, twisted like I'd been fighting for my life or begging for my release.

My tits were bare, and a white substance lay on them.

I slowly slid my fingers through the creamy substance, completely grossed out.

My panties were wrapped around my ankles, and I figured I had pulled them down at some point during the dream.

I hated how good he still made me feel. Hated the way my body betrayed me every

damn time. Caleb Killic had ruined me with a kiss once, and my dreams had never let me forget it.

"Fuck," I muttered, rubbing my hands over my face, trying to erase the way my skin still tingled where I thought he'd touched me.

That's when a glint caught my eye.

A single gold coin rested on the pillow beside me.

My breath caught, frozen in my throat. I knew that coin.

I'd traced its edges once with my fingers, listened to him tell me about its weight, its meaning, how no one outside his family ever touched it.

It had been a quiet moment between us, rare in this lifetime of hate.

The Killic crest glinted in the low light, bold and unmistakable.

I sat up too fast, my head spinning.

There was a note folded next to it, written in the same sharp, brutal hand I remembered from the back of old invoices and secrets that we weren't supposed to talk about, scrawled on restaurant napkins.

Finders keepers, sweetheart. I always find what's mine.

The panic hit me like a blow to the gut.

I launched out of bed, heart hammering, while every nerve in my body screamed. I darted to my desk, yanked open the security monitor controls, fingers fumbling over

the touchscreen as I pulled up the feed.

The screen showed nothing but a flicker of the same frame looping on repeat, an obvious override if you looked close enough. Someone had got in and made damn sure I wouldn't see it happen.

My stomach twisted into a knot as the truth sank in. He had somehow planned this. How long had he been following me? Watching me?

I ran for the door, instincts kicking in as I yanked it open and scanned the lock. It was still engaged. The chain, untouched. But that didn't matter. I ran to the back door and noticed it was ajar. Just enough for someone like Caleb to slip through.

The air rushed from my lungs, and my heart raced so hard I felt it in my throat.

He'd been here. In my apartment. In my bed. With his hands on my body while I slept, dreaming of him fucking me, not realizing he already had his hold on me in the most twisted way.

I stumbled back, gripping the counter behind me to keep from collapsing under the weight of what that meant. All those dreams, all those filthy fantasies that haunted my nights, weren't just in my head. They were echoes of him. Warnings I'd ignored.

And now I knew, with bone-deep certainty, that he'd found me.

Caleb Killic had breached every wall I'd built. Every line I drew. And now?

Now everything was going to go to shit.

An hour later, I was sitting in the Rouge Roulette, tucked into the corner of Rhea's office with a bottle of water I hadn't touched, clutched in my hand.

My legs bounced uncontrollably, adrenaline still coursing through me.

Rhea was on the phone with Obsidian, pacing behind her desk, looking furious.

They were trying to figure out how the hell Caleb had gotten past our security, how he'd walked into my bedroom like he fucking owned it. I wasn't hearing the details anymore. My brain kept looping at that single image, his coin. That fucking note.

The door slammed open with enough force to shake the walls. We both looked up, startled.

Paramore was standing at the doorway, breathless and pale, like she'd seen the devil himself. Her eyes locked on mine, wide and stricken, and I knew whatever it was, it was bad.

"Paramore?" My voice cracked. I set the water down and crossed the room. "What is it?"

She hesitated. Swallowed hard. "We found her."

My stomach turned to ice. "Jinx?"

Her lips trembled, and the tears came fast. "Sh-she's dead."

"No," I whispered, already backing up, shaking my head like that would change what I'd just heard. "Where?"

"You don't want to know," she whispered.

"Paramore." My voice dropped, low and sharp. "You need to tell us. Now."

She grabbed my arm like it was the only thing keeping her upright, her grip trembling. "Outside."

Rhea stepped forward. "Out—what?"

"In the dumpster," Paramore choked. "Outside the club."

The world spun as both Rhea and I looked at one another. She didn't wait. Neither did I. We ran down the stairs into the main floor and rushed to the back exit, shoving the door open, the stench of the alley punching me in the face. Beer, urine, and the unmistakable stench of rotting flesh.

A car was parked crooked, hazards flashing like some kind of sick beacon.

We moved toward the side of the dumpster, the buzz of the hazards flashing behind us sending an eerie light our way. Rhea reached for my hand, and I didn't even realize I'd grabbed her back until we rounded the corner and saw her.

Jinx was there, tucked into herself like a child, as if curling up could have protected her from the brutal way they'd taken her out.

Her body lay beside the metal bin, half in the shadows, her heels the only thing sticking out.

They'd wanted to hide her, but didn't care enough to finish the job.

Bruises marred her arms and neck; raw welts pressed into her skin.

Her eyes were open, wide and glassy, staring into nothing, like whatever was left of her had left long before her last breath.

A sharp gash, filled with dried blood, scarred her neck.

We stood in silence, every muscle in my body locked up, stomach twisting. I wanted to touch her, to close her eyes, but I couldn't move.

I couldn't fucking breathe.

It was her mouth that stole the breath from my lungs. It was sewn shut. A crude fishing line threaded through her lips, twisted into a mockery of a smile.

I staggered back, hand catching the wall as my knees threatened to go out. "Fuck."

"The Turks did this," Paramore growled from behind us, her voice a mix of grief and fury. "She left with them. I know it."

"They knew," I said, my voice barely more than a rasp. "They knew who she was working for."

Paramore nodded, wiping her tears with the back of her hand. "This isn't just any hit. Whoever did this was fucking sending a message."

I turned from Jinx's body, bile burning the back of my throat.

"That's it!" Rhea snapped, her curls bouncing, voice cracking with rage. "This shit ends now. We leave. Tonight."

"Rhea, wait," she pulled away from my hand and turned on me.

She pointed at Jinx, fury sharpening every word. "You want that to be one of us next? Because that's where we're headed. And you know it."

Everything inside me coiled tight, sharp like a blade. “I didn’t bring this down on us. He did. The Turks did. They started this.”

“No,” Rhea shot back. “You poked the fucking bear. For five years. We told you to pull back. Told you to stop. You didn’t listen.”

I straightened my spine, the heat of anger buried in my chest. “I’m not afraid of him.”

“Then you’re a fucking fool,” Rhea said, stepping toe-to-toe with me. “Because I am. I’m afraid for every girl in this club. For all of us. You want to die? Fine. But don’t drag us into the grave with you.”

The alley fell into a tense silence as Demise emerged through the side door, her heels clicking against the pavement. Her face was unreadable, her voice like steel.

“We need to call it in. Now. If we don’t, we’ll be blamed.”

Rhea turned to me. “Enough is enough, Stephanie. Call Jameson. Take the deal and let’s go.”

“If I leave, he wins.”

“You both have some sick shit going on between you, I get that. But this is not the way. If it was Caleb who did this, he needs to pay. And if it isn’t, then whoever this is, they’re not out to play games.”

I heard the sirens in the distance as I stood there, staring into Jinx’s empty, judging eyes.

Duchess

I sat in the main lounge of the Rouge Roulette, wrapped in a blanket, barely listening as a young detective with too much gel in his hair and not enough experience in his eyes scribbled notes and tried to get me to repeat my story for the third time.

"You said you go by Duchess, is that right?"

I nodded. "Yes, that's correct." I didn't want to give them my name, not if I didn't need to.

"You said the victim worked for you?" he asked.

I nodded, voice flat. "She was a dancer for the club.

"You have reason to believe this was a targeted killing?"

My eyes flicked to Rhea, who stood stiff against the wall like she was holding up the damn building with her spine. "You saw her mouth was sewn shut. That wasn't random."

He scribbled something else, glanced over at his partner who was bagging evidence near the alley.

"Do you know who would want to hurt her like this?"

My jaw clenched so hard it ached. I forced myself to meet his gaze.

"Like I told you the first two times, we found her out back near the dumpster.

She left with a client three days ago and when we didn't hear from her the next day, some of the girls went looking for her.

They never found her, until tonight. That's all I can give you. "

Being a Harlot meant knowing how to deal with pressure, and part of that was knowing exactly what to say when the cops came sniffing around.

We were taught from the beginning, never give more than you have to, never lie unless you're damn sure you can back it up, and never, ever throw a sister under the bus. We played our roles well because our lives depended on it. I gave him just enough truth to keep him from digging deeper. When you ran a club like ours, you learned how to toe the line. Enough truth to keep the heat off. Enough bite to make sure they didn't push.

By the time they rolled the body out, I couldn't feel anything anymore.

I waited until the last cruiser pulled away and the red and blue faded into the night before I made my way upstairs. Rhea and the girls needed space. I needed answers.

But first, I needed to make a call I'd been avoiding for the last twenty-four hours.

The club was empty. Rhea had shut it down for the night. She felt it disrespectful to have the girls work with what had just happened. I entered the office. the door clicking quietly behind me. I sank into the leather chair behind the desk and pulled out my burner phone.

My thumb hovered over the number for longer than I'd ever admit.

I hit dial.

The call barely rang once.

"Did you make a decision?" Jameson's voice was calm. He'd apparently been waiting for the phone call.

"I think so," I said, forcing the words through lips that didn't want to move.

"But I do need to make some changes to what we had discussed before."

"Go on." He stated.

I closed my eyes and exhaled slowly. This was the part that hurt. "We don't just need affiliation."

The silence stretched between us.

I swallowed hard. "We need protection."

I waited for him to speak. "What happened?"

"One of my girls was found dead tonight. They threw her in the dumpster out back of the Rouge Roulette."

"Did you tell the cops who did it?"

I shook my head. "No. Played dumb."

"Good. We'll deal with them separately."

"We?"

"That's what a partnership is."

"I-I can't give you what you wanted. If you take us in, I swear I'll pull my weight for the Bastards. Whatever's needed. But in return...you can't have our girls. The Rouge Roulette is ours. But if you help us stand, we help you expand."

There was a pause, followed by muffled voices in the background. He was talking to someone. Whispering numbers.

"Powertrain's not gonna like this," he muttered. Then louder: "You're asking for a high price, Duchess."

I sighed and leaned back, the ceiling above me spinning with exhaustion. "I've put my blood, sweat, and tears into this clubhouse. All of it. I just ask that you don't tear it down just because you can."

"I'm not that cruel, Stephanie."

"I won't leave you hanging. You can have our other assets. We've slowly accumulated businesses. Spas, tattoo parlors, garages. If they work for you, you can have them."

The line crackled, and then he said, "I'll have your back if you have mine."

The relief hit me like a gut punch. I'd braced for resistance. For judgment. What I got instead was trust.

"Then it's a deal," I said, my voice firm now. No more room for doubt.

I left the office feeling like I'd just signed off on the most important deal of my life. The President of the National Chapter had our backs. My girls were safe, for now.

But as I threw a leg over my Harley and kicked it to life, the rumble of the engine was steady, grounding, but it couldn't drown out the thoughts crashing around in my head.

Roulette was going to lose her damn mind.

Half our assets were about to start filtering into RBMC territory, and not everyone was going to like what that meant. All the fronts we'd built were going to be used by another club. Even if it was through word of mouth, for now, that kind of shift made enemies. Fast.

I had no clue how I was going to explain it to the girls, let alone calm the storm when it hit. But I'd figure it out, like I always did.

Because if there was one thing this life had taught me, it was that survival isn't about brute strength. It's about knowing when to bite your tongue, when to strike, and when to step into the fire so it won't burn you.

The weeks ahead were going to test every limit we had. And I'd be damned if I didn't come out stronger.

I might bend, but I sure as hell wouldn't break.

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

P resent Day...

"Sir?"

That voice cut through the silence just as the rim of the glass met my lips. The whiskey hit hard. It was too sharp, too bitter, but right in line with everything my life had become. No sweetness left in it. Just bite and burn.

Leon stepped inside, shoulders squared, jaw tight, that unreadable expression he always wore when he was going to inform me of something I wasn't going to like.

I'd been waiting for years for this. Years of silence.

Years of half-assed leads and bullshit sightings.

Years of trying not to let the weight of her ghost bury me alive.

I should not have underestimated her the last time I'd seen her.

I should have taken her, not even given her a chance to breathe, to fight back.

That was my fault. It was all on me, and I goddamn knew it.

I stared back at Leon. Out of all the men I trusted, he was the one who had never given me a reason to doubt him.

We'd been through hell together... real hell.

Not the kind people whispered about after bar fights, but the kind that left scars and turned you into someone you barely recognized.

The kind that shed blood and turned you into monsters.

That's what the Turks did to me and everything around me. It ruined it.

Still, even trust had a limit. And mine was hanging by a thread.

"We found her."

Those three fucking words. I'd heard them too many times to count. They were always spoken of with too much certainty. Always meant to pacify me, to buy time. And every single time? They were lies.

"Say that again," I said, not because I didn't hear him. But because I needed to give my rage a reason to focus.

Leon didn't flinch. "We found her."

I set the glass down, slow and deliberate, the sound echoing like a warning. My fingers twitched. The only reason I wasn't throwing it across the room was because I needed to hear the rest.

"You realize I'm done playing games, Leon." My voice was low, hoarse from nights of smoking too much and sleeping too little. "I'm done chasing ghosts."

"It's not a ghost," he said. "It's her."

I stood, rolling the tension out of my neck, jaw locked so tight it felt like it might snap. I didn't want to believe him. Believing meant hope. And hope was a fucking cancer. The more you fed it, the deeper it grew until it owned every inch of you.

I wasn't letting that sickness in again. Not unless he could prove it.

"Where is she?"

"New York City. "He said simply.

I frowned.

Ten years.

I'd spent the last fucking decade ripping the country apart to find her.

Scouring every lead, every corner of this goddamn world.

I'd put men on every coast, in every club, and I even tried to plant one inside the Royal Bastards, following her brother and father.

The idiot we had finally put on the job had gotten himself killed in a crossfire with the Bloody Scorpions, and now I had no eyes in ears on the inside.

But he did let me know she was protected.

The Royal Bastards weren't just any club. They had armor, and no one got in without permission, and you sure as shit didn't get out without shedding blood. If they knew where she was, they weren't saying a damn thing. Not to me. Not to anyone.

I couldn't blame them, not really. If I were them, I'd keep her under lock and key,

too. But the truth? I didn't give a fuck about any of them. She might be their Princess now, but she was my Queen before she ever set foot in that clubhouse.

And now... now I had leverage. I had a location.

In the last five years, I took every opportunity that dangled in front of me and turned it into a weapon. I played the game so well within my family, they never even saw me take the board. I had no mercy; I was vicious in my control.

Now the family calls me the Karanlik Prens , or the Dark Prince.

I don't wear the crown. Not yet. But I own every shadow the light's too scared to touch.

My grandfather still breathes, still clutches tradition like it's going to save him.

The family thinks I wait out of respect, but they don't know I've already laid the foundation to rip that crown off his rotting skull the second he falters.

Every move I've made, every body I've buried, every alliance I've bought or bled for... I built it all for her.

My Queen. My Duchess

And all she wanted to do was run away. But this cat-and-mouse game was starting to become a burden. One that ate at my soul. And I was not about to let it take me alive, not unless she suffered as well.

"How did you find her?" I asked.

"It was by pure accident, Sir."

I dropped onto the dark leather loveseat across from my desk, the only comfortable seat in a room that was built to intimidate any weak soul who dared to enter it.

The walls were lined with shelves full of books, files, and deep reminders of the men that I'd had to bury to get here.

Smoke, leather, and dust clung to everything, but although it seemed harsh, it was familiar, and it was mine.

A thick rug muffled the cold click of shoes, and the vault behind the shelves held truths better kept locked away.

I swirled the last of my whiskey, watching Leon, and waved my hand to him to continue.

“She owns an escort service. Calls it Violent Delights. ”

A smile curled on my lips. Of course she did. It sounded just like her, a pure, fucking violent delight.

“And how do I get to her?”

“You don't. She's been under the radar for years. Still goes by the name Duchess in her inner circle.”

“Fuck. Me. She kept the name?”

“It seems like it, Sir. And she's been untouchable for years.”

“That's impossible,” I growled. “Nobody is untouchable.”

“Well, nobody we talked to has ever seen her. They didn’t even know what she looked like. She keeps off social media platforms and seems to have her own people in the dark web who move money for her. She doesn’t touch it.”

“Fuck. Me. Then how the hell did you track her?”

Leon raised a brow. “Did you know female biker clubs existed?”

I looked up, curious despite myself. “A female MC?”

“The Royal Harlots MC, to be exact.”

“So you’re saying she belongs to this... club ?” I grimaced.

Leon smirked. “She doesn’t just belong to it, Sir. She’s the fucking President.”

I had to admit, I was surprised. Genuinely. It was the first time in years anyone had caught me off guard.

“And what about these Violent Delights?”

“High end, VIP escort service. Anybody who is anybody with power has used these girls, but it’s not easy to get to them.

You have to be thoroughly vetted which means clients go through heavy background checks, financial screening, credit history.

If you don’t have the money or the reputation, you don’t get access. ”

I leaned back into the loveseat, smiling to myself. Completely fucking impressed.
“Smart girl.”

Leon gave a slow nod. “The clients also sign an ironclad contract. It states that if something were to happen to any of the girls, the client is held accountable. Word is, if the contract breaks in any way? She handles it personally. Tracks them down and puts them in the ground.”

I raised a brow knowing why she'd done that. The girl my grandfather had killed was on the news a few days later. A brutal attack on her body, her mouth sewn shut, probably by Ozan himself. Disgusting. She didn't trust anyone and I couldn't blame her for that.

“She's most definitely my Duchess.”

“She most certainly is and she's made a name for herself.”

“Tell me more about these Harlots.”

“Right now, we don't know how or when they came to be.

They were ghosts until one of our guys, a contact inside the Bloody Scorpions, had a run-in with them.

Let's just say it didn't end well. He gave us what little intel he had before he went dark.

We sent another man in after that. He managed to get out, but just barely. ”

“They've been operating out of a tucked-away building near the South Street Seaport,” Leon explained, his voice low and steady.

“It's a smart move. The area is tourist-heavy, busy day and night, and close enough to the harbor that anything questionable can be moved in and out quickly.

Industrial enough to keep curious eyes out, polished enough to blend in. ”

He shifted slightly. “The guy we sent followed one of the girls after she left the building on her motorcycle. But he didn’t make it far. They clocked him after two blocks. Cut him off before he even had a chance to tail her properly.”

“What happened to him?”

Leon paused. “He rider veered him off the bridge, put him in the harbor. She got away by the skin of her teeth. But not before the street cams picked her up weaving through the East River crossings.”

Leon handed me a thick manila envelope. “This is who he caught on camera coming out of the building.”

He tapped the envelope. “I pulled every bit of CCTV we could access, tracked her from the piers across lower Manhattan. Between the traffic cams and retail systems, we built her route frame by frame. That’s how we found her.”

I slid the photographs out slowly, the first image hit me square in the chest. Dark jet-black hair tumbled past her shoulders, curves in all the right places.

She looked stronger. Harder. There was steel in her eyes, like she dared the world to try her.

A new sharpness to her mouth, a tension in her jaw that hadn’t been there before.

I wondered if I had given that to her. A different type of mark that I found I wanted to soothe.

Her eyes... those hazel brown eyes, always made me feel this sense of protectiveness.

The ones that used to flash when I pushed her too far.

The ones that held fire, fury, and everything that ever brought me to my knees.

They hadn't changed in all these years and they hadn't seen what I'd done during that time to protect her from my grandfather's grasp.

She had been trying to disappear for years, and she'd done a pretty good job at it until now.

She'd let her guard down and I finally had my hands on her.

But what pissed me off the most wasn't the ten years I'd spent tracking her down.

It was the fact that she'd been under my fucking nose this entire time, hiding in plain sight, mocking me. Daring me to come to her. As if I wouldn't tear the world open just to find her.

Silently, I vowed she would pay for putting me through all that turmoil.

"Book me a flight to New York," I said, my voice sharp.

"Yes, Sir. Would you like me to book you a hotel, Uptown?"

"No need. I'll be staying at the apartment. It's close enough to the Seaport that I can move when I need to."

"Yes, Sir. Would you like me to accompany you?"

I shook my head as I downed the last of my whiskey in one burning gulp. Standing, I adjusted my suit jacket and buttoned it with a slow, deliberate tug. The suit was

armor in the form of tailored fabric, and I was getting ready for war.

“No. I want you here. Eyes open. Ears to the ground. If my family makes a move, I want to be the first to know about it.”

We were raised to love with your heart, but rule with a blade tucked behind your back. And in my world, family meant fuck all when power was on the table. Cousins, uncles, brothers... they'd all slit your throat if it meant another rung up the ladder.

“Also,” I added, pausing just before I opened the door, “get me access to one of her girls. The most expensive one. I don't care what it costs.”

I met Leon's eyes. “If I can't get to her, then I'll have to make her come to me.”

“Yes, Sir.”

I took the manila envelope with the photographs with me. Entering the bedroom, I spread them across the bed to take a better look. I memorized every curve of her face. Every inch of her body. She knew she'd always belonged to me, which is why she hid from me.

She never knew how much I loved her. How deeply, how violently, how completely obsessed I'd become.

She ran once but I'd make sure she wouldn't do it again.

Stephanie Winters was mine.

And the Duchess? The Duchess was everything I'd ever wanted and more.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

P resent Day...

I looked across the conference room to Roulette, who sat at the other side of the table.

Her black leather boots were propped up on the table, her seat leaned back, and her hands propped up on her head.

A leather jacket hung from her chair, the Queen and her crown emblazoned on the back, the words Royal Harlots MC clearly prominent on the sewn in patch.

Obsidian sat to my right, shoulders hunched, and eyes focused on her screen.

She had kept her name as Black Obsidian and was now the MC's hacker.

For the most part, she worked with Paramore on security.

God knows what she was working on currently, but I never bothered her.

She had my complete trust, and I knew whatever she was doing always involved the safety of the Harlots, and that's all I needed to know.

Several of the ladies were just wandering in for Church.

Junie, better known as Paramore, was our newly patched Sergeant at Arms. Always on her best behavior, she was a blonde bombshell.

A beautiful woman in a suit with a resting bitch face that pretty much screamed, fuck with me and I'll cut your balls off.

Angora, our Secretary, sat beside her. The complete opposite of Paramore with her sweet demeanor and bubblegum appearance.

They would have called her Kitty, but she was a little more sophisticated than that.

Angora fit her just fine. Next to Roulette, across the table, sat Lantana, our Road Captain.

Always in her leather. She was sexy, laid back, and smart as fuck.

As a Road Engineer she had access to maps and roadways where we could travel without being seen.

A rare Venezuelan gem, for sure. And she was poison to those who wanted to fuck with her.

Beside her sat Mirage, the Harlot's Tail Gunner.

Mirage worked at the company as my Marketing Manager.

Girl was creative as fuck on and off the Road.

Rainbow was our Treasurer, she always sat beside Obsidian.

We had a tendency of comparing her to Rainbow Bright with all that array of color in her hair.

But don't ever underestimate a Rainbow, you never know what you may find at the

end of it. She was my numbers girl and kept everyone on track when it came to money matters and accounting. Then there was Stiletto; she strode in with her dark brown curls, looking like a Polynesian goddess. She was ex-military and had worked with the CIA cleaning up their mess for a few years. But something happened to her, and we didn't talk about it.

We just know who to go to when we need things to disappear, and our names off the newspapers.

Demise greeted the group as she walked in. As our War Lady, she had taken Paramore under her wing, teaching her and all our Enforcers what she knew. With everything that was going down around us, we needed double the lady power.

Demise was the Violent Femmes representative and the current manager for the Violent Delights.

Always meticulous, she personified what the Violent Femmes were: sophisticated, intelligent, and beautiful women.

With that sensual smile and all those curves, no man would deny her anything, and she knew how to use her assets to get what she wanted.

She was in charge of bringing in our clientele.

No one came through our system without a background check done personally by her.

Each client was especially chosen and at times, if we saw it fit, we'd send out a special invite.

Anybody who didn't follow our rules would be discarded.

And if you harmed any of our girls, they would find you in the nearest cemetery.

Demise always looked like she was ready to start shit, which was why I loved her so much.

As the rest of the members came in, I thought back to that night and how everything had started.

In a matter of forty-eight hours, we had swiped our names clean, shut down the doors to the Rouge Roulette, and using Killian's new identities, we moved our asses to New York City.

Within a month, we'd purchased half of the building we sat in now.

A condo facing the Harbor down on Pearl Street in Fulton.

Twenty floors, six of which were taken over by our business offices.

Roulette had taken her idea of Rouge Roulette, sold the property back to the Hellbound Lovers MC, and with Obsidian's help, we created the Violent Delights.

On the surface, it looked like a high-end escort agency.

Sleek website, luxury clientele, and a reputation for discretion that made it irresistible to politicians, executives, and tech billionaires.

The kind of place whispered about behind closed doors, where men spent more for a night than most did in a month.

But behind the curated profiles and velvet appointments was something far more sinister.

The escorts were beautiful, trained, and wired moles. Every touch, every word, every moan was a setup. They wore hidden tech that logged voice patterns, mirrored devices, and skimmed data from unguarded phones and laptops. Pillow talk turned into confessions. Intimate moments turned into leverage.

Clients thought they were paying for pleasure.

In reality, they were offering up everything they had, from financial records, encrypted files, political secrets, dirty little sins stored in cloud drives and late-night texts.

And once they were compromised, the agency sold the information to the highest bidder on the black market.

Criminal syndicates, rival corporations, foreign interests.

No one asked questions. No one was safe.

The Violent Delights didn't just traffic in bodies; it trafficked in power.

And the worst part? The victims never even knew they'd been robbed.

It was the perfect ruse. A highly exclusive VIP escort service that only catered to the rich and sometimes famous.

In the last ten years, it had grown in terms of name and numbers, and we were now the number one escort service on the East coast, soon the West if all went as planned.

In order to get rid of the money that we kept having to move, we purchased real estate, to include tattoo parlors, spas, and the occasional bar and restaurant. Our businesses were all profitable and strategically set up in high-end areas in the city.

As much as I wanted my freedom, I pretty much lived a hermit lifestyle, afraid that Caleb Killic would be searching for me.

It felt like every time I stepped out of the building, I was being watched.

More so now, in the last few months than before.

I knew he wouldn't stop, he'd become obsessed with finding me.

But I'd been careful, at least I thought I'd been careful.

The Harlots had been slowly expanding, and we now had several chapters forming across the nation. Jameson had come through, and my girls were well protected. Everything I had hoped for was now a well-oiled machine.

We had Lunatic running one of the tattoo parlors, Violent Ink, up in Cleveland, Ohio.

The bitch was certifiable but loyal as fuck.

I know she had plans of her own and was slowly taking over in her area.

We also had Karma, who'd taken over as Prez in Memphis, TN.

We had Quinn over in Atlantic City. She ran the Steel Roses, which is where most of our girls trained for self-defense.

They also made some kickass beer-the Harlots Ale.

I recently named Allure as President of the Los Angeles Chapter, and I was moving Calypso and a few of our other members up to her chapter.

We had chapters growing in Canada, with Shark as Prez in Northern Ontario.

They ran a non-profit shelter for anti-bullying and they also were expanding their own fronts.

Diamond was over in Quebec City. We took her in after we heard she was being accosted by some dark heavy hitters.

We offered her protection and she and her ladies had been with us ever since.

Obsidian has been working with Diamond Trucking to get them any info she can find to track down traffic rings.

Recently she had been helping them in relocating abused children.

Having a son of her own, she had soft spot for kids.

Marisol ran the Tijuana, Mexico Chapter. They, like their brotherhood, liked to kick ass, fighting in cages. Not a lot of people wanted to mess with them, and as long as they kept their fronts up, I could care less about how they made their money, as long as they made it.

We recently put Azrael as the President in Baltimore, MD. Mercy had let me down, she was a troublemaker, and most recently she had gotten herself killed. If it wasn't for Azrael, covering up the situation, and taking control, our names would have been on a Feds list.

Roulette started Church this time around, asking about the Atlanta Chapter.

“Ghost let me know that Chanel, Vivi's daughter, has returned.

” Vivi used to be the President of the ATL chapter until she was brutally killed.

The case had grown cold, and they never found the killer.

That hadn’t been a good day for the Royal Harlots.

It was Ghost who took over as President when Vivi died.

Now having Chanel back, it could bring us some trouble.

“You think it’s going to be a problem?” Rhea asked me.

“I think we should have Ghost keep an eye on her. We can give them a call later and see where their mindset is. I don’t want a loose cannon in my MC.”

“Good call.” Rhea agreed.

Demise spoke up next. “Looks like the Vegas Chapter has something going down with the woman they recently rescued. I know Pearl up in Phoenix offered to give them safe haven, but it looks like an opposing casino owner wants to fuck with our territory. The club’s casino took a hit recently. Selene may need backup.”

“Okay, keep your eye out on them, if they need anything, let me know, and you can take another Enforcer with you.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I got a call from Grace this last week, Hellsing’s Old Lady over in New Orleans.” I paused for a second and smiled. “Looks like she’s vouching for Lilith as President in Asheville, NC. Looks like the witches want to join the Harlots.”

“That could be interesting,” Stiletto stated.

“I could do with some witchcraft,” Paramore chuckled.

“They’re no joke, you know. Grace has let me know they’re pretty powerful. Besides, with some of the rumors going on with some of our clubs, having a little supernatural on our side won’t hurt.

As we finished the week's business, there was a knock on the door. Gypsy, one of our Enforcers, came in.

"Prez, do you have a minute? "

"Go ahead, Gypsy, what's going on?"

"I was just informed that one of the Violent Delights has gone missing."

I leapt up from my seat. "Who?"

"Sanja. She never showed up after her appointment yesterday."

"Who was she seeing?"

"Some investor with J.J. Banks."

"Isn't that bank affiliated with Killic Consolidation Holdings?" Obsidian looked at me.

"What?!" Roulette's boots came off the table with a resounding slam. Dread ensued right after as I tried to keep my calm.

“We can’t just jump to conclusions.”

“Did you forget what happened to the last girl who disappeared?” She was talking about Jinx.

“Of course I didn’t forget. But we also have the Bloody Scorpions doing shit to our girls, and we don’t know, maybe someone caught onto us.”

“Sanja can handle herself,” Paramore stated. But I’m with Roulette on this one.

"Obsidian?"

"Yes, Prez."

"Find out whatever you can on Sanja’s whereabouts last night."

She nodded and got to work on that laptop of hers. "Let's finish business and we'll continue to look into it. I'm sure she's alive and well."

Twenty minutes later, Demise and Obsidian walked in, the looks of concern on their faces made my stomach turn.

"Is she dead? " I whispered.

Obsidian shook her head. "Worse."

"What could possibly be worse?"

She swallowed nervously and then looked around the room, I could see her searching for the right words. "Oh for God's sake, just say it!"

"Prez, Caleb Killic has her."

"And he's requesting a meeting with you." Demise finished for her.

"Son of a bitch!" Rhea shouted out the words that seemed to have left me.

"You're not going," Stiletto was adamant.

As the women around formulated plans on how to protect me, my mind was already set on how I was going to get Sanja back.

Raising my hand, the room instantly silenced. "Tell Caleb Killic I'll be there."

"You can't possibly..."

I looked sternly at Roulette, silencing her. "Stop. All of you just stop what you're doing. My priority is and always has been the safety of these girls. If what he wants is to see me, then in order for him to let go of our own, I'll replace her. I'm done hiding anyway."

"You can't possibly give up all that you've done so easily." Rhea stated.

"I'm giving nothing up. Caleb Killic found me months ago."

"What?" Paramore whispered.

I nodded. "It's what this feeling of being watched was. He's known where I've been the entire time. Probably planning all this to his advantage. He likes to play games ladies. I might as well indulge him. As long as we get Sanja back in one piece."

I got up and went to the door. I needed time to assimilate things. "Roulette, Demise,

make sure there's a car up front in an hour. You'll both be coming with me. And I don't want to hear it," I looked specifically at Roulette.

"I wasn't going to hide forever, Rhea. You and I always knew that."

Walking out of the conference room, I headed towards my office at the other secluded end of the building.

You would think I'd be shaking in my leather boots, but I wasn't.

It felt like a relief to finally be seen.

After ten years of hiding, it was time to face my fears and revisit my past. I had lost a little piece of me ten years ago.

Changing my appearance, losing my name, and who I was.

I always knew I'd see him again. Caleb wasn't one to give up.

Now I just had to figure out a way to resolve this without shedding any blood.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

I was alone in my office, pouring myself a drink, when she arrived. I could feel the heat of her presence when she entered the room although not a word was spoken.

"It's been a long time, Duchess. I presume you're here for Sanja?" I asked.

When I didn't receive an immediate response, I looked at her over my shoulder.

My breath literally left me. I felt as if though time was standing still and in the center of it all, only her and I were left.

She was even more beautiful now than the images and memories I'd been left with.

Memories that accompanied me well into the depths of my lonely nights and sullied my dreams.

She wore a red leather jacket over a white silk tank top and a striped pencil skirt with a high slit. High enough for her to be able to ride her motorcycle. Black Stiletto heels completed the outfit. Those heels did shit to my whole fucking being and I hated her for it.

Stay angry.

Stay focused.

"I'm not here for chit chat, Caleb. Tell me where the girl is and I'll be on my way."

I fully turned to her as the door snapped shut and locked behind her. I wasn't to be disturbed.

"The girl is safe. For now."

She turned slowly away from the locked door and those electric blue eyes of her trained on me and narrowed.

God, how I loved to see her get all fiery on me.

"I missed you," I whispered as I took a sip of the amber liquid in my glass tumbler.

She looked taken aback by my comment and I couldn't blame her. I always showed my contempt for her, even though that's far from how I truly felt, but now was not the time to dive into those feelings.

I continued the conversation as if I hadn't just confessed what I felt for her. "You've changed, Stephanie. Forgotten about us. I'm hurt," I grabbed my heart in jest.

"I'm not here to participate in your crude games, Caleb. I'm just here for my girl."

I slowly brought my hands down and narrowed my eyes on her. We could both feel the atmosphere growing thicker between us. That slight electrical current played havoc on us, igniting triggers in us both.

"Did you think I'd forget what you did?"

"There was nothing to forget. I left with what I came in with. That should have been enough."

"Oh, no." I shook my head. "Now you know that's not true, Stephanie. You left with

more than that, didn't you? Twenty million more."

Her eyes never wavered.

Not even a flicker of remorse. Not one fucking blink that gave away guilt or fear or acknowledgment. She stood there like a stone statue, calm and cold and pretending like the past never touched her.

Like she hadn't disappeared with twenty million in clean cash.

Like ten million in product hadn't vanished without a trace.

Like she hadn't known exactly what Alan was doing and decided to keep her pretty mouth shut.

She kept that from me.

Me!

And no one crosses me. Not then. Not ever. But she didn't just cross the line, she set fire to it and then disappeared into the ashes of what she'd destroyed for ten fucking years.

"I went on with my life, Caleb. Not sure what you've been doing with yours, but... "

"I spent it searching for you!" The words tore out of me, loud and raw, echoing off the glass walls like a damn outcry. The rage that had simmered for a decade erupted, and I slammed my hands against the desk, the impact sharp enough to rattle the furniture.

I stood, slow and deliberate, taking calculated steps toward her.

She backed up, just one step, but it was enough. I saw the flinch, the hesitation she didn't want to show. Good. She should feel something. She should feel me .

"Every minute of every day," I growled, voice low now, dragging out the ache behind every syllable. "Ten fucking years of tracking ghosts and chasing shadows. I burned men to get answers. Buried them when they couldn't give me what I wanted. I tore cities apart looking for you."

Her shoulders squared, but I saw her jaw clench. She didn't look at me. Wouldn't. And that was the part that told me everything.

"At first," I said, stalking her as she moved, "I swore I'd kill you. That was the plan. Hunt you down. Make you beg. Put you down like a traitor."

I cornered her near the edge of the office. The floor-to-ceiling window behind her reflected the tension between us.

"But that would have been too easy."

She finally looked at me then. And in her eyes, I saw it. Recognition of the man I'd become. Of the price she'd put on my soul the day she vanished.

"You don't get to pretend like nothing happened. Not with me. Not after what you did."

I leaned in close, breathing her in like a man starved.

"I don't want revenge anymore, Stephanie."

My lips curled into a smile that didn't reach my eyes.

"I want you to remember every second of what it means to belong to me."

"Is that what you think you did?" She raised her chin up, defiant as she met my stone-cold gaze. "Coming into my bedroom, attacking me the way you did. Abusing me without my consent."

"I did not... "

"You didn't?" she snapped, cutting through my denial like a blade. "How about when you killed one of my girls? Was that not enough pain for you?"

Her words sliced through the room like a whip, each one laced with venom, rage, and grief.

My pulse thundered behind my eyes, not from guilt, but from the bitter realization that she would never understand why.

Never see the hunger. The torment. The obsession that wouldn't let me sleep or breathe without her in my blood.

I stared at her, my voice low and dangerous. "I admit it. I stalked you. I watched you. I tasted you when I shouldn't have. I broke into your space because I needed to remind myself you still existed. But I did not lay a hand on that girl. That wasn't me."

"Liar," she seethed.

"There are others out there who want to hurt you, worse than I ever could. Real monsters. Ones who don't give a damn about you, only what they can take.

You have no idea how I will tear them apart with my bare hands if they ever touch you.

And I swear to you, I will torture you with every wicked thing I know, again and again, until you remember exactly who you belong to.

Until you stop running. Until you understand that your soul's already mine. "

She took another step back, her defiance turning into something colder, more distant.

"I don't believe you. And you have no idea what I'm capable of. What I've had to do to survive," she hissed, but her voice trembled with the weight behind those words, as if daring me to push harder.

I took a step closer, eyes locked on hers, my voice once again dripping with venomous intent.

"And you don't know what I'd make you survive if anyone else even thinks about touching what's mine again.

Pray it's me breaking through your door next time, because I'm the only devil who knows how to torture you and still leave you breathing.

Anyone else, and you won't be left standing, Duchess.

That's not a threat. That's a fucking promise. "

She opened her mouth, fire behind her gaze, but I cut her off with the weight of everything she made me become.

"And you don't know what I became because of you," I growled. "But you're about to. Because I'm not fucking done. Not even close. And if you think surviving me once was hell, baby, you haven't seen what I've got planned for round two."

“You will pay for what you did.”

“Will I?” I chuckled. “You dare to threaten me when I am the one holding one of your own, captive?”

“Fuck you.”

I smiled, reaching out and sliding my fingers through a soft strand of her dark hair. “There’s something you don’t know, Stephanie. Something I kept from you, from my family, for a long time.”

Her breath hitched as I took a step closer. “Turns out...you can't kill a Duchess!"

As she turned to run, I grabbed her around the waist and drew her back into my chest.

"Caleb, what are you doing?" She tried to squirm out of my grip, but my hold on her was like steel. She wasn't going to get away so easily.

Turning my head into her hair, I pressed my lips to her ear. "See, because you don't kill royalty, you own it."

She stiffened in my arms as I spoke my truth.

"I'm not yours to own," her whisper was filled with fear.

I leaned into her, securing her arms in mine as I spoke. "You owe me twenty million dollars, Duchess, and there's only one way I can see you paying that back."

"I owe you nothing," she gritted, struggling out of my hold.

"I beg to differ."

"You have no proof of it and even if I did, I still wouldn't pay you." Gripping her arms, I spun her around to face me. "Do you have any idea what you have done to me? What you are currently doing to me?"

Anger emanated from her cobalt blue eyes, shooting daggers at me. "I honestly don't give a flying fuck, what I may be doing to your small appendages."

The cruel smirk she gave me only served to light a fire deep inside me. My hands itched to bend her over the nearest console and have her adhere to a sound spanking, but that would have to wait until I had more control of the situation.

"Your smart mouth was always going to get you in trouble."

She tilted her head, that amused expression still playing on those lush lips of hers. Lips I had dreamed of for so many nights.

No woman could compare to Stephanie Winters. Not one. It didn't matter how beautiful. How smart, how good they were in bed, nor how fast I came on their tongue. Not one compared to my Duchess.

I played games with myself all these years. Trying to convince myself that I was crazy. That I had been drugged and deceived.

How could I possibly love a woman as plain and insignificant as Stephanie Winters?

But they were all lies I told myself because Stephanie was nothing but significant in my life.

She ruled every waking hour. My obsession with her grew throughout the years, along with my desperation.

And in that despair, I thought I could never live another day without her.

There were several moments in my life where I figured it was just best to end it. End the turmoil. End the wait.

I had pressed the barrel of that gun to my temple more than once. But then thought to myself, what good would that do, when I couldn't take her with me.

She leaned in and whispered. "In trouble by whom? Some lowly bodyguard?"

It was my turn to smirk at her. "No. sweet girl. By the Turkish Karanlik Prens . Soon to be King himself."

I lifted the lapels of my expensive suit jacket open as I presented myself to her. "You're looking at the head of the Turkish Mafia, my Duchess."

Her eyes widened, and she barely breathed as I pressed her up against the door. "And he gets what he wants when he wants it."

"Impossible," the word fluttered against my lips as her hands pressed against my chest. It was the first touch she'd ever initiated, and it made my whole body grow hard.

"You really have no idea what you've done to me," I whispered back, her eyes drawn to mine.

I slid my hand into her hair and cupped her cheek. "You've always been so precious to me, Stephanie."

"What the hell are you talking about?" She uttered in disbelief.

"Which part? That I'm the head of the Turkish Mafia or that I think you're beautiful."

"The former," she bit out.

I smirked again, stroking her soft cheek with my thumb as I leaned in and pressed my lips to her ear.

"Blood. My hands are dripping in it."

As I slid my hand down to the curve of her throat. "And I'll shed more for you if I have to."

I felt her swallow nervously as my thumb stroked the side of her jugular. She was so fragile, so defenseless. In one fowl swoop I could cut off her breath and end it all right here. Both her life and mine, of course.

"You're a psychopath," she breathed.

I gripped her throat, and I felt her body stiffen against mine. Her hands reached up over my own. "I'm much more powerful than that. I have the full intention of making you beg for me, Duchess. And I want your screams as you do it, because only then will I be certain that you're mine."

"I will never..."

"Shhh," I pressed a finger to her lips.

"I wouldn't say never, Tatlim . You also thought I'd never find you and look where that has gotten you."

I dragged my thumb along her bottom lip and felt her shiver. The redness of that lip

was almost hypnotic. My lips hovered over hers. A ghost of a kiss lingering between us.

I pulled away, just as suddenly as I had captured her. Straightening my jacket, I took a moment to give her a once-over and then reached for the door. "I unfortunately have a full schedule, Miss Winters. Perhaps we could continue this another time."

It took her a moment to realize I was kicking her out. And when she did, that fire I loved so much, sparked in her eyes.

"I didn't come here to be treated as your toy. You will not control me or anyone around me."

Her stance was fierce and stunningly beautiful. "I'm not trying to control you; although it seems I've already accomplished that."

She narrowed her eyes on me as she came at me, bringing herself toe to toe with me. "I want my girl, Caleb. I do not want to bring anyone else into this, but I will if I have to."

I leaned forward, bringing my eyes level with hers. "Your girl has been sent home since you got here."

She stumbled slightly back, and I watched as the heat from her eyes swept to her cheeks as she balled her hands into fists.

"Until we meet again, Duchess."

I waited by the open door for a minute until she finally grabbed her bag and swept passed me, leaving that aroma of wildflowers behind.

"This isn't over," she stated as she left.

"I hope not," I whispered, watching her hips sway before she disappeared down the hall.

I pointed to my secretary and watched as Laura scurried around her desk and ran up to me.

"Yes. Sir."

"Find out that scent she's wearing. I want that scent everywhere by the time I get here tomorrow." "Yes, of course, Sir."

I shut my door and went back to my desk, already thinking about the next time we'd meet. I wouldn't be as nice to her in our next encounter. I promised her she'd scream, and I was planning on stealing those screams from her just as she'd stolen everything from me.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

The restaurant was one of those upscale rooftop spots nestled atop a high-rise hotel in the heart of New York City.

Its floor-to-ceiling windows offer a panoramic view of the city skyline glittering beneath the night sky.

Modern lighting cast a soft glow over marble floors, crystal glassware sparkled like ice, and clean-cut men in tailored suits floated from table to table, pretending their money made them untouchable.

I hated these places. Too polished, too quiet, too much pretense.

The man's arm brushed against mine as I leaned in, making sure the low cut of my red dress did its job. He was a hedge fund baby through and through, born into wealth and fed privilege from a silver spoon. Salt and pepper hair matched his well-trimmed beard, giving him a distinguished edge that might've fooled someone into thinking he'd earned any of it.

But I knew better. Still, I wasn't here to judge.

I was here to win him over, and if my cleavage helped speed up the deal, then so be it.

Rhea had warned me he'd be more into the image than the woman beneath it.

Perfect. That meant I could work him without worrying about his hands getting greedy.

I'd dressed to kill tonight. The fire-red silk clung to every one of my curves, a neckline plunging just enough to leave him wondering what it would take to see more.

The client across from me wasn't here for a date.

He was here to close a deal, and I'd use every asset I had to make sure the numbers leaned in my favor.

I was halfway through a steak that was overpriced and under-seasoned when his phone buzzed. He answered, nodded, and stood with a tight smile. "Emergency call. I'll be back in a moment."

The second he walked off, I didn't even get a breath in before the leather of the booth shifted beside me.

"Didn't know you liked your steak rare, Duchess. "

My heart thudded and a slow heat spread through me, one that had nothing to do with the wine or the man who'd just left.

"You've got five seconds to leave before I make a scene," I muttered, keeping my voice low and my eyes forward.

But Caleb didn't leave. No, he fucking leaned in, looking every bit the devil, I remembered.

He looked handsome tonight, too handsome.

His midnight, black hair was slicked back with just enough wave to hint at how wild it could get.

His dark eyes were bottomless, a storm brewing with control and chaos, and his lips looked fully sculpted.

Sinfully tempting in the dim light, drawing me in like a magnet.

His jawline was cut from granite, a sharp, masculine edge softened only by the five o'clock shadow that shadowed his skin.

Everything about him screamed danger, but it was the kind you wanted to touch, taste, and curse yourself for afterward.

And that perfectly cut navy suit molded to broad shoulders, hiding a body I knew was carved from power and blood.

Turkish steel in human form, and I hated how my pulse betrayed me just being near him.

His hand slid beneath the pristine white tablecloth with all the arrogance of a man who thought he held all the power.

His fingers were tracing the inside of my thigh with a slow, possessive stroke that made my breath stutter in betrayal.

Heat licked up my spine as I grabbed his wrist, the warmth of his touch searing into my skin, dangerous and electric, the kind that made a woman forget how to say no and remember how easily she'd once said yes.

"You looked bored. Figured I'd offer you something more... appetizing ."

I gritted my teeth and gripped my fork like a weapon. "Touch me again, and I swear to God, Caleb..."

"What, you'll stab me to death?" he said, voice soft but laced in wicked amusement as he looked down at the fork. "Might take you a while."

"Don't tempt me."

"Wouldn't be the first time someone tried. But you wouldn't do it here. Not in front of all these rich pricks."

He smelled like expensive sin. His over-priced cologne mixed with the tobacco scent of his cigars, and his breath tasted like whiskey, while the heat of his hands induced violence. His fingers tightened on my leg just as he leaned in to whisper against my neck.

"You can dine with them, dress in their silk, wear their diamonds... but we both know who you cum for when you're done playing Queen."

His fingers slid higher, brushing the edge of my panties, dragging heat across flesh that had no business reacting to him. I clenched his wrist tighter, but he only leaned in further, his lips brushing my ear with infuriating control.

"Go ahead, make a scene. Let all these polished little monsters see what you really are. We both know you won't, because truth has a price in this world, and you can't afford the fallout. Not here. Not in front of the client you're so desperately trying to impress."

His other hand trailed upward, calloused fingers ghosting over my collarbone before dipping into the plunge of my dress, just enough to skim the swell of my breasts. "You wore this dress for a schmuck like him? What a waste."

I turned my face away, and my jaw clenched. "Jealous, much?"

He dragged his nose along the curve of my throat, slow and sinful, until I shivered. "Tell me, Duchess," he murmured, voice husky and soaked in seduction, "how bad do you want to cum for me again? Because I can still taste you on my tongue. So sweet and addictive. I want you dripping down my chin."

He dragged his nose up beneath my jaw, inhaling like he needed the scent of me to survive. "I want your taste on my tongue again."

His tongue traced my ear as his calloused fingers slipped beneath the edge of my panties, unhurried and bold.

His fingertips found the slick heat waiting for him, and he let out a low, guttural sound that made my thighs clench.

"You're wet for me, Duchess," he whispered, his voice thick with need and victory as his fingers slid through my swollen, needy lips. "So fucking wet, and I've barely touched you. I want my fingers soaked in your heat, Duchess, while you beg me not to stop. I want to feel you pulse around me, desperate and filthy, just the way I remember. The way you've always been for me." But most of all, I want you to admit that every single night since you ran, you've dreamt of this moment. And I'm going to keep coming for you until you do. "

"I will never give into you, Caleb." I breathed.

He pulled back with a smirk that made my blood boil. He left my traitorous pussy thrumming from his touch.

"Not never, Duchess. When you give in. Next time, it won't be dinner I'll be interrupting, Duchess.

It'll be something that leaves a mark. A message, loud and clear, in a language only you and I understand.

Keep playing house with your polished friends, I'll be the shadow that keeps you looking over your shoulder. You'll know it's me, and when it hits, you'll realize just how far I'm willing to go to take back what's mine. "

Then, with a smooth grace that made me want to choke him, he rose from the seat and walked away like he hadn't just set my entire body on fire with rage and something far more dangerous.

I sat there, trembling, trying to piece myself back together. The client returned moments later, oblivious to what I had just gone through, and the rest of the dinner passed in a blur of fake laughter and stiff small talk.

But I did not sleep well that night. And whatever little sleep I did get was filled with hot desires, rough moans, and the scent of expensive cologne and tobacco.

The next morning, I was still raw. I hadn't slept, not even for a second. I was still in the red dress, lying curled on the couch with a fury in my chest that wouldn't ease.

The door slammed open.

Rhea.

Her heels struck the floor like bullets, her eyes wide, her hand gripping her phone like a weapon.

"Have you seen the email?"

My voice came out hoarse. "What email?"

She shoved the screen in front of me.

Killic Consolidated Holding: Building Acquisition Confirmation.

I read it once. Twice. Three times.

"No," I breathed. My voice cracked. "He bought it?"

Rhea nodded. "Our building, Steph. The Violent Femmes location, bought. Just like that."

"Half the building," I corrected.

"He bought the foundation. Which means we pay his mortgage."

I shot to my feet. Blood roared in my ears. "Motherfucker!"

Rhea looked away, lips pressed tight. "He knew exactly what he was doing when he took Sanja. He was planning to destroy you, us."

"He didn't show up at that restaurant last night just to get under my skin. That was a warning. This... this is the fucking threat."

"Restaurant?" Rhea blinked. "What are you talking about?"

I ignored her question, rage building. "I should have known better. I let my fucking guard down again, didn't I?"

"That's not the question, Stephanie. I want to know what we are going to do?" she asked quietly.

I stared out the window, the city humming beneath us. "I'm going to kill him," I said.

"What?" she asked. "Stop fucking around, Prez. We need to figure something out."

Suddenly, my phone buzzed, and an unknown number popped up with a text message.

We're not done, my future Queen. Not even close.

"I'm going to kill him, and no one will ever find him after I'm done with him." I smiled, and Rhea simply sank into a chair. Because she knew I was about to do something really bad to this man.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

I don't know what got into me, but I found myself pulling up to Caleb Killic's house on Mulholland Drive at two o'clock in the morning.

I'd called Bandit up earlier that day to find out where he was.

Bandit, or Barry Reed, was the Royal Bastards' crazy pilot.

He'd been doing a drop off when I asked him for a favor, one which he owed me for something I'd done for him a while back, when I'd introduced him to his newest conquest.

"I'm only taking you as far as the strip. You're on your own after that." They'd recently acquired a small cargo plane in which my motorcycle fit perfectly. Bandit simply shook his head and muttered obscenities in his deep Louisiana accent as I slid into the passenger seat.

"You're lucky I'm heading' down that way," he spoke through the mic as he continued to complain.

I looked at him and smiled. "Well, your bed is nice and warm because of me, so I figured you owed me."

He looked over at me, mouth agape as he pulled the plane up and over the airstrip.

"I don't believe you threw that in my face."

"I would never," I pressed my hand to my chest in mock horror. "I'm simply asking for a favor in return."

"Uh-huh," he murmured.

The entire flight, I kept going through the plan in my head. Sneak in, grab his laptop and leave. Then again, my instincts at the moment were to storm in, fire two shots, and leave.

Don't hesitate, don't think, just kill him and get it over with.

"Why are you heading down there in the first place?" My thoughts were interrupted by Bandit as he hummed a happy tune.

"I've got a business situation that needs to be dealt with."

"Why does it sound like there's an underlying truth in there somewhere?"

"Did I ask you what kind of dealings you had in my city? Aren't you supposed to ask for permission anyway."

He closed and opened his mouth for a second before answering. "Well...not exactly. I'd already spoken to Crucifix."

"Yeah, but that's the Bastards, did you speak to the Harlots?"

"Well...no."

"Exactly. Besides, Royal Bastards don't ask Royal Harlots their business and vice versa."

"Well I'm neither," he shrugged. "I'm just the fucking pilot."

I stared at him for a second and then turned away. He had a way of making his smart ass remarks honest. It was one of those things you just kind of loved about him.

Three hours later, we'd landed on a strip near the docks owned by the Hellbound Lovers and Death Row Shooters. Grabbing my bike, I backed it out and revved the engine up.

"Hey," Bandit ran towards me.

"What's up?"

"Be here by seven in the morning and I'll take you back," he gulped in air as he rubbed his big belly.

I smiled and leaned over to him, kissing him on the cheek.

"Thanks, Barry, I knew I could count on you."

"Be careful now. You die, and they'll put that blame on me for bringing you here."

I waved at him as I took off, heading straight for the Hollywood Hills, a thirty-minute drive from the Port of Los Angeles.

The city glowed to my left as I enjoyed the cool breeze of the evening.

I was startlingly calm as I took the drive.

Of course, that calm went out the window as I coasted silently onto Mulholland Drive, the tires whispering against asphalt as I rolled to a stop near the edge of the

gated community.

I killed the engine and parked the bike just shy of the turn, making sure it remained hidden. The rest, I'd do on foot.

The hill leading to the property cut steep and unforgiving. Perfect for keeping people out. Even better for someone like me to slip in.

I adjusted my jacket, tightened the strap across my chest, and walked the path remaining hidden in the shadows.

A sleek black sedan approached the iron gate just as I stepped into the shrub line. I crouched low. Waited. When the gate opened, I moved. Quickly sliding behind the vehicle as it passed, using its bulk to slip through undetected.

Too fucking easy.

This place reeked of wealth, and not the new kind. It was the kind that allowed you to build empires full of bloodshed and keep those dark secrets hidden behind million-dollar doors.

I made my way to the third house on the left. I only knew where it was because hours before, Obsidian had given me a full file on Caleb Killic and the dirty company he headed.

The house was perched on an ultra-private hillside on the coveted Mulholland Drive.

The mansion itself was also gated, but I was able to get access from the hilltop.

It took me a minute, but I was finally able to leap over the fence along the side of the house.

I crouched and waited, assuming cameras would see me, but all was quiet.

I slowly walked down the lightly lit path, finally coming to a large European-style villa. The motherfucker owned a thirty-million-dollar home with views across the valley to the canyons, and he was chasing me down for a mere twenty million. That was chump change for him.

"You gotta be shitting me," I whispered into the night, as I made my way toward the back of the house.

I was met with an Olympic-sized swimming pool hidden by giant Spanish columns. The pool itself had a lazy river and a fountain in the center of it. I cursed as I made my way along the side of the house and tried the sliding door.

"Please. Please, please," I whispered, tugging on the metal handle, and was surprised to see the door was truly unlocked.

I stood in his living room in shock. This was all too easy, and my gut instinct told me to run. Of course, I never listened to it.

Clearing the area, I spotted two very expensive bottles of wine, one of which was empty and had fallen onto the white area rug. Drops of red wine had already sunk into the rug, and all I could think about was what a bitch it was going to be to get that stain out.

I shook my head. "Somebody's been drinking."

I stepped over the bottle as I took out my gun. The bottles explained why the door may have been left open, but was he alone in the house?

I slowly made my way up the stairs, trying to remain as quiet as possible. I never did

do stealth well. I was more a kick the door in and make an entrance type of girl, but in this case, I would do my best.

Pulling my phone out, I found the blueprints Obsidian had provided. If she was correct, his door was at the end of the hallway, and it stood wide open. As I made my way in, the lingering thought remained about how all this was just too easy.

How could there not be security?

Where were the cameras?

Where were his foot soldiers?

How could a big-time Mafia King to be, not have any men watching over him?

I found him sprawled, face down on top of the bed. A half-empty glass of red wine was placed on the nightstand beside him. His hand hung off the mattress, fingertips dragging against the floorboards, and he was only wearing his boxer briefs. He had a tight ass; there was no denying that.

I was only here for one thing... his coveted laptop. We needed whatever contract was on that laptop so that Obsidian could forge it and make it disappear. I still thought it was a weak plan, but it kept me out of jail.

As I stared down at him, I couldn't resist. I raised my gun and slowly pointed it at his head.

The steel of the Beretta my father had given me glinted in the moonlight.

It was a newer model, sleek and light, tinted with rose gold and made especially for me.

All my girls had custom-made guns recently provided by the Royal Bastards MC.

I had one bullet in the chamber, and as I cocked the hammer, all I kept thinking was that it would take just one shot to get him the fuck out of my life.

As the heavy click bounced off the walls, the figure on the bed suddenly stirred.

The shot rang out as he swept my wrists up and over my head and swung me down onto the mattress. The bullet had been fired into a pillow, and I struggled with trying to get a second shot in.

"Murderous bitch," he muttered, as he wrestled the gun out of my hand.

I screamed out in frustration as I fought him. Scratching at his arms and back as my knees came up to make contact with his lower appendages.

Prying the gun from my fingers, he raised it over our heads and fired a warning shot. I screamed and covered my face.

"Will you stay still, now?" He stated calmly, as he flipped off the bed and went out to the balcony.

From the awkward angle I had on the bed, my head falling over the side of the mattress, I watched as he flung my gun over the side of the railing.

"Son of a bitch," I whispered as he sauntered back in. A loud splash sounded in the distance, and I realized he'd thrown my gun in the pool below.

"You'll pay for that one."

"Oh. I fucking hope so." He made his way towards me with purposeful strides.

It took me a second to realize what he was going to do, but by the time I reacted, it was already too late.

It happened too fast.

One second, I was kicking off the sheets and scrambling to bolt from the bed, my instincts screaming louder than the blood rushing through my ears, and the next, his hands were already on me. Rough and possessive.

Caleb's fingers clamped around my ankles, yanking me back across the slick black silk sheets as if I were nothing but prey caught in his net.

I thrashed, kicking hard, my heel connecting with the sharp edge of his jaw.

I heard the crack, felt the jolt up my leg, but all it did was make him grunt.

A savage grin cracked across his face, and I realized he was enjoying this. I'd just turned him the fuck on.

"Don't touch me!" I spat, grabbing fistfuls of the sheets, my nails tearing into the fabric as I tried to crawl away.

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But he was already climbing onto the bed, straddling me before I could make another move.

His weight pinned me down, forcing me flat to the mattress, my face pressed into the cool silk as he ripped the leather jacket from my body in one sharp tug.

The soft brush of fabric vanished as he reached for the belt I hadn't even noticed lying on the floor.

The moment I felt the leather tighten around my wrists, the rage in my chest lit like wildfire.

“You son of a...”

“Shhh...” His voice curled hot against the shell of my ear as he leaned over me, his breath thick with the sweetness of the wine he'd been drinking. “Did you really think it would be that easy, Duchess? I've been watching every step you take. Every breath. Every lie you've told yourself since I found you again.”

His hand slid over my bare arms, down to my hips, and beneath me. His fingers brushed the edge of my breasts, sending a jolt of pleasure through me, and I felt it as my nipples tightened.

“If you wanted in my bed that bad, sweetheart...” he murmured, his mouth dragging along my throat, “all you had to do was ask.”

I growled and bucked, twisting under him until I managed to roll to my back, wrists

still bound but fury blooming in my eyes.

I looked up, expecting that brutal gleam he always wore when his control slipped, but instead I found something that twisted deep inside me.

Something I didn't want to feel for him.

Softness.

His gaze searched mine, dark eyes laced with a hunger I didn't want to name, a look that burned hotter than anger.

"What do you want, Caleb?" I snapped, voice low, breathless. "What the fuck do I have to do to get you off my ass?"

That wicked smirk curved across his face, and I wanted to smack it off him. He leaned in closer, lips brushing the corner of my mouth. "But it's your ass I want to be in, Duchess."

"Fuck you," I snarled, jamming my knee into his side and twisting hard. The belt scraped against my skin as I slid free.

I stumbled off the bed, my bare feet hitting the cold floor. I ran for the door, heart racing, my blood still humming as my adrenaline surged.

But when I reached the doorway to the hallway, I realized something wasn't right.

He wasn't chasing me.

I stopped, turned slowly, and there he was.

Kneeling on the bed, hands resting on his thighs, that broad chest rising with each breath like he was the one trying to steady himself.

Moonlight spilled in through the windows, gilding every hard angle of his body.

His hair was a mess, wild and tousled, and the hardness straining beneath the fabric of his briefs made my mouth go dry.

Caleb Killic was pure sex, and he knew it.

But the part that scared me most? Was that I wanted it. I wanted to taste him again,

"You won't go far. My men only allowed for you to get in but I haven't ordered them to let you out yet."

Killing him would have been so easy. Why couldn't I have just killed him?

He slid out of bed and made his way to me. All long, muscular limbs, and six-pack abs. He was a fucking Adonis, and I was this weak bitch who couldn't even walk out that door.

Just go.

Run . I said to myself, not knowing why I stayed.

He smiled at me as he cupped my cheek, and my heart skipped a fucking beat.

"I know you're mad..."

"Don't," I swept my head away.

“What did you expect me to do, Duchess. I had to get your attention somehow.”

“So, you decided to take the most important thing I have?” I seethed.

“Not take it. Not yet. Just own a little piece of it. It’s only fair that you start to pay back what you stole.”

“Go eat ass,” I spat out.

“Oh, I will. All the ass you’ll give me.”

He pulled me in closer. “Because you can try and hate me, Duchess, but in the end, you’ll only keep coming back. And do you know why?”

He didn’t wait for my response. “Because I have something you want.”

I narrowed my eyes on him. “Yeah? And what would that be?”

“This.”

He leaned in slowly, and I froze, knowing what was coming.

When his lips finally crushed mine, it was the kind of kiss that left no room for thought.

It was all-consuming, reckless, and soul-snatching.

It was the kind of kiss that ripped your name right out of your mouth and made you forget the world was still spinning.

I whimpered against his lips, that soft, involuntary sound betraying just how badly I

wanted this. How badly I wanted him. It was all the permission he needed to drive himself over the edge.

With a low growl, he wrapped one strong arm around my waist and spun us effortlessly, like I weighed nothing at all.

My breath caught as he carried me backward, and before I could utter a word, I was crashing down into the center of the mattress, the sheets folding around me, trapping me in their silkiness and the scent of him.

His body followed mine, heat and muscle and hunger pressing against me as we clawed at each other's clothes. Buttons popped, fabric tore, and the second my panties slipped down my thighs and hit the floor, he stilled.

The air around us turned electric.

He dragged his gaze down the length of my bare body like a predator savoring the moment before the kill. Then he crawled forward, looking like a predator, like he had all the time in the world to ruin me.

His mouth found my inner thigh first. A whisper of a kiss. Then another, a little higher. And another, closer still.

He didn't rush it. Didn't speak.

He let his lips and tongue do all the talking, marking a trail up my trembling skin, devouring me, and damn me, I wanted him to.

I fisted the sheets, my hips already lifting to meet him, and all I could think was that if he didn't claim me soon, I was going to come undone from the anticipation alone.

And from the heat in his eyes as he looked up at me...

He knew it too.

"It's time to scream for me, Duchess."

"No. W-wait," I tried to push his head away, if you call that trying. But my whole intention of stopping him went out the window with my gun as he swept his eager tongue along my swollen pussy.

His hungry moan caused my body to light up as his tongue rubbed along my clit, taking me to a completely different level of sex.

His tongue kept sweeping up and down, rolling over that hardened bundle of nerves before sucking it into his mouth.

He licked my lips, teased me until his mouth closed over my clit, and sucked hard, finally making me scream as that first orgasm consumed me.

Jolting my hips off the bed only made him try even harder as he slid his fingers inside of me, curling them just right.

Just as they hit my G-spot, I froze, and he looked at me as my hips followed his jagged movements.

Up and down, his thumb circling my clit as his fingers curled inside me just right.

"Don't stop," I gave out in breathy whimpers.

"That's my good girl," he leaned in and bit down on my clit. I screamed again while another shattering orgasm swept over me. By the third one, I was pushing his head

away only to have him chuckle as he flipped me around to smack my ass.

"Caleb," I whispered, trying to slide myself off the bed. He spanked me again and growled as my back arched in heat.

"Hmmm," he hummed a response, lost in his own seductive world as he slid his fingers through my wet folds. I mewled and looked over my shoulder, watching as he placed his cock to my wet core, teasing me with it, and making me bite my lip against a plea that threatened to escape.

He spanked me again, and crying out, I pushed back against him, sliding him in deep.

"Fuck," the word broke as he slid out of me and then slowly slid himself back in, his cock hard and thick.

As he spanked me, I felt the walls of my pussy contract around him, and I gripped the sheets, thinking this was it.

This was how I ended up, the President of the Royal Harlots at the mercy of a Mafia King.

He suddenly lifted me until I was perched on all fours, and as he slid into me, he wrapped his hand around my neck and pulled me up against him.

"You'll always be mine, sweet Duchess. I'll never let you go."

He circled my clit as he continued to fuck me. "Now cum on my cock like a good girl and show your King just how addicted you are to having him inside you."

"Caleb," his name came to a silent whisper as my body tightened and my hips created havoc against his cock and fingers, the friction forcing me to fall off that sharp edge.

He reached up and squeezed my nipples, squeezing the tips as he bit down on my neck, and I got lost in this precipice of ecstasy which only he controlled.

Because that's exactly what happened. I had given all my control to the King of the Turkish Mafia, and as I screamed for him, I didn't care not one fucking bit.

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Caleb

Reaching across the bed, my hand skimmed the cool silk sheets, instinctively seeking the heat she'd left behind. But the only thing that met my fingers was emptiness.

My eyes opened, narrowing on the absence. The room was quiet, too quiet. Not even the whisper of her breathing remained. I bolted upright, the black silk twisted around my hips, my head still buzzing with the echo of her moans from the night before. But she was gone.

The scent of her clung to the air, wildflowers, leather, and her sweet pussy, an intoxicating mix that lingered in the bedroom.

My hand drifted lower, and I wrapped my fingers around my cock, stroking slowly as memories of last night crashed over me.

Her tight pussy, the way her body clenched around me, how she screamed my name like a reverence and a threat all at once.

I felt it all like a phantom grip, her tight little body wrapped around my cock, a memory so vivid it was as if she still lay beneath me.

I growled low, the sound guttural, primal, the ache in my cock pulsing with need and fury.

She thought she could leave without consequences.

That she could steal from me, ride me like she owned me, make me cum so hard I saw stars, and then vanish into the fucking morning mist without a goodbye.

Let her run. Let her pretend she wasn't mine.

I stroked myself harder, groaning as my climax ripped through me, the image of her on her knees, mouth open, eyes wild, seared into my brain.

She'd get there again. I'd make sure of it.

Next time I saw her, she'd be the one begging, on her knees, tongue out, ready to be fucked like the filthy girl she is.

And when I was done, when she was gasping my name, she'd finally understand.

She doesn't get to leave me. Because next time... I wouldn't let her go at all.

I pushed out of bed, the morning breeze brushing over my bare skin as I stepped onto the balcony.

I looked out over the railing and let out a chuckle as I realized her precious gun was no longer in the pool.

The woman couldn't even leave me a breadcrumb, giving me no choice but to create a plan to bring her back, and in her pride, I was pretty sure she'd fall for it.

That was the Duchess' only downfall. Nobody told her what to do, but when it meant beating out the enemy, her pride would always get in the way.

But what had me truly laughing, the kind of laugh that vibrated low in my chest, was what she'd taken.

The fucking laptop.

She'd swiped my damn laptop from my study. The same one Leon had encrypted six ways to Sunday. And here's the thing, she had no idea that letting her steal it was part of the game.

She wanted to play?

I'd play. And I'd make sure to win.

Because Duchess didn't know who she was fucking with. She thought she was clever, slipping out before sunrise and not letting me have my fill of her before she left.

I wasn't. I was turned on.

Her pride was the key to everything. That stubborn, bulletproof pride that wouldn't let her back down from a challenge. It was her greatest weapon, and her biggest weakness. And if there was one thing I knew, it was how to use someone's weakness against them.

I grabbed my phone and dialed.

"Laura. Cancel my schedule. I want you at the house in twenty."

Her voice filtered through the speaker, sharp and efficient. "Is everything alright, Sir?"

"Perfect," I murmured. "We're planning a party."

She arrived exactly twenty-three minutes later, notepad in hand, ready to work. She followed me into the study, where I tossed my empty whiskey glass onto the bar and

turned to her with a wicked smile.

"I want the best caterers. No junk food. We're talking high-end, Michelin-level service. Champagne towers. Caviar if we must."

She scribbled furiously. "Music?"

"Live. Sexy. Something with a bite."

She paused, the tip of her pen hovering midair. Her brow furrowed. "Sir...what exactly is the theme of this event? How should I present it?"

I leaned back in my chair, folding my hands behind my head. "Tell them it's a celebration. Company growth. High numbers. Make it exclusive. Only the most senior male execs and board members will be invited."

Her pen scratched across the paper.

"No spouses," I added.

She froze. "No spouses?"

"You heard me. Keep it private and discreet."

"Of course, Sir."

I watched her carefully as I leaned forward again, voice lower now. "And I want you to reach out to the Violent Delights. Let them know they'll be compensated generously for their appearance. Airfare, accommodations, whatever they need."

She blinked. "I'm not sure how to reach them."

"Leon has the contact. Loop him in."

She nodded and jotted it all down, but the hesitation was there. This wasn't just any event. This was a game of chess dressed as a party.

"Invite the old man and the Senior tiers. Make it impossible for them to say no."

Her lips thinned. "That may be...difficult."

I shrugged. "Then make it worth their while. If anyone can do it, it's you, Laura."

She straightened her spine with a small nod. "I'll do what I can."

I gave her a slow smile as I walked past her, heading toward the back patio where the sun began to dip beneath the hills.

The city below buzzed like it always did, but tonight the electricity wasn't from the streets. It was from me.

And soon, it would be from her.

Getting her killed wasn't on my list, but I had this urge to see how she handled being in the spotlight of the Turkish Mafia.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

I dropped the laptop on the desk in front of Obsidian. "See what you can do with that. I want to know what he knows, and see if you can find that building contract."

Roulette knocked and I waved her into the office. "Did you do it?"

"I got it."

"No, I mean, did you go through with it?"

I shook my head silently.

"So, you went all that way, had him lying there unconscious, and didn't kill him?"

Roulette stared at me like she usually did. Giving me that judgmental look that said I was fucking crazy.

"Nope."

"What was the point of that?"

I turned away from her because I didn't even know at this point.

At first, I wanted to show that I had power, that I was smarter than him.

But in the end, he'd won. I never hated anyone more than I did, Caleb Killic.

At least, that's what I was trying to convince myself of this morning when I opened my eyes to the most beautiful California sunset.

But then I quickly remembered how I'd gotten there and what had happened.

I could still feel his heated touch running down my back as I slid myself away from under his arm.

Looking at him, sleeping so peacefully, I fought the urge to go through with my plan. It would be so easy to just kill him. I wanted to, badly, but what would that solve. This was all a game to him anyway.

I didn't bother waiting for him to wake up, I simply gathered my stuff, picked up the laptop I found tucked in the chaise lounge in his office, and ran out.

Before I got to the main gate I remembered my gun.

Staring up at the security camera, I undressed before jumping into the pool and retrieving the Beretta.

As I picked up my clothes, I flicked the camera off and walked out.

The hell if I was going to give him another reason to come find me.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know, Roulette! Stop asking me questions because I don't know!"

She sat back in a seat across from Obsidian and they both watched me. I honestly had no idea what my next move was. Killing him was too easy, I needed to be methodical in my approach with him.

Obsidian opened the laptop and sighed. "I think you need to seduce him."

I let out a snicker and shook my head. "I think we're far beyond seduction at this point."

"What do you mean?" Roulette always liked digging in deeper while Obsidian just glanced up at me quietly and knowingly, and just continued to tap away at the laptop's keyboard.

"It doesn't matter, just let me know what you find on that thing."

The phone suddenly rang, and Obsidian put it on speaker. Angora, the club's Secretary's voice, rang through. She managed all of my private affairs and kept me up to speed on anything that may affect the Violent Delights.

"Obsidian. Is the Prez with you?"

"Yes, she's here."

"Prez I've got Caleb Killic on the line. He says he's been trying to reach you."

I'd been ignoring my phone all day precisely for this reason. "I don't wish to speak to him. Tell him I'm in a meeting or something."

"Prez you're gonna want to talk to him."

I frowned. "And why is that?"

"Because his company just bought out the entire escort service for one night and he is willing to pay whatever it is he needs to pay."

I glanced at both Obsidian and Roulette and walked over to the phone. "Put him through."

"This is gonna be bad," Obsidian whispered.

The phone rang and before I could answer, his deep voice came through.

"I thought you'd never talk to me again."

"What do you want, Caleb?"

"Why'd you leave so early, baby. My cock missed you."

Rhea started to say something and Obsidian quickly clamped her hand over her mouth. I looked at both of them, signaling them to keep quiet.

"What the fuck do you want, Caleb?" I asked, ignoring Rhea's death glare.

"I simply want your services for an event."

"And you honestly think that I'm going to put my girls in jeopardy and send them to you?"

"It's a private company event. I assure you, nothing will happen to your lovely ladies. They will just need to keep some of my executives entertained."

"And what do you need me for?"

"Because I'd like for you to be my escort."

He had this way of instigating me, and my blood began to heat up as he spoke. "I own

the Violent Delights, Mr. Killic. I don't offer the service."

"I just want a truce, Miss Winters. You are up for a truce, right?"

"I don't do truces with criminals."

He chuckled. "Then I'll pay you. How does twenty million sound?" Roulette reached out to the phone and pressed the mute button.

"Do it," she gritted her teeth as the words came out, seeming as though it hurt her more than it did me.

"You realize that what you're agreeing to is to let him purchase me?"

She nodded. "The way I see it, this is our way in."

We stared at each other, and his voice interrupted us. "What do you say, Duchess? Twenty million, isn't that what you go for these days?"

"I'll fucking kill hi... " Obsidian leapt at the phone as I raised my hand to stop her.

I pressed my finger to my lips as I took him off mute.

"I go for thirty, motherfucker."

His laugh filled the room, and it gave me a sharp thrill I didn't expect. "Thirty million it is. Where do I wire the money to?"

"Obsidian will send you the account."

"Perfect. It's nice doing business with you, Duchess."

"I wouldn't say the same."

"Oh, and wear a sexy dress. I want to make sure I'm envied by every man there."

I slammed the phone down, seething in anger.

"Don't let him get to you, Steph. He's just trying to get a rile out of you." Rhea said.

"He's degrading her on purpose," Obsidian stated.

"It's what those men do. He wants to win and put you in your place. Don't let him do it." Rhea said calmly.

I nodded. "Yes, he does, but he won't. In the end, I have the upper hand."

"How?"

"I'm not the one obsessed here; he is."

And obsession was a deadly game to play.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

The family wanted to know what I was doing, and I had every intention of letting them in on my plans.

But I wasn't going to hide anymore. If I were to be leading the family, then they all needed to be clear that I was the one who was going to make the calls.

My grandfather no longer existed in this company, as much as he wanted to deny that fact it was what had been decided by the board and by the family.

His retirement was definite, and I was going to take this opportunity to make sure the board and executives were aware of this.

My grandfather had been a major part of this company, and in the grand scheme of things, he was still important, but not when it came to the day-to-day business decisions.

I was now in charge, and I wanted to make it clear, with my grandfather present, that anyone who thought otherwise would pay a high price.

I had Laura do the event from my home. I'd bought the mansion and rarely ever invited anyone, so I figured why not do it there.

As I cleared the grand staircase, I was met by Yusuf Arslan, one of my grandfather's most trusted board members.

He was one of the family members I had always needed to watch my back with.

The competition had been intense with him, even more so after I was placed in my position.

He hated me, and he had no problem showing it.

“Great party,” he stated.

I smiled smugly. “Isn’t it?”

“You were always about the materialistic side of things. I hope you take that kind of care on where your investments are being placed.”

“My investments are doing just fine. Made ten million just this morning.”

Yusuf smiled smugly, muttering under his breath. “I’m sure you did.”

I narrowed my eyes on him. “I’m surprised you didn’t see the numbers.”

“Haven’t been paying attention lately, I’ve got more important things to do than babysit you.”

“I’m sure you do,” I took a sip of my whiskey and let my attention drift over to the main entrance where a dozen women were being led inside by a beautiful fiery redhead.

“Now that’s a party,” I heard one of the Execs chuckle off to the side.

The room fell silent as the women entered, and the men gawked.

The Violent Delights were everything they advertised and more.

Sexy, curvy, sophisticated, and absolutely stunning.

They were beyond the level of a simple escort service, and as they began to wander down the steps and towards the board members, I noticed how well trained they were at entertaining.

They laughed and joked, stroked the men's egos to their hearts' and their dicks' content. They were worth every penny.

I would have been intrigued to talk to a few, but there was only one woman who caught my interest. She stood in the center of the room, waiting for me to guide her inside. She most definitely was not an escort, nor should she be treated like one. No, she was a Duchess waiting on her King.

She wore a gold dress that sexy hourglass figure.

Her tits were pulled up nearly spilling out of the damn things, and my cock wanted to slide between them and fuck them.

I knew what lay beneath that dress. The scent of wildflowers between her thighs, the way her heart-shaped ass filled my hands.

And that softness, God I wanted to hold her forever.

I set my glass down and I slowly made my way towards her.

Those electric hazel eyes never left mine, and I watched them darken as I approached.

Right before I got to her, I was cut off by a boastful and obnoxiously arrogant

presence.

Yusuf had completely cut off my stride and was now flirting with my woman.

I stopped and watched him make a fool of himself.

I wondered if they'd recognize her, but they obviously didn't.

Yusuf was beside himself as he lifted the back of her hand to his lips.

I grabbed a passing champagne glass and gulped it down as fast as I could while I gained control of my jealous reaction. I hated that he was in any proximity to her, let alone that his grubby hands were on the one person who belonged to me.

My Duchess was pleasant. Smiling and engaging him with small conversation, but her attention waned toward me every once and again.

At one point, she looked over at me questioningly, her eyes asking me why I hadn't approached just yet.

But I was watching them interact with her.

Five members of the family had already got engaged with her, and not one of them recognized her.

Not one of them realized I'd brought a traitor into their midst. But that didn't mean she was safe; she would never be safe from my family.

If they ever found out who she was and what I had done, they'd shoot her and rejoice in my suffering.

I was speaking to one of the board members when I noticed her go out the back doors.

I excused myself and followed her out. I watched from the sliding doors as she walked along the path that led to the pool.

The breeze lifted the gold silk of her dress, sweeping it around her. She looked like a goddess.

I came down the steps as she got lost behind the villa's large pillars, and when I came around, I saw her standing at the railing that faced the canyons. I came up the large staircase and approached her from behind.

"I thought they'd never leave you alone," I whispered, wrapping my arms around her.

She surprised me as she turned and slapped me hard across the face; the sting resonated on my still bruised face.

"I see we're in bad spirits tonight."

"You brought me here to show me off to your family. Did you think I wouldn't notice what your game was like? Was your plan to get me killed?"

"I didn't think you'd notice."

"Thirty million wasn't enough of an insult?" She shoved at me again.

"You had to go and invite the entire Turkish mob to join in killing me?" She slapped me again.

"Calm down, Stephanie."

"I should have never let you touch me. I should have killed you when I had the chance."

She lunged at me, and I grabbed her wrists, bringing them up behind her. We stumbled, falling against the rail, and she accidentally slipped on her dress and nearly toppled over. She cried out just as I grabbed her by the waist, bringing her back into the safety of my arms.

She grabbed at the lapels of my jacket, her breath ragged. "We're not good for each other, are we?" I asked her softly.

"Toxic," she sucked in a breath of air.

"I live to torture you, my Duchess. I'll never stop until you're mine."

"Why?"

"Because I'm in love with you," I confessed.

Her eyes widened as I brushed my hand across her lips and down her neck. I had so many feelings I'd kept hidden for so long, I just didn't want to hold them back anymore. Not that I wanted to.

"I've always loved you. Ever since Alan brought you into the family business. You were so magnetic. So smart. Too damn smart for him. Fuck, for any of us."

I ran my hands through my hair as I released her. I turned my back to her, gripping the railing, avoiding her eyes, and looking out at the dark canyons instead. The Hollywood sign gleamed in the distance, and a coyote's howl echoed in the deep silence.

"But you always treated me as if I were the enemy," she said quietly.

"Because you were...to my grandfather. To my family. You were a stranger who had too much access. You knew too much, Stephanie, and as much as I tried to protect you, Alan got in the way."

She was suddenly at my side, leaning against the rail to watch me. "Were you the one who killed Alan, Caleb?"

I knew I was going to lose her if I gave her a wrong answer.

Hell, I was going to lose her whether I told the truth or I lied.

There was something about Stephanie Winters that made you want to tell her all your secrets.

As if she could be able to keep them safe for you without holding any type of judgement because she wasn't without sin.

She knew exactly what it meant to keep a secret.

I simply looked over at her. The wind played with the strands of her jet-black hair.

"You're so damn beautiful."

"That's not answering my question."

"What if I don't want to answer it?"

She looked out at those same canyons and then back at me. "Then I'll disappear, and you'll never find me again."

“That didn’t work for you the last two times.”

“This time it will, Caleb. 'Cause I’m done with all this. I’m tired of running.”

I wasn't sure what was worse, never seeing her again or dying. They were both the same in my book. Losing her would be equivalent to death for Caleb Killic.

"I'm going to ask you one more time..."

Her voice faded as I looked out onto the canyons again. The question stilled the air, and as I looked at her, I knew this was what I had to do.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

"Did you kill him, Caleb?"

He looked at me, and he didn't even have to say it. I just knew.

His coal black eyes were full of pain. But not for what he had committed.

His pain came from the possibility of losing me.

After Alan, I never thought about love. I engaged with the Harlots, built the empire that is now the Violent Delights, and I ignored every man who thought they could have me at their beck and call, like some sort of trophy.

But Caleb's confession meant something. Because he had everything, and he was about to give it all up for me.

Because that's what loving me would do to him.

It would strip him of everything he'd built.

"Was it because of me?"

"No," he reached out and slid his hand to the back of my neck, pulling my forehead against his. "No, my love. You had nothing to do with that decision."

"Then why? Why did you kill him?"

He clenched his eyes tight as he struggled with the answer. He gripped me tighter. "It was an order given by my grandfather. Alan had committed the worst of betrayals and had stolen from the family. There was nothing I could do to save him. It was him or me."

"But why you?"

He turned away from me, his knuckles turning white as he gripped the rail. His head bent low; he took a moment to respond. When he did, his voice was filled with genuine pain.

"Because I needed to be punished. My grandfather has a brutal way of teaching a lesson."

"Do you regret it?" I whispered, holding my breath as I waited for that cold response.

"No. I do not. He was a traitor. He was hurting my family and you. I have no remorse for what I did. The only regret I have is not telling you the truth."

His response was defensive, as expected, but there was this genuine regret when he mentioned my name.

"Why didn't you tell me you felt this way about me?"

"What for? To have to reject me? To have you laugh at me?"

"I wouldn't have... "

"You forget how much you hated me, my Duchess."

"Is this why you were so relentless in chasing me?" I asked carefully.

“At first, it was an order. I was truly angry with you. You had betrayed me, my family... But then I realized that my family was just an excuse. I needed to know you were alive, that you were well. I need to have you close, Stephanie. I truly missed you all those years.”

I took a step back, realizing this man had truly spent the last ten years of his life searching for me.

“If you loved me, why hurt me?”

“Why not? You were slowly killing me,” he seethed.

“And Jinx. What about her? She was innocent in all this.”

“That was my grandfather’s doing. When I found out, I was livid. I wanted to kill him but... “

“He was your grandfather.” I finished his thought. “Blood is heavier than anything else. I get that.”

“DO you?” He looked at me then, his features with an inner turmoil I could never understand.

I should have feared him. A man who was this obsessed was dangerous.

He was a man who would kill me before I could leave him.

But I suddenly didn't want to leave him.

Maybe it was because I'd always been attracted to assholes, or maybe a part of his dark soul called out to mine, but I suddenly didn't want to leave.

I had no urge to run or hide. All I wanted was to stay by his side and ease that turmoil in his eyes.

All these questions fluttered through my mind in a whirlwind, yet the most prominent of them was, could a Duchess love a murderer?

Instinct.

I'm going to blame what I did next on instinct. Placing my hand on his shoulder, I pulled him to me, and I wrapped my arms around him. That damn cologne of his engulfed me as I pressed my nose into his neck, his arms holding me tight.

"Please forgive me." He wasn't asking for forgiveness about what he'd done; he was asking for it for what he was about to do.

Sweeping his hands into my hair, he tilted my head back and kissed me.

His kiss was fierce and full of need. It wasn't forgiveness he wanted, it was retribution for his sins, and he was looking for it in me.

He was using me to punish himself for betraying his friend, for betraying his family and that ounce of need and vulnerability killed me.

Breaking the kiss, he slid his mouth along my jawline and down to my jugular. Biting it lightly as he slid down the straps of my gown. He groaned as he leaned back and nudged the material lower until my breasts were revealed.

"Fuck, you're gorgeous."

His eyes met mine as he gave the dress a hard tug, and the slip of silk fell to my ankles. I leaned back against the railing as he dropped to one knee. He wasn't

proposing, at least, not yet. But God I would have said yes as long as he looked at me with those possessive eyes, forever.

I looked down at his rugged face, sliding my hand through his dark locks and pulling on it lightly. A deep moan emanated from his chest as I slid my leg up onto his shoulder. Turning his head slightly, he left feather kisses along my inner thigh.

"I love when you do that," I breathed.

His hand drifted up the back of my other leg and suddenly my panties were being torn away from me.

I cried out as another howl came from the canyons. Caleb looked up at me and winked right before his hand ran along my wet core. Feather light touches that made me swivel my hips and beg him silently.

"Such a naughty Duchess," he groaned, just as he slid two fingers into my depths.

I moaned, gripping his hair as he slid those thick fingers deep inside of me. His tongue dragged along my slit, spreading my cream along my swollen pussy lips.

I whimpered and squirmed as his mouth clamped down on me. As he sucked and bit down on my sensitive core, I screamed. My legs shook, and I gripped the railing as I got closer to the release that I needed from him.

He stopped abruptly, and then those dark eyes looked up into mine. My pussy clenched at the sight of his lips covered in my cream. He licked at them as if he'd just eaten the sweetest of fruits and then reached out to gently circle my clit.

"You need to cum, baby?"

“Uh-huh,” I whimpered for him, knowing he liked that.

He was torturing me, and he knew it, and he also knew his dirty words excited me.

“Such a naughty Duchess. I never knew royalty could be so dirty.” He leaned down and slowly licked at my now quivering pussy.

“I need your cock in me. Please, Caleb.”

My desperate pleas fell on deaf ears as he continued to torture me, bringing me to the edge and back down again.

“Caleb, fuck me,” I breathed as I yanked at his hair, pulling his mouth off me.

He slowly stood before me, grabbed my hand, he led me through the sliding door and entered his office.

He walked over to the chaise lounge that sat by the window, and he turned and undid his pants.

His cock jumped out, eager to play, thick and hard.

He slid down onto the chair and dragged me with him, lifting me up onto his lap.

I screamed as he slid up inside of me, forcing me to sit down onto his full length. The orgasm that had been building roared to life, and when his cock thrust up into me, my body tightened, and I began to shudder. My tits trembled as I stared down at him. My mouth was held open in a silent scream.

“Feels good, baby?”

I nodded as I gyrated on his lap. He scooted down on the chair, moaning in approval as my pussy spasmed around him. I was cumming just from that first thrust, and it was possibly the hottest thing I'd ever experienced. I had been so needy for him, I came just from his penetration.

“Fuck, Stephanie. That’s a good dirty girl.”

“Oh fuck,” I breathed against his mouth.

He humped up at me, and I rode out my orgasm on his cock. My body shuddered as another wave hit me, making me scream his name as my round ass bounced on his lap. The sound of my wet pussy slurping on his cock only made the sex hotter.

My hips rocked on his lap as my pussy clenched down on him. He grabbed me by the waist and tugged me into the seat, spooning me from behind. As he pulled out his cock, I whimpered.

“Beg me,” he whispered in my ear as he lifted my leg and slid his hardness along my slick center.

“Caleb,” I breathed and mewled.

“Beg me, Duchess.” He continued to tease me while lying at my back.

His cock slipped through my folds, hitting my clit, causing me to stir.

“Please,” I whimpered.

“Please fuck me, my King.”

“Fuck, yes, baby,” he growled.

My body writhed in this soft, sexy dance that I knew would entice him, and yet I was still shocked as his cock entered me again, throbbing between my legs and spreading my hungry core onto his dick as he fucked me deep and hard.

I moaned and screamed out for him as his powerful thrusts destroyed my eager pussy. Our hot, wet thrusts filled the air, and the smell of sex sent us both over the edge.

I screamed his name as his cock twitched, and he unloaded himself inside of me with a low sexy growl at my ear.

It was over.

He'd claimed me.

And as I lay there listening to his heart beat to the same rhythm as mine, I realized there was no escape from what had just transpired between us.

My body and soul craved his as much as he did mine, and there wasn't much else we could do but find a way to co-exist without killing each other or getting killed.

You could call it love, sexual attraction, animal instinct, or chemistry. It all meant the same thing. We were meant for each other, and there was no going back.

Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

I left Caleb sleeping on the lounge and quietly headed out. As I stopped to put my heels back on, I noticed Emir Killic and that man I met earlier, Yusuf something, standing by the pool.

Taking my shoes off, I tiptoed my way quietly towards them. I hid behind one of the columns that aligned with the wall and shielded me from them.

"Did you do what I told you to do?"

"I did."

"And did he sign it?"

"I had his secretary have him sign everything. She's a smart little slut, works better on her knees though."

They both chuckled before Yusuf continued. "The FBI will be all over Killic Consolidation Holdings by the end of the week."

"Whatever they find, Caleb will have to respond."

"Are you sure this is what you want to do, Sir? Drug trafficking is a serious felony. Signing off those transports can get him a life sentence."

"He deserves it for being so arrogant and thinking he can undermine me."

"Did you see the traitorous bitch?"

Emir nodded. "I'll deal with her later. We just need to be patient."

"Yes, Sir."

What the hell was I going to do? Caleb was being used by his own grandfather. He was going to take the fall for all the heroin they'd been trafficking. All these years I had been trying to destroy the wrong man. I should have focused on the head of the snake, Emir Killic.

I had to let Caleb know. But how could I possibly convince him to see the truth?

I looked up at the window where his office light had just turned on. They were about to destroy him and I couldn't just sit back and watch.

I tore out of Caleb's house like my heels were on fire, heart pounding with a chaos I couldn't name. One of his sleek black cars was parked just outside the gate. I didn't even hesitate. I wrenched the door open, slid into the back seat, and barked, "Take me to the hotel. Now."

The driver didn't ask questions. Smart man.

Los Angeles blurred past the tinted windows as we tore down Mulholland, the glittering lights of the city stretching wide beneath the hills.

It should have calmed me, but my mind wouldn't stop racing.

Realization was hitting me at full force as I ran through Caleb's confession to me. How he claimed everything he'd done, all the manipulation, the stalking, the mind games, were because of his love for me.

It was such a fucked-up situation. And then everything I'd heard Emir Killic say.

He was planning on destroying his own flesh and blood.

The one man who had protected his name for all these years. The man who killed my Jinx.

I had to warn Killic, but I needed the proof in my hands before I approached him.

As soon as I reached the hotel, I kicked off my heels, peeled off the tight gold dress, and threw on a silk robe before grabbing my burner.

My fingers flew across the screen as I punched in Roulette's number.

Obsidian joined a second later, her face illuminated by the glow of a dozen monitors behind her.

"I hope you have a good reason for waking me up at this goddamn hour," Rhea muttered, her eyes bloodshot but alert. Paramore's head popped into view behind her, tousled and sleepy.

"He said it," I breathed, pacing the length of the suite, unable to keep still. "He told me everything."

"Who?" Rhea demanded. "Caleb?"

I nodded. "He confessed, Rhea. That he's been behind all of it. The stalking. The sabotage. But also..."

"Don't say it," she growled.

"He said it was all for me, Rhea. That he did it because he loves me."

"You didn't believe him, did you?"

I don't know what to believe. But I don't think he was lying to me. You had to see his face."

"Did you fuck him, Stephanie?"

"Rhea..."

Rhea blinked, her mouth parting in stunned disbelief. "Are you insane!"

"Maybe," I snapped. "But this just got bigger than me, than him!"

"How much bigger?" Paramore asked.

"I know who did the hit on Jinx. It wasn't Caleb."

"Then who was it?" Obsidian chimed in.

"Emir Killic, Caleb's grandfather, was the one who killed her."

That shut everyone up. Even Obsidian sat back, eyes wide.

"Caleb said Emir did it to send a message," I continued, voice sharp now, all heat and fury. "To make me bleed for going against him. And now that bastard's setting Caleb up to destroy him."

Rhea leaned in, dark eyes blazing. "I'm going to regret this, aren't I?"

"Possibly. Just know you're doing this for me."

"Fuck. Me." She swept her hand across her brow in frustration.

"Obsidian, did you break into that laptop yet?"

She nodded slowly. "I did. But you're not gonna like what I found. Emir's been planting shit for months. Fake transfers. Hidden files. It looks like Caleb's been laundering cartel money through shell corps in Dubai.

"And?" I prompted.

"And it's not him," she confirmed. "The IPs trace back to an internal system. Emir's using Caleb's credentials to make it look legit. If this gets out, the Feds will take Caleb down without blinking."

"Jesus Christ," Paramore whispered.

"And what do you care?" Rhea hissed. "He's been torturing you for years."

"I care," I said quietly, "because I won't let that old bastard win."

"You sure this isn't about your pride?" Rhea asked, arms crossed.

"It's about truth," I bit out. "And justice."

Obsidian finally spoke. "You want me to get Killian involved?"

I nodded. "Send him everything we have on Emir's dealings. Every file, every trace. If anyone knows how to dismantle a tyrant, it's him."

"And what about you?" Rhea asked.

"I'm going to convince the Dark Prince that his flesh and blood are about to bury him alive."

Paramore's voice chimed in, solid and sharp. "You want backup?"

"Get Demise. Fill her in. And tell Bandit to get his ass to L.A. I want boots on the ground."

Rhea sighed, clearly hating every word but understanding it all the same. "You're sure about this?"

I met her gaze through the screen. "I need you to trust me."

She nodded slowly. "Then go make him bleed, Duchess. Or save him. Whatever the hell it is you're trying to do."

I ended the call, the silence thick around me. And then I got dressed.

Because if I was going back to Caleb Killic... I was going back as the woman he thought he could control.

He wanted a Duchess? He was about to finally get what he wanted.

It was nearly four in the morning when I arrived at Caleb's. Security had let me in without a second glance. I banged on his door until he opened it. Ignoring how sexy he looked in his silk pajama pants and ripped abs, I pushed past him and headed to his office.

"I knew you'd be back. Couldn't get enough, could you?"

“Would you please get serious and put some clothes on? I can’t think straight with you half naked.”

“What’s going on?” He tugged on a t-shirt as he sauntered over to me.

“I need you to look at what Obsidian just sent you.”

He scratched his head, his hair all mussed, and one of his eyes was half closed from sleep. “It’s four in the morning, Stephanie. Come to bed with me and we’ll discuss business later.”

He reached out for me, and, grabbing his hand, I dragged him across the room and forced him down into his chair.

“Plenty of time to play later, Mafia King. Right now, I seriously need you to look at this.”

He gave me a more concerned look, and I simply nudged him. “Stop looking at me, Caleb. Look at the damn screen.”

He glanced at me once more and then began to read what Obsidian had sent him. He was murmuring obscenities, a look of real worry crossed his features, and when he finally looked up at me, it was pure disbelief that I found in the depths of those black eyes. Disbelief and sadness.

“How could he?”

“Because he’s not human,” I whispered.

I came up to him and crouched down beside him. “I’ve had Obsidian and her contact work on this. We’ve been on it since I left last night. We sent this to the FBI, Caleb.

Roulette has a contact through them, and I'm hoping they see the truth and help."

"I always knew there was more to me becoming CEO than I thought. He always said I was worthless. I guess I had a little value left in me after all."

I pressed my hand to his cheek; that vulnerability of his always surprised me. "What are you thinking of doing?"

He kissed the palm of my hand and leaned back into his chair. "Whatever it is won't turn out well for either of us. He'll probably want me killed when he finds all this out, because he will."

I grabbed his hand and squeezed it. "You're not alone."

Nodding, he got up from the chair, his fingers grazing mine as he let me go and stepped out onto the balcony. "I know and I'm grateful, but this is something I'll have to do alone."

I came up behind him, leaning against his back and running my hands down his arms. "If you need me, you know where to find me."

He turned to me then, sorrow in his voice. "This may be the last time we see each other, Duchess."

"Don't say that." I cupped his cheek, my chest full of angst for this man that I had hated and misunderstood for so long.

"You worried about me?"

"How could I not be," I said, wrapping my arms around him.

“I thought you hated me,” he whispered.

“Yeah, well, I thought you hated me back.”

“I just hated the fact that you weren’t mine.”

“Well then, you’re going to have to make it up to me cause I’m not done having you in my bed.”

Grabbing my hand, he leaned his cheek into it. “You’re my everything, Stephanie. Just know that.”

“I do know that,” I whispered.

“And know that he’ll come after you, too.”

I nodded. “Oh, I am ready for that.”

He gave me a sad smile and kissed my hand. “I’m sorry if I won’t be there to see his defeat.”

“You’ll be there, Caleb. I promise you that.”

I wrapped my arms around him again and hugged him tight. My chest felt like it had been gutted. I did the right thing, letting him know.

I always knew I’d win, just not like this.

I didn’t realize winning meant losing him in the process, nor that the thought of that would hurt this deeply.

I'd done a lot of dark shit in my life to get me to where I was.

Shit, I didn't want to do, blood I didn't want to shed.

For the most part, I was able to get through everything with the help and support of my sisters, but this was something I didn't know how to handle.

How was I supposed to protect my Mafia King from his own family?

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Caleb

As I dangled from the scaffold jutting out over the side of a thirty-story high-rise, the first thing I tasted was blood.

Metallic and thick on my tongue. The ocean below roared as it crashed against rocks.

And the wind howled around me as if the Pacific itself wanted to drag me under.

My arms burned from the pressure of the chains biting into my wrists, and the frigid steel cut through the thin fabric of my shirt, burning through my skin.

Every inch of my body screamed, but the only thing I could think was, So this is what karma feels like.

Dragged from my bed in the middle of the goddamn night, I'd barely had time to fight. One second, I was dreaming; the next, I was choking on smoke, with fists coming at me from all angles. They'd swarmed me, placed a hood over my head, and beat the fuck out of me.

My arms were twisted behind my back, and then I felt the needle, inserted sharply and fast into the side of my neck.

I thrashed, cursed, fought with every shred of strength I had left, but the world blurred into nothing before I could land any solid hit.

Now, I was awake. Strung up like meat, exposed to the sky and the city below.

But this wasn't some dusty abandoned warehouse or blood-soaked basement on the outskirts of town.

No, this was personal. High above the skyline, with the ocean stretching forever beneath me. It was a spectacle. A fucking warning.

I tried to twist, to get a look at whoever the hell had done this. But the chains clinked and groaned, and every shift sent my balance teetering. One wrong move, one broken weld, and I'd be a memory painted across the pavement below.

Fear slithered through my gut like ice water, but I shoved it down. Anger was the better fuel. And I was burning from the inside out.

"Come out, you coward motherfucker!" I shouted; my voice ripped away by the wind.

No one answered.

And then, as if I were nothing more than a rag doll, the line holding me swung hard.

My body jerked, slamming into a steel beam.

My ribs lit up with pain as my boots scraped against metal.

I managed to plant them on the edge of the beam, catching just enough stability to stop myself from swinging again.

The silence stretched.

I raised my head slowly, still groggy from the drugs. My vision still blurred, but even in dusk's light I could make him out.

My grandfather stood before me. His large black overcoat was blowing in the sharp wind. I trembled, but not because I was cold, but because of his deathly still stare.

When Stephanie had nearly banged my door down, I thought she was just eager to be with me, but I never expected what came next.

The truth of my grandfather's dealings and what he was hiding from me was finally revealed.

She'd shown me months of recent transactions, and even documents with my signature being forged on them.

My grandfather was planning on ruining me.

Confronting my grandfather had been useless. Finding empathy in him was pointless. He had a heart of stone, and acid ran through his veins, not blood. He had no tolerance for minute details like feelings and love for family. Nor did he have any tolerance for blame.

No.

My grandfather only considered money as a source of accomplishment. And when someone touched his money, he had no patience. He was quick to pull the trigger, and his family wasn't an exception. He was even more cruel to them. He showed no mercy, no compassion for anyone. Not even himself.

He tilted his head as he looked around. "This is a good piece of real estate. I didn't think you had it in you, but it was a good investment after all. It will make me a lot of money."

I struggled against the restraints I was in. I finally realized where I was. I had recently

purchased the old building, wanting to convert it into a hotel. Construction had begun just recently.

"Poetic, isn't it? How things you think are worthless sometimes work to your advantage."

I knew he wasn't talking about the property.

He was talking about me. He'd used me all these years to get his revenge.

Had me kill, steal, and shed blood for the family when in truth it was to protect his drug haul.

The one thing I made sure I kept my name out of.

I made enough money with real estate and my business to go into degrading myself as a drug dealer.

I knew he was planning something. Leon had seen a few movements he was questioning, but I didn't want to believe it.

Fuck I still didn't want to believe it after Stephanie showed me the proof.

But there was no denying it. I was simply a pawn in his game to deter the Feds.

He was going to pin the entire operation on me with not one ounce of remorse.

"Why?" I knew the answer, but I wanted to hear it from him.

"You're just like your father. A waste of space. I thought maybe your brother would turn out better, but his actions brought him to where he is now. You're all just a big

disappointment.”

“What did you do to him?”

He smiled cruelly, and my eyes grew wide with the knowledge that my brother didn’t just leave. Why would he? You didn’t leave family unless you shed blood for them.

“What did you do to him?”

“He begged for forgiveness, but it was too late.”

“What did you do?” I screamed.

“You could find him in Evergreen Cemetery, buried next to your mother. Don’t worry, I made sure to hold a special spot there for you.”

“You motherfucker!” Tears ran down my cheeks as I grief struck me. The shock of his demise ran deep, and pure hatred emanated from me for the monster who stood before me.

My grandfather had ordered him killed because he didn’t want to be forced into this life of drugs and murder. Because he’d gone against him.

“He had every right to leave. Why didn’t you just let him go?”

Why?” I sobbed, feeling regret for being so blinded by this man I had considered family.

A man who’d brought me up with the education that family always came first. Now I understand why.

So, they could be used and manipulated at his will.

“You are no longer my family,” I seethed.

“Hmph,” he grunted. “Stupid boy. Family is just a word used when one is trying to be forgiven for their wrong doings. It means nothing to me. Just an obstacle I’ve had to deal with time and time again.”

“You will pay for everything you’ve done.”

" And so will you, Son . Secrets are always revealed, Caleb. You didn't think I wasn't aware of every movement you made? I witnessed how you fucked your family's enemy, showing her off and waving her in front of our noses. A pure insult directed at me."

“You will not lay one hand on her.”

“Don’t worry, Caleb. I’ll make sure she dies a very long and torturous death.”

I clenched my jaw in pure disdain and anger. "You have no right!"

"I have every goddamn right!" He screamed back in anger.

"My own grandson, my own flesh and blood, betrayed me." His voice broke at the end of that sentence, and I nearly laughed.

My grandfather not only had crocodile tears that he shed when he wanted to manipulate, but he also knew exactly when to strike, he had perfected the talent.

"You betrayed me!" I screamed. "You used me!" My voice went low and menacing. “And like you said, Grandfather, all secrets are revealed. And yours came out right on

time, didn't they? How dare you judge me when you were willing to hand over your own flesh and blood to save your own neck?"

Looking back, he gave a signal, and I was suddenly dropped onto my knees. The impact made me grimace in pain.

I seethed as I watched him approach. "You were always a problem, Caleb. You were always the one who didn't listen, who wanted to have his way."

"You have kept things from me my entire life. I've been covering your ass for the last ten years! I won't do it anymore. I will not follow your orders and kill again."

He chuckled, the harsh sound grating on my nerves. "I want you to know your value has diminished. You have no power here nor with the family. That was your main problem, Caleb. You could never understand that they all are ruled by me."

"Your vengeance means shit to me!"

He slapped me then, hard enough to bust my lip. I spat out the blood on his expensive shoes. "She's strong. Stronger than you or any Killic, and she will not hesitate to kill you."

He smiled. "I have other means of getting to your precious Duchess now."

He slid the bottom of his cane under my chin and forced my head up. "You did a great job of having her fall in love with you. It will be easy now to have her come to you."

"No!" I tried standing up only to fall on one knee once again. "I won't let you hurt her!"

"It's too late now. She should already be on her way."

"No." I struggled against the wire. "No!" I screamed as the crane pulled me up off the ground.

"I'll kill you if you hurt her. I swear to God, you will burn in hell for this!"

He slowly walked away as the crane went back into its position facing the water, my feet once again dangling off the ledge.

"Whyyyy?!" I screamed.

My grandfather stopped misstep and turned. "Because you are of no use to me, Caleb. You never were."

I felt the emptiness in the air, and I screamed in rage out into the night.

There had to be a way out of this. But as I hung there, I knew I was completely helpless.

I had no one. I was alone in this goddamn world, all except for her.

I didn't know if she loved me enough to come find me, but I needed to trust that she knew what she was doing.

My Duchess was a fighter, and for the first time, I prayed that she'd find a way to win.

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Source Creation Date: August 14, 2025, 9:45 am

Duchess

The building looked so far away but I could see something dangling from the ledge. When I received the text message, I didn't know how to react at first.

Was it a trap?

Was he playing a game?

Should I just ignore it?

The call came in soon after and that's when Emir Killic's voice resounded in my head. "Since you like to play games, here's one for you. If you don't come and play with me, you'll find your boyfriend splattered along Venice Beach."

The phone fell silent, and I knew instantly that there was no way out of this one. Emir Killic was a cold-blooded killer. He'd used Caleb to lure me in, and in doing so he created his own demise because I wasn't going to be deterred so easily.

No .

I was going to break every bone in his fucking body for this.

"How the fuck are we gonna get up there?" Obsidian whispered.

"By shooting at anybody who gets in our way." Paramore responded just like I knew she would.

Roulette came up beside us. "Wolf is on his way. We just need to keep them occupied until he arrives."

I registered what she was saying, but in the back of my mind, I knew I'd kill anything that got in my way. "Shoot to kill," I whispered.

"And leave Emir Killic for me."

Roulette grabbed my arm. "Are you sure you want to do this? That man up there, the one you've had a sudden change of heart for, wanted you dead at one point."

"Listen, love is a shitty ass feeling. But Caleb protected me from this monster until now. Even though I stole from him, I destroyed his shipments, and we killed several of his own, or don't you remember? If this is the only way I've got to pay him back, I'll do it. I owe him that much."

"So you love him?" Roulette questioned.

"If you want to call our love/hate relationship, love. Then, yes, I love the asshole."

Both Roulette and Obsidian looked at one another, but even if they didn't understand, I wasn't looking for their permission. I was asking for their loyalty.

"Watch your backs," I called out. "Shoot anyone who shoots at you and make that bullet count."

Paramore signaled for half the girls to follow her to the back of the building, the other half, including Roulette and Obsidian, followed me towards the side. It was easy to find an entrance since the building was under construction, but it was also just as easy to get hurt while going in blind.

"Watch your steps," I whispered as we propped open a side window and I slid in first. My boot slipped on a metal object, and I froze as the noise ricocheted throughout the empty lot.

"Fuck," I cursed as Roulette slid in beside me. "I can't see shit."

"Well, that was a way of announcing our arrival."

I shot her a sharp look that told her, don't test me right now, and raised my weapon, sweeping it ahead and clearing the room.

Without a word, the girls fell into step behind me.

Roulette covered my six, her breath steady and close.

Obsidian took the left flank, eyes sharp.

Demise and Stiletto brought up the rear, all remaining in the shadows.

We moved in silently through the wide hallway, our boots crunching over broken plaster and loose grit. The air was filled with concrete dust, half-slung tarps lay over equipment, scattered bags of cement, and a thick film of white, coated everything in sight.

I motioned with a tilt of my chin toward the metal door at the far end, where the stairwell exit illuminated the hallway, and just as we neared the door, a single gunshot split the silence.

Every instinct locked into place.

Showtime.

"Move, ladies, move!" I yelled as we all gathered in the stairwell. The shots rang from the back, which meant Paramore was doing her own damage.

I looked at Obsidian. "Stay down here with Stiletto and Rainbow. Make sure to keep alert, don't allow anyone up this stairwell who isn't a Harlot or a Hellbound Lover. Roulette, Demise, you're with me."

We ran up the stairs two at a time, gaining as much time as we could.

Our priority was Caleb and getting him off that damn ledge. I'd deal with Emir when it came to it.

Suddenly, a heavy-set man appeared at the top of the steps, and without thinking, I lunged at him, hugging the stairwell and lifting my body, I sent a full force kick to his face. The man stumbled back as I ran past him, shooting off a bullet to his head.

"Damn," Roulette whispered behind me.

"Who told him to go around scaring women?"

She stepped over the dead body and continued to follow me up the stairs. We ran up the remaining flights, slamming the door shut behind us when we got to the roof. All seemed clear until a bullet whizzed past my head and hit Roulette, sending her flying back.

"Rhea!" I screamed, rushing to her aid. I lifted her and dragged her back to the wall of the side of the entrance. She'd be safe there. I crouched down before her.

"Bitch, what the fuck!" I grabbed at her jacket, afraid I'd lose my friend.

"Bullet caught my shoulder, but I'll be alright." Bullets flew past my head, and I fired

back blindly.

She grabbed my arm. "Go. Save that asshole, but I swear to God, Duchess, he better be worth it because if he's not, I'll put a fucking bullet in your goddamn shoulder."

"He is. I swear he is."

I placed my hand over hers and gave her a look that showed how much she meant to me.

She frowned angrily. "Don't fucking look at me like that. It's not my turn to die yet."

She turned and fired, and it was my cue to run. I jumped over one of the AC units and over the ventilation units that were being installed. The metal boxes served as shields against the bullets that seemed to be aimed only at me.

As I rounded the corner of one unit, I saw it. A tiny glint came from the rooftop beside us. "Son of a bitch," I raised my gun and took a deep breath. I let it go slowly just as I saw the shadow move, and I pulled the trigger twice. The shadow slumped to the ground, and I was in the clear.

I made my way to the edge of the building.

Bullets flew at me from straight ahead. I ran as fast as I could, knowing Roulette had my back.

As I approached, gun aimed, the man inside pointed his at me and I fired without thinking.

One bullet shattered the windshield. The next hit his chest while the third caught him right in the jugular.

The man slumped back against the seat, his gun slipping out of his hand and clattering on the ground.

Tugging on his sleeve, I brought him off the ledge and back onto solid ground. Using his dead body as a step stool, I got up on the scaffolding.

"Fuck," I whispered, trying to figure out how to maneuver through the metal bars so I could reach Caleb.

When I finally got to him, I realized they had him on a crane hook, and I had no idea how I was going to get him down from there.

I searched the grounds and suddenly I saw the lever. I tanked it down, and the hook he was on began to move. I steered it left, and slowly it swung Caleb back onto safe ground.

"Okay. Okay," I said, trying to reassure myself that I had this in control.

"Press the green button!"

I screamed as Demise appeared next to me out of nowhere. "What the fuck!"

She gave me a look like, get over it, and reached out and pressed the button. The hook came down, and Caleb fell onto his knees, toppling over.

I ran to him, but just before I could reach him, a silhouette appeared, and raising a gun to the sky, a shot was fired, bringing me to a halt.

I raised my hands as he lowered the gun, aiming it steadily at Caleb's head. Grabbing him by the hair, he yanked him up to his knees.

"You have no way out, Emir. You might as well give it all up. The FBI is on its way!"

He chuckled. "You always wanted what wasn't yours. My money, my power, even my piece of shit grandson."

"You think of yourself so high and mighty, Emir Killic. But you wouldn't have half the wealth you have today if it wasn't for Caleb."

"You no nothing of my family!" He screamed, and I flinched as he yanked Caleb's head. "What you don't realize, Duchess, is that It would be so easy to just shoot him and still blame it all on him! He's worthless anyway!"

"You're ruined, Emir! I made sure of that!"

My eyes met Caleb's, who was slowly starting to come to.

He was still restrained and hanging from that damn hook; he couldn't defend himself, but yet, as the realization of where he had hit him, he looked up at me defiantly.

Almost ready to die. My eyes wavered slightly, unsure of what he was about to do.

"The FBI already has all the information they need on you, Emir. There is no place to hide. Just give yourself up, and we can end it here!" I shifted slightly, and that's when his gun trained on me.

"You're just a whore who manipulated my family and fortune!"

I looked over at Caleb, who now had his eyes trained on that same gun.

Don't do it.

That thought crossed my mind as I pictured him lunging at Emir. I needed to calm the situation down, but how?

"I can give it all back, Emir! All you have to do is let us go, and you can have your fortune!"

"I want your fucking heart on a silver platter!" He screamed with such vile anger that I tried not to show that he had any effect on me.

"Well, here I am, Emir Killic. You've spent all this time looking for me, and I was right under your nose. How does that feel? Being made to look like a fool."

I spotted Demise coming in from his right, and I was trying to distract him enough for her to take him down, but the fucker was smart.

"Call her off, or I'll kill him." He pressed the gun to Caleb's temple, and I pretty much saw red.

I don't recall everything that happened next, but a gun was fired.

Demise went down, and I lifted my gun, aiming it at him.

Before I could take the shot, Caleb made his move.

Swinging his body into the old man, he shoved him so fast and so precisely that Emir Killic didn't have a chance of survival.

I watched in shock as Emir's body was tackled across the rooftop and Caleb flew out onto the ledge, his grandfather falling to his death while he hung in the air.

A few seconds later, there was a scream that echoed from below, and I ran to the

ledge. Looking over it, I could see his body splattered on top of an unmarked car. The blood was too much, and I turned away.

Shots kept firing, the sound ricocheting throughout the building, as the Turkish Mafia fired back at the police. The door to the rooftop suddenly flung open, and Diesel, one of the members of the Hellbound Lovers, appeared. He was Roulette's FBI connection.

He looked at me and then up at Caleb. Slowly, he approached the ledge and whistled as he looked down at the body.

"That's a way to go." Looking at me, he tilted his head. "You do that?"

I shook my head, and he narrowed his eyes at me. "So he jumped?"

"No, he..."

"Jumped." Diesel stated firmly, and I finally understood what he was saying.

I nodded. "He saw the FBI was here, said he couldn't take it anymore, and jumped."

Diesel nodded and looked up at Caleb. "Get him down and go."

"Roulette's hurt and one of my girls," I pointed at Demise, who was lying on the ground.

"I'll take care of them, just go. He can't be here when they come up."

I turned to leave and then looked back. "Diesel!"

He looked up from his perch on the ledge.

"Thank you," I mouthed.

He nodded at me and then reached for his mic and called it in. "We got a jumper, gentlemen."

He'd saved Caleb from a lifetime in jail, and I'd never forget that.

The Harlots would have the Hellbound Lovers' back for whatever they needed.

For now, I have more pressing matters to handle.

Like, what the fuck were we going to do when the Turkish Mafia found out that Caleb Killic had killed the head of the family?

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DUCHESS

The news the next day was filled with the suicide jumper at Venice Beach. Somehow, the Turks had managed to keep their grandfather's name out of the reporter's mouths, probably costing them a fortune.

When Caleb found out that Yusuf Anslar had been the mole who ratted him out, he began to search for him, but the coward had run away. From what Caleb had told me, he wasn't going to stop until he found him and hung him by the balls for what he had been conspiring to do.

All I knew was that Yusuf was still out there, and he was considered a threat to me, my Harlots, and my man. Laura, his secretary, had also disappeared shortly thereafter. I had a feeling Caleb had something to do with it, but I didn't ask any questions. I honestly didn't want to know.

Whatever Caleb's business dealings were, they were his.

I didn't meddle in his shit, and he didn't meddle in mine, except for when he asked me to purchase a bunch of real estate.

I now own two buildings, which we turned into a hotel and a condominium in New York.

Jameson couldn't have been happier as we brought in more fronts.

The Turkish Mafia would never stop being our enemies, but at least I knew I had one

ally. One that couldn't keep his hands off me.

Caleb moaned as I slid into the hot tub beside him. I bit my lip as I ran my hands up his thighs, sliding them around his hard cock.

“Lift your hips,” I whispered to him, and as he did, I slid his cock in my mouth.

I knew just how he liked his cock licked and sucked on. How he grunted when I started to give it long hard strokes.

“Fuck, you do that so good.”

I giggled and smiled as I continued to tease him, slapping his cock on my tongue before devouring it again.

His hips began to rise over the water, sliding deeper down my throat and I gagged on him softly before I suctioned my cheeks and drew him out.

Up and down, squeezing his balls until he grabbed my hair and slid up into my mouth, spurting hot cum down my throat as he threw his head back.

I smiled seductively, popping him out of my mouth, his hips jerking as I tapped on his sensitive head.

He growled and grabbed me by the waist. I tried moving, but he turned and lifted me over the tub.

His hand came down on my ass, and I cried out as he spanked me.

Over and over, biting each cheek with every blow.

The power games we played always ended with me being bent over, and I loved

every second of it.

Stretching my cheeks open, his tongue curled over my asshole and drove down over my clit. I rocked back onto his face, the water lapping around us and onto the floor. I gripped the edge of the tub as he sucked on me; the hungry sounds he made had me gyrating onto his tongue.

Sliding up, he spanked me again just for good measure, as his hardened cock slid into me. Wrapping his hands around my throat, he squeezed as he continued to fuck me harder. My knees were going to be immobile by the time he was done with me.

"Don't you ever leave me, Stephanie."

"I won't, my King."

He spanked my ass again and groaned as I arched my back and swiveled my hips along his cock.

Pressing his lips to my ear, he threatened me once again. "If you do, I'll find you and kill you."

He bit down on my neck, and I shattered around him. He tugged my body against him as my hips rotated and ground onto his lap.

"That's my good Royal, slut."

I slid back into the hot water and sighed, finally sedated. He slid back against the other end, and narrowing my eyes on him, I placed a foot to his chest. "You realize that if you ever cheat on me, I'll shoot your nuts off and feed them to the dogs, right?"

He chuckled as he grabbed my foot, kissed it, and massaged it. "I'm well aware of that, Tatlim."

"Good, just checking."

I pulled my leg back and slid across the water to him. Wrapping my arms around him, I kissed him lightly. My hand slid down to his balls, and his moan was quickly cut off as I squeezed them tightly.

"Don't ever threaten me again," I whispered against his lips.

"That wasn't a threat, Duchess. If you ever do leave me, I'll find you, kill you, and I'll save a bullet for me."

I cupped his face and made him look at me. "I'm never leaving you. I thought we established that."

"Doesn't hurt to give you a little reminder once in a while." He squeezed my ass and pressed his lips to mine. Our tongues slid against each other, and as the kiss deepened, so did my love for him.

It wasn't a hearts and rainbows kind of love. It was more Guns and Roses, but whatever you wanted to call it, we were meant for each other.