



# Gio (Steel Demons MC #6)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** Aint no bigger line to cross than layin eyes on your best friend's sister. But hell, rules—they're there to be broken, right?

One call from my club brother askin' me to help his kid sister and I'm there in a flash. Harper ain't no kid anymore, but now, she's all I can think about. That sweet body, those innocent eyes—they're tearing down every wall I put up.

She overheard somethin' she shouldn't have, and now she's in danger. Well, they don't know who they're messin with. I'd die before I let 'em lay a hand on her.

If I can get us both out of this alive, she'll be in my bed, right where she belongs.

Some lines weren't meant to be crossed—but I'm about to erase em.

She's mine, and I don't play by anyone's rules.

**Total Pages (Source):** 34

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

It was weird, being back home. Well, technically home adjacent since I wasn't actually born in Las Vegas but a town right next door, Steel City. It was—and is—as blue collar as it sounded. Not that there was anything wrong with Steel City, it was a perfectly fine mostly middle-class town, but it was a place that was too wrapped up in bad memories for me. It was the place where my mother had left us and then years later where I lost my father. The town for me was filled with loss and abandonment. Sure, there were good memories. My older brother and fierce protector, Cole was there with me every step of the way. He'd even attempted to delay his military service to take care of me, which I refused.

And he left me too.

I know, I know, I told him to leave. I wanted him to leave and spread his wings, to stop pressing pause on his life for me. And I was happy he had, but my stupid brain still felt abandoned. Left behind.

So, armed with my high school diploma and a college acceptance letter, I left Steel City, and I never looked back. I never came back to visit because I didn't have to. With Cole in the military he would simply stop in California to meet up with me for a few days and that was that.

Until now. I was back. For work, not for good, but being back, even this close to Steel City has me on edge. Nothing had felt right since the plane touched down on the tarmac, but I shoved those thoughts aside because I had a job to do.

As a junior planner at one of the most successful event planning companies on the West Coast, thank you very much. I'd been with Exquisite Events for nearly three years and all that time I'd been little more than an assistant and gofer for my boss, Nicole. But this job was my first chance to prove that I was a superb planner in my own right, that I could handle the stresses of the job without someone lurking over my shoulder.

I was excited about the opportunity. Really, I was.

"I know you can handle this," Nicole said over the phone as I wandered the halls that snaked away from the ballroom inside a brand-new casino that didn't exist when I lived here. "I know it."

Her words surprised me, and I stopped in my stilettos, looking up and down the hall in search of the joke. "Thank you, Nicole. That means a lot."

"You're from Las Vegas so who better to understand the trashy," she laughed. "I mean, flashy Vegas culture."

Bitch. "Right." I ended the call without a word because fuck her. I had better things to do than worry about what she thought. If I kicked ass at this event, and I would, then Nicole would no longer be my boss. So just do a good job.

The charity gala would be a success, of that I had no doubt. The guest list included everybody who was anybody in this town. Well-known, infamous, or anonymous, as long as they had deep pockets they were on the list and would be here at my event to write big fat checks to help out the foster children of Nevada when they aged out of the system.

"I got this," I whispered to myself and shoved the phone into the back pocket of my jeans. This damn hotel, The Las Vegas Regency, was a labyrinth of halls with no

distinguishing features, which made it impossible to navigate. I only had a few days until the event which meant I needed a damn map, which I couldn't get online because it was a casino and that—apparently—was a major security problem.

“You're not supposed to be back here lady.” A kid in a bellhop uniform said as he rushed past me. “Employees only.”

“I'm planning an event in the Golden Ballroom. Any idea where I can get a map?”

He shrugged, a sympathetic smile on his face. “Carl Miller is the one who deals with events on the property. He's around here... somewhere. Good luck,” he called as he slipped through a seemingly invisible door that locked behind him.

I jiggled the handle, but nothing happened. “Dammit.” I turned and headed back the other way and I stopped at an opening. All hallways from the ballroom led to this point, which was helpful to know, or it would've been if I had a damn map. I heard voices in the distance, and I headed in that direction.

The voices were both male and the closer I got the more I realized that they were angry. Arguing. And then the words became clear.

“There is no fucking way I'm gonna lug crates of guns into this fucking place with all the cameras everywhere. You think I'm stupid, Carl?”

Carl? Shit, was that the Carl I needed to speak to?

“It's called a service entrance, Viper.” That exasperated voice that belonged to Carl was crystal clear. “No cameras back here. Everyone will think you're vendors to one of the events going on.”

My brows furrowed at what I was hearing. Guns? This sounded like a conversation I

definitely shouldn't not be listening to, so I slowly stepped back, eager to put some distance between me and whatever was going down.

"I'll bring a sample of the guns. Tell your buyer to have the cash, or else." The man called Viper didn't sound harmless, that much was certain.

"He wants to make sure you have the right guns," Carl insisted but I heard the tremble in his voice.

"That what a fucking sample is, Carl. Proof I have what he fucking ordered. Don't fuck with me on this or I will make sure your body is never found. Got it?"

That was enough of a threat for my feet to start moving a little faster, only I didn't have anywhere to go. The doors behind me were locked so there was only one way forward.

"These Asians don't fuck around," Carl assured Viper. "If there's even a whiff that it's not legit, they'll walk away. And retaliate."

Fuck, this is bad. Really bad.

It was just a reminder of why I never came home. Everyone only thought about the bright casino lights and famous residencies that lasted for years. No one ever thought about the prostitution and the gangs. And the bikers.

But I didn't want to hear any more, so I started walking—loudly—and pasted on my most professional, slightly clueless smile. "Excuse me, gentleman, I seem to be lost." When both heads swung towards me, my eyes widened. "Carl! You are just the man I've been looking for," I began, determined to keep talking until I was far away from here. "I need a map. I can't do much more without a map."

Carl nodded and let out a frustrated sigh at the interruption. “Yeah, I’ll email it to you.” He took a step forward but the other man, Viper put a hand to his chest.

“Hold up. Who the fuck are you and why are you sneaking around back here?”

I frowned, ignoring my racing heart. “I’m Harper and I’m planning a charity gala here in the hotel.”

“Bullshit,” he spat out. “Where did you come from?”

I rolled my eyes and let out a slow breath. “Back that way. I tried to get out with one of the bellhops, but the door closed behind him.”

“Shit,” Carl muttered. “You should have gotten a temporary pass to get you through all the access points.” He pulled out a small plastic card and started moving in my direction when, once again, Viper stopped him.

“No. Wait one fucking minute. What did you hear?”

“About what?”

His expression darkened and I knew without a doubt that this man wasn’t just a biker, he was a killer. “Whatever the fuck you heard.” He took several big steps forward until he was right in my face, his grown eyes were black and angry. “Talk. Now.”

“I didn’t hear anything. I don’t know where I am, and I was on the phone with my bitch of a boss who pissed me off and I took a moment to calm down.”

He gripped my upper arm tight enough to make me gasp in pain. “Good. You didn’t hear nothing at all. Got it?”

“Since I didn’t hear anything, yeah, I got it.” I tried to yank free of his hold, but he kept me there in a classic power play, only releasing me when he was ready to.

“If I find out otherwise, you’re dead.” His index finger traced the line of my jaw, down my throat and across my collarbone. “Then again, maybe I’ll just make you wish that I’d killed you.”

Understood. I took a step back and nodded. “The map, Carl?”

This time when Carl stepped forward, Viper allowed it. “I’ll email that map to you shortly, Harper. Sorry about the mix up.”

Mix up. Was that what we were calling shady deals with biker gangs these days?

Home sweet hell.

I rushed back to the ballroom with my heart racing, trying like hell to forget everything I just heard.

After a few hours I managed to forget, and then an uneasy feeling settled over me that I couldn’t shake for the rest of the evening.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

“Road Captain, hell fuckin’ yeah!” My best friend, Cole, clapped me on the back, his smile was damn near as big as mine. “Congratulations, brother.”

“Thanks, man.” I shrugged my shoulders and turned around to show off the patches, freshly done for tonight’s patching ceremony. “I’m official.” It felt like I’d been a prospect for years and there were times I wondered if I would ever get patched in.

“How does it feel?”

My smile grew wide. “Fucking amazing, man.”

“You earned it,” Cole assured me. “Been a long ride but it paid off.”

My brother and my sister-in-law, Petyon, stopped beside me and clapped me on the back a little harder than necessary but that’s what annoying older brothers were for, pissing off their younger brothers. “You earned it, brother. You stepped up every time we asked.”

“It’s what we do.” Although I’d grown up with Cole and Rocky—so I knew what it was to live with brothers and to have their backs—this was a whole new level. This was a lot more than just the three of us against the world.

“Damn straight,” Rocky grinned.

“You did great, bro.” Peyton stepped in front of me and wrapped me in a hug.



“Congrats, Gio.”

“Thanks, Peyton.”

She flashed a smile and turned to Rocky. “Come on, let Gio enjoy his night.” She tugged him away with a smile for me because she was now family too. Her and the baby.

“Every time we turn around, another kid is being added to the family.” Cole laughed and shook his head. “Better them than me.”

“Amen, brother.” The last thing that was on my mind was finding a woman to settle down with. “But I thought you were looking for a nice girl?”

Cole snorted. “Where the fuck do you find nice girls around here who aren’t already tangled up with one of our brothers?” He shook his head. “I’m happy about this fucking road trip.”

“You are?” Road trips could be fun, but they were always hellish. Traveling to a new territory that was unfamiliar where you knew you’d be surrounded by enemies and potential threats everywhere.

“Fuck yeah,” he nodded and took another sip of his beer. “I’d rather have a shipment of guns and weed on the open road for the chance to experience something new. I’m bored with the club bunnies and the Vegas nights.”

“Bullshit,” I laughed. “Maybe you need to hit up the apps and find that elusive nice girl you secretly dream about.”

He finished his beer, and his brows shot up. “That’s rich coming from the guy who won’t fuck a woman for more than three nights.”

“Hey, it’s not my fault that all get attached.” It was a problem, especially with the easy pussy on demand in the form of MC bunnies. They were easy but every last one of them wanted to become an old lady which meant I went through them quickly. “I’m not ready to settle down yet. Hell I’m not sure if I’ll ever be ready. She’ll have to be one hell of a woman to make me even consider it.” Thoughts of women turned my gaze towards a group of bunnies where Teesa and Toni, sisters, stared back at me.

“Don’t tell me you’re gonna fuck the crazy sisters?”

“I’m not. Too much trouble. Sisters fight like enemies and after one hot threesome they’ll be fighting over me.”

“We used to fight like that. Remember?”

I threw my head back and laughed. “How could I forget? That right hook of yours is a menace.” We grew up together and we fought hard, loved hard, and always had each other’s backs. “And we were still in high school.”

“You should see my left hook,” Cole offered. “You’ll never see it coming. Nobody does.”

“Asshole,” I grumbled just as Cindy, a stacked blonde bunny walked past us, making sure her double-D tits pressed against my chest.

“Hiya, Gio.”

“Hey Cindy. Busy later?”

She shook her head. “For you? Never.” Her pink lips pressed into a pout and all I could imagine was those lips wrapped around my cock later.

“Once we get the shipment loaded up, I’ll come find you.”

“You know where I’ll be,” she purred and headed to the bar to grab beers for some of the brothers.

“Cindy has stars in her eyes, you know that don’t you?”

I shrugged. “Don’t rain on my fuck parade.”

“Not raining, warning.”

Yeah, Cindy did have stars in her eyes but that was her problem, not mine. “She knows the deal.”

“One day this shit is going to get you in the kind of trouble you can’t charm your way out of. Can’t wait.”

“You wish for my downfall?”

“Nope.” He shook his head. “I can’t wait for you to fall in love.”

“Not today, Satan.” Not tomorrow either.

Diesel, Maverick, Rebel, and Slate joined us, and Hawk approached from the other side with a tray of shots. Diesel turned to me with a grin. “You got everything all mapped out for this trip?”

Part of my new job as road captain was to handle all road trips. Planning and routes, dangers on the road, and all the rest of it. Even though I wasn’t going on this trip, the responsibility was all mine. Usually the position went to older brothers, but apparently, I’d impressed them so much when I was prospecting that they decided I’d

be perfect for the role. “Yep, all done, Prez.”

“Good.” Diesel nodded, satisfied even though he was a man of few words. “When the guns are with the Mexicans and the weed is with the Russian dispensary owners, I want Rebel and Cole to head to Lompoc to pick up Hollywood. He was paroled and he gets out in seven days.”

“Holy shit, no way!” Hollywood did a half-dime in Lompoc for a fight that went sideways, and I loved that asshole. He was big and burly and grumpy as fuck, but he was a damn good shot.

“Yep. Got word an hour ago.”

Rebel nodded. “Got it. We leave in two and a half hours,” he said to Cole. “Just enough time for one more drink and to pack a bag.”

Cole nodded and the group dispersed. “I’ll see you in a week or two,” he said to me and fist bumped me. “Congrats again. Try not to celebrate too hard without me.”

“I make no promises, man. How about I party for you while you’re gone?” We shared a few more laughs and one more drink before Cole hit the road and I hit the sheets.

With Cindy.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

One day to go. That was my mantra for the past thirty hours as I scrambled around the hotel and casino making sure all the invites had rooms, comped tickets for shows and anything else they needed to show up and put some of their money to good use. Still, it was all part of my job, so I did it with some semblance of a smile on my face.

My feet hurt, my hair needed a deep conditioning, and I was overdue for a full night of sleep. As soon as I got back to Santa Barbara, I planned to sleep for twelve straight hours. Until then, I was running at full speed.

“Harper! Ms. Davis, stop. Please!”

I turned and found Carl running full speed across the casino floor. His face was red and slightly damp, his collared shirt seemed tighter today than yesterday. His light brown eyes were filled with worry. “Carl, where’s the fire?” He’d avoided me yesterday and now he was making a big show of chasing me down.

He held up a finger for me to wait while he sucked buckets full of air down his lungs. Minutes later he was finally able to speak. “Ms. Davis,” he began.

“Harper,” I insisted.

He nodded, “Harper, please tell me that you didn’t hear any part of my conversation with my associate the other day?”

Associate? Yeah, right. I fixed a smile on my face and nodded. “I didn’t hear any part

of your conversation with your friend, Carl. I wasn't close enough to hear anything but voices and that's why I headed that way, to get help navigating this giant maze." It was mostly true, but Carl didn't need to know that I'd heard a hell of a lot more than I should have. Or wanted to.

"I mean it Harper." He shook his head and raked a hand through his hair. "These guys don't fuck around. If they think there's even a chance you heard us, you're as good as dead."

Shit, I knew that. Viper wasn't the first biker I ever met so I knew the deal, I'd just never been on the receiving end of the trouble. "Right. Of course. Well you can assure your buddies that I didn't hear anything. I'm here to work and as soon as this gala is over, I'll be gone. Out of state. Never to return."

"Okay. That's good. Really good." He nodded, his gaze and his focus already on something else.

Probably the gun deal he was working on. "Yep. See you around, Carl. Thanks for your help." I rushed off even though the ballroom was behind me, desperate to get away from Carl and this scary situation.

Hours later I gave the ballroom one final glance and let out a long, satisfied sigh. Everything was perfect. The place looked beautiful and elegant, perfect for the crowd that would fill these seats tomorrow. You got this, Harper.

I totally got this. I felt lighter and happier when I turned out the ballroom lights and closed the door behind me. Tomorrow would be a long day, but it would go off without a hitch because I would make sure it would. The day was over, and tomorrow was the event.

Nothing else to do but relax.

The hotel was packed, and the casino was even more packed, so it was easy to blend in with the crowd. And then I spotted two bikers wearing Blood Reapers MC patches. They scanned the crowd, and I had a feeling that they were looking for me, not Carl.

Shit. Double shit. I scanned the area and ducked down low, which wasn't all that difficult since in heels I topped out at five-foot-five, blending in with a bachelorette party as they headed to their waiting limo. I skirted along the long line for valet and dipped into the parking garage while my heart raced. Fear spiked but I refused to look over my shoulder, refused to see if danger was quickly approaching.

Sweat dripped down my spine and by the time I was nestled in the safety of my rental car, my body was drenched in it. I started the engine and raced from the parking garage, punching the gas to get back to my rental as quickly as possible. A red light stopped my progress, and it forced me to rethink the intelligence of not staying at a hotel where there were security cameras and guards and people in general.

The truth was that I spent entirely too much time in hotels when we were in the middle of an event, and I wanted my own space. And a kitchen even though I was too tired to cook and too freaked out—right now—to even stop at a drive-thru for a dinner I desperately wanted and needed to eat.

Stupid fucking criminals.

I didn't care about some stupid gun deal. Guns were everywhere, almost inescapable, but they were forcing me to care, dammit. Back door deals like this were probably how most of the guns in this country were sold and I wasn't silly enough to think I could do anything to stop it.

I just wanted to go home, put on a successful event and get back home to California. Where I belonged.

My heart rate settled just enough after I arrived at the rental for me to enjoy—mostly—a hot shower. I scrubbed the day, including the stuffy casino air, from my skin and hair, letting the hot water relax my muscles until my shoulders were away from my ears. I didn't feel one hundred percent, but I felt good as I stepped from the shower and wrapped myself in a big, fluffy green towel.

“Better,” I sighed and wiped away the steam from the mirror. I had just given myself permission to relax, confident the fear was behind me since I'd be back home in forty-eight hours or less, when broken glass sounded on the first floor.

I froze and stared at my reflection a little too long. Another window broke and then the door was kicked in. I stifled a scream by covering my mouth, my heart rate kicked up and I searched for a place to hide. The bathroom had nothing big enough to conceal me, so I stepped in the bedroom and scanned my options. Under the bed was too obvious. So was the walk-in closet. There was a linen closet, but it was all shelves so not an option. Behind me was a small space that used to be a closet, but now it was a storage facility that held old lamps and a chest of drawers with just enough space behind it to hide a small-ish human.

The sound of heavy footfalls grew louder, and I snatched my phone from where it charged beside the bed and tiptoed to the closet, crouching down low and calling the one person in this world I knew wouldn't let me down.

“Harp, hey squirt, how's it going?”

I smiled at the sound of my brother's familiar voice, deep and slightly gravelly. “Cole, hey.” I tried to get my tone light and upbeat, but I failed. Miserably.

“What's wrong?” All the joy vanished from his voice, and I could almost picture his scowl.



“Someone just broke into my rental house.”

“Okay. Stay calm and call the cops.”

“No,” I whisper-screamed. “You don’t understand. I’m in Vegas.” I sucked in a deep breath and gave him the quickest, quietest rundown I could without drawing attention to my location. “And two of them were following me in the hotel. I think they’re downstairs.”

“Shit. Okay.”

“Can you come? Please?” I hated sounded so weak and small, asking my big brother to come running to my rescue.

“Drop me a pin of your location.”

My hands trembled but I did what he said. “Done.”

“Okay. Stay right where you are and don’t come out until you’re safe.” Cole ended the call, and I was left staring at the phone. His words were oddly cryptic, but I did as he said and stayed crouched behind the chest of drawers in nothing but a towel.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

“I s this bad boy all for me?” Cindy giggled as she took my cock in both hands, looking at him like he was the only thing she needed to stay alive. Her lips tugged into a plump smile as she leaned forward and opened up, wrapping them around the crown with a moan.

“Ah, fuck.” I loved a woman who knew how to give a good fucking blow job and Cindy was a champ at giving head. My hands tangled in her blonde hair and my hips pumped, sending my cock deeper and deeper down her throat. “Yeah, just like that.” I took a fistful of her hair and fucked her mouth because Cindy was a dirty girl who liked it rough. This was exactly what I needed, a mindless fuck to help me sleep.

My phone rang and vibrated on the end table beside me and I reached for it without looking at the screen. “Yeah?”

“Gio, man. I don’t wanna see your hairy fucking ear.” Cole’s voice was strained, and I pulled the phone back to see it was a video call. Dude shouldn’t be complaining, he might have got an eyeful of my cock.

“What’s up, man? Looking for a peep show?”

“Not tonight,” he grunted. “Look I need you to come through for me tonight. Right now. Are you capable?”

I knew that tone and I knew those words. I sat up straight without regard for Cindy or my aching cock. “Yeah, I got you brother. What do you need?” Cole wasn’t just my

MC brother, he was the same as blood, no different than Rocky. We grew up together and when his dad died, he and his sister came to live with us. They were family, period.

“Harper’s in town. She’s in Vegas putting on some charity function,” he began, his tone annoyed as he told me about the break-in. I pushed Cindy away and got to my feet, moving towards my bedroom while I scooped up my clothes.

“Okay. Where is she?” Little Harper was in trouble. She’d chased after us growing up, wanting to be so close to Cole at all times that she annoyed the shit out of him. I thought it was cute.

“I just sent you the address. Keep Harper safe. Please.”

“You don’t even need to say it, brother. I’ll call when I have her.” I shoved my feet into my boots, slid my phone into a pocket and headed to the front door.

“Where are you going, honey, I thought we were partying tonight?”

I froze at the sound of Cindy’s baby voice, which I fucking hated, but it surprised me because I’d forgotten all about her. “Gotta go. Get dressed.”

She frowned and shook her head. “I can just wait here for you. I know how important club business is. We can have breakfast when you get back.”

“Cindy,” I sighed and pinched the bridge of my nose. “I don’t have time for this shit. Get dressed and get out.”

“But we didn’t finish our night.” She looked so fucking hopeful I couldn’t stand it.

“And we won’t. I have shit to do.” I motioned for her to get dressed, scooping up her

dress and bra. “Quickly, Cindy.”

“But,” she began and shook her head. I hated that shit, the look meant to be a guilt trip. I didn’t do guilt trips, and I didn’t tolerate them.

“You knew what this was, Cindy.”

Her shoulders fell in disappointment, but she dressed quickly and soon enough, I was on my bike and headed to the location Cole sent to my phone. Harper was on my mind. We’d grown up together, but I didn’t look at her like a little sister, even though I had to. Even though I promised Cole that she would never be more to me than his kid sister, and therefore my kid sister.

That was a lifetime ago, I reminded myself as I pulled up to the two-story bungalow with busted windows and the front door hanging wide open. This was now. Today. She was a grown woman now and I wasn’t the kid she remembered. We were basically strangers. She never came back to Steel City, her job as a big shot party planner in Cali kept her busy.

But she was here now.

I jumped off my bike and pulled out Sasha, my Desert Eagle. She was a big bitch, but she was effective. Nobody was getting up after she tore a hole through them, but they wouldn’t die either. They would only wish they’d died.

The living room was dark, but I could see the lamps had been turned over and the coffee table was busted up, but I was sure the spray-painted threat was a new addition to the décor. I resisted the urge to call out and instead took my time to clear the downstairs before I crept upstairs.

“Harper,” I whispered into the main bedroom while I looked around. The bathroom

was still steamy and damp but there was no sign the intruders made it up here. “Harper,” I whispered again when she didn’t answer.

She’s hiding behind a chest in a closet, Cole had said.

With a smile I opened the door that was too small for a normal-sized man to fit through and slipped my head inside. “Hey Squirt, you in here?”

There was a long beat of silence and then a small, feminine voice that was slightly husky. “Gio?”

I smiled when she stood, showing nothing but her wet hair and bare shoulders. “In the flesh, babe.” My gaze raked over what I could see. “Lookin’ good, Harp.”

She groaned and rolled her eyes, but she couldn’t fight the smile even as worry clouded her eyes. “Where’s Cole?”

“Left on business a few hours ago. Called me to come in his place.” She looked so small and scared, dammit. All my protective instincts kicked in. “He probably didn’t want to worry you.”

“He didn’t say anything.” She wrapped her arms around her waist and stayed planted behind the drawers.

“Probably because he didn’t want to worry you. Come on out and get dressed.” She shook like a fucking leaf and my hands bunched into fists half a dozen times, the need to hunt those assholes down and make them pay for scaring her strong. “Come on, Harper. As much as I like watching you in a towel, you’re probably getting cold.”

That snapped her out of her thoughts, and she flicked a gaze up to me. “Thanks for coming but it sounds like they’re gone.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “They are.” I holstered my gun and stepped out of the closet, treating her like a terrified kitten.

“Good. Thanks.”

“No problem.” I gave her my back while she changed from the towel into pajamas, oblivious to the fact that I stood in front of a mirror and saw every supple curve, every silky inch of her naked body. “Don’t know if you remember but it gets cold at night in the desert.”

She turned and her gaze met mine in the mirror, a blush stained her cheeks. “I remember but I don’t plan on going anywhere until morning.”

“Plans change, sweetheart. You can’t stay here. Not tonight, not for the rest of your visit.”

“What? I’m staying here, Gio. I paid for this place.”

I smiled. “You’re more stubborn now.”

She crossed her arms angrily. “Yep, and not so easy to sway.”

“Fine,” I growled. “You think you can stay here?”

“Yeah, I do.” She lifted her chin in defiance.

“Okay, I understand but you’re wrong. The front door is hanging by one single hinge and half the windows in the living room are shattered. You stay here and you’re a sitting duck.”

“Shit.” She nibbled her bottom lip and then narrowed her big blue eyes into a glare

aimed at me. “Turn around.”

I turned back towards the mirror.

“Close your eyes,” she demanded with a laugh.

“Why? Don’t be shy, Harper. You’re lookin’ good. Really good.”

Her cheeks flushed as she changed into a pair of jeans that hugged all of her curves and then I did close my eyes because she was temptation personified. And my best friend’s little sister.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

Life had a twisted sense of humor, that was the only explanation for why I was alone with Gio Lombardi, the objection of all my teenage fantasies. The universe must've gotten a good laugh, sending him to save me in nothing but a towel. Being around him made me feel like the scrappy little girl who followed him and Cole everywhere they went until they got too big for me to keep up.

But Gio was here now, and he was bigger and hotter. His thick black hair was shorter now and I kind of missed those thick black waves but the close cropped look was sexier, dammit. His arms were covered in tattoos, some colorful and some black and white, all of them were gorgeous works of art. The one thing that hadn't changed? Those golden hazel eyes were still so expressive, making most of his thoughts easy to decipher.

Why, oh why did he have to be the one to come to my rescue? And why in the hell was he so fucking hot?

"Thanks for coming, Gio." Even if I was embarrassed and even if I might still have a tiny nigger of a crush on him, I was grateful.

His lips curled to a one-sided smile. "You already said that, Harp." His gaze took a long, slow journey of my body, heating up every spot along the way.

I turned away and finished packing my bags.

"You can leave those here. Take just one that you need the most."



“What?” I stood up straight and turned back to the annoying handsome man who’d swooped in to save me. “I’m not leaving my bags here.”

“Yeah,” he sighed and got in my face. “You are.”

“No,” I shook my head. “I’m not leaving my luggage. It goes where I go.”

“Agreed.” He grinned as if he’d just won something. “It’s coming with you but just a little later. You’re coming with me, right now.”

If I was younger and stupider I might have gotten lost in the colorful swirl of his smiling eyes, but I wasn’t. Not totally, anyway. “I’m not leaving my bags or my car, Gio.”

“Sure you are. I’ll have one of the prospects pick up your bags and your car and bring it to the clubhouse. Where you’ll be.” His gaze darkened and his smile faded, giving me my first glimpse of grown-up, badass biker Gio.

His words finally clicked. “What? I’m not getting on that deathtrap with you.”

His lips curled into another smile, sexier and darker. His eyes sparkled with a challenge. “Wanna bet?”

“What are you going to do, Gio?”

He licked his lips and Lord help me, but my gaze tracked that pink tip, and my breath hitched. “I’m bigger now. Stronger too. I can toss you over my shoulder and put you on the back of my bike, no problem.”

My pulse quickened at the idea of Gio putting his hands on me and carrying me anywhere, so much that I hadn’t come up with a response. Yet. I would, I just needed

time.

“Look Harper, I know this isn’t ideal. I know you’d rather be anywhere than near me, but I’m here to keep you safe and to do that you can’t stay here.”

“You’re overreacting because of Cole.”

“No,” he barked loudly. “This has fuck all to do with Cole. Come on,” he grabbed my hand forcefully and tugged me out of my room and down the stairs. He was annoyed or angry, but he was careful until we got to the bottom of the stairs. “They will come back, Harper.” His big hands gripped my shoulders as they turned me in a circle to make sure I took in the wreckage.

I sucked in a breath and took it all in, the broken furniture and art, the hanging door and worst of all, the graffiti. ‘Keep your mouth shut, bitch. Or else’. My heart pounded at the clear but unspoken warning and the effort they put in just to threaten me.

Gio sighed and his grip softened along with his voice. “They will come back, Harper. You can’t stay here. Whatever it is that you saw or heard, they can’t risk you telling anyone.”

“Who would I tell?”

“Me? Cole?” He shrugged. “They don’t even know your connection to the Steel Demons yet and they’re this worried.” He shook his head and rubbed his palm over his cropped hair. “So what’s this all about?”

I shook my head and closed my eyes. “It was at the hotel, I’d gotten lost and was trying to get back out and I overheard a conversation between Carl, who oversees events at the hotel, and some guy. They were talking about a delivery of guns. I made

a ton of noise so they would think I'd just walked into the corridor, but the person talking to Carl didn't seem to buy it."

Gio's eyes narrowed, "Do you remember anything about the other man?"

"His name was Viper, and his vest said something Reapers."

"Shit," he growled, and his grip subtly tightened. "Blood Reapers." He spat the word out like it was acid. "They don't fuck around, Harper."

I snorted. "I kind of figured."

Gio's gaze never left my face, and I couldn't tell what he was thinking. "Look, I'm not going to tell anyone, I only heard a snippet of a conversation. Who the fuck would I tell and about what?"

Gio let out a harsh breath, and his gaze hardened and turned serious. "This must be something big. You're not safe here Harper. I want you to come with me because you know it's right but I'm happy to do things the hard way."

Shit. Fuck. Reasonable Gio was even hotter than cocky Gio. "Fine, I'll go with you."

To his credit, Gio didn't gloat or even smile, he just nodded with a stern expression on his face. "Okay. Let's go."

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Minutes later I was on the back of his motorcycle with my arms wrapped around his waist and a helmet protecting my head. For the first minute or two, or maybe it was only a few seconds, I kept my eyes clamped shut. But the breeze felt nice, cool but not chilly. Comforting. Relaxing. And then one by one my eyelids cracked open, and

I watched as the world whizzed by. It was magnificent. It was beautiful.

I was intoxicated by the ride that was—unfortunately—over too damn soon. “That was nicer than I thought it would be.”

Gio flashed a smile as he dismounted the motorcycle, drawing my attention to his long, thickly muscled legs. “Wait ‘til I take you on a longer ride, you’ll be cruising down California highways on two wheels.” He took my helmet and set it on the seat. “Come on, I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

I paused. “That’s not necessary.”

“It is. You’ll be staying here for a while, and they need to know. We don’t keep secrets here.”

I nodded and let Gio lead me inside the clubhouse. My first impression was that it was like a sports bar, but a bit rough around the edges. There were worn leather couches, a dart board in the corner and a couple of pool tables. The bar area was filled with numerous men all in varying states of drunkenness and a haze of smoke hung in the air. I did spot a few women, mostly scantily dressed, and out the corner of my eye I could see one woman on her knees in front of a man. Her back blocked the view, but from the expression on his face it was clear what was going on. I quickly looked away.

Gio introduced me to dozens of people and I must have said, “It’s nice to meet you,” a thousand times. I knew I wouldn’t remember half the faces tomorrow because I was too focused on the threat.

Finally, I saw a familiar face, Rocky, Gio’s older brother, and he wrapped me in a big bear hug that lifted me off the ground, “Thank you all for letting me stay,” I said.

“You’re family, Harp. No thanks necessary.”

I hugged him back. “It’s good to see you, Rocky. You look happy.”

“I am,” he replied with a big ass smile. “You’ll meet the reasons why soon enough.”

I wanted to ask about Nolan, but Gio put a hand on my back and guided me away. “Let me show you where we’ll be staying.” My feet stuttered but he gave me a gentle push forward.

“What about Cole?”

He shrugged. “He’ll be gone for a week, possibly more depending on how things shape up, so you’re stuck with me.”

Lucky me.

The room where I would be staying was bigger than I expected, fitted with a bed, a sofa, a desk, and there was another door that led to a private bathroom. “Are you sure this is necessary?”

“Positive.” He nodded, again there was no playfulness or teasing in his tone, which scared me more.

And turned me on. “And what the hell am I supposed to do here, Gio? I have a gala to finish planning. And attend to make sure it goes off without any problems.”

His dark brows shot up. “Staying alive would be a good start.” He muttered the words unhappily as if they were like glass in his mouth.

“I have to work tomorrow. It’s important.”

“So is your life.”

There was no reason those words gave my heart a little flutter, but they did. “I have to do last minute setup and check in with all the vendors tomorrow so you can either go with me or stay the hell out of my way. Understood?” My chest heaved and I readied my next argument.

Gio stared at me intently for a long damn time, his chest also heaved to the point his eyes darkened to a rich, molten chocolate color. “Don’t leave the clubhouse,” he growled, turned away and slammed the door behind him.

My response was nothing more than a smile.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

I stormed out of Harper's room—my room—and stopped, leaning against the door to let out a long, frustrated breath. Harper was getting to me already and we hadn't even been together for an hour. Another few days with her and who knew what mental state I would be in. I let out a sigh, that would be a problem for later.

The more pressing problem was the Blood Reapers MC, which meant I needed to update the guys. Now. Luckily, I found plenty of them hanging in the bar with shots and beers in front of them while they shot the shit. "Diesel. I need to talk to you."

He took a long pull of his beer and nodded. "Talk. Or is this private?"

I shook my head. "No, it's about Harper." I dropped down in a chair between my brother and Diesel and snatched Rocky's beer while I told them about the Blood Reapers. "She overheard them talking about crates of guns and they followed her to her rental, trashed the place and left a threat."

"Shit." Rocky let out a low whistle. "Cole know?"

"Yeah, he called me when she called him. He doesn't know the extent of things yet, but I wanted to talk to you first. Harper's stubborn but she needs protection." I explained about the gala and her stubborn refusal to stay safe.

"Fuck me, I swear you boys collect damsels in distress," Rebel said with a grin.

Right up until this moment I would've agreed with him. But Harper was different.

“She’s Sniper’s sister.” Calling him by his club name, I hoped, would make it clear that this wasn’t actually up for discussion. “And the Blood Reapers have her in their sights.”

“Focus,” Diesel growled. “Blood Reapers aren’t your typical MC. They do business with the cartels, the Bratva, even the Yakuza. That’s a lot of fucking money and a lot of business to keep quiet.”

“Don’t forget they are delightfully violent. Tortured a man’s wife because he wouldn’t sell them gun without the proper ID.” Slate shook his head and sighed. “They do the type of shit warlords do all in the name of getting ahead.”

Simply put, Harper was in real trouble.

“We’re protecting her,” Rocky said in a tone that left no room for argument.

“We are,” Diesel agreed. “Find out everything she knows,” he ordered.

“She thinks the deal is happening at the hotel because Viper and Carl were arguing about lugging crates of guns into the hotel. Viper promised to bring a sample of their catalog as long as they had the money. The only thing she heard about the sellers is that they’re Asian and they don’t fuck around.”

“It’s going down at the gala thing?” Slate shook his head again. “That could be a nightmare, but I think I could hack into the casino security system.”

Diesel nodded. “We need to think about how to handle this, but for now it’s best that you stick close to her, Gio.”

“I plan to.”



“Good,” Rocky laughed and stole his beer back. “Because you’ll be her date to the gala.”

I frowned. “What? Why? I don’t have shit to wear to a gala.” And there was a good reason for that, I didn’t get dressed up. Ever.

“It’s a good thing you and Harper are sticking close, I’m sure she can help you pick out something perfect to wear to her event.” Rocky’s joy at my expense was exactly what I expected from my annoying big brother, but the weird thing was that I wasn’t as annoyed or as pissed off as I should’ve been.

“Sounds like a plan,” Diesel answered when I didn’t. “I’ll let you know when we have the rest figured out.”

There was no getting out of it at this point and the thing about it was that I refused to let anyone else be responsible for Harper’s safety. Cole was as close as blood to me and Harper mattered to me. I was the best man for the job.

Hell, I was the only man for the job.

And the only thing to do now, was break the news to Harper.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

“I still don’t get why you have to go as my date?” The sixteen-year-old girl inside of me screamed in defiance, wanting to know why in the hell I was questioning this good fortune. Back then, all I wanted was to go out with Gio who’d never given me the time of day. But the reality was that my sixteen-year-old self was a hormonal idiot and didn’t realize that this was all fake. Sure, the suit was real, and he looked damn good in every cut and color of suit we tried on, but I refused to let myself get wrapped up in a man that I couldn’t have and who probably still saw me as a kid.

“Because,” he began, catching my gaze in the three-way mirror where he tried on a dark blue suit that looked good. Too good.

“Oh, because? Great answer. I accept it,” I answered, heavy on the sarcasm.

“Because I need to stick as close to you as possible and a madly in love, possessive boyfriend is the most believable.”

See? Fake. This fake date was why we were shopping together, like a happy couple.

“Do you even know how to be a madly in love boyfriend?”

Gio turned to face me with a wolfish smile. Step-by-step he drew closer to me and laid his hands on my shoulders, so close I could see the whirlpool of gold that circled the green and brown flecks in his eyes. His full lips had me mesmerized, hell the whole damn package was mesmerizing. “You’re a beautiful woman with a killer body and I happen to think you’re pretty fucking fantastic. Not much pretending to do.” He took a step back and spread his arms wide. “So what do you think?”

I think he looked hot as hell. The blue designer suit was made for his perfectly built body, lots of muscle but the lean, wiry kind. His tattoos were visible at the neck and throat, and it was too damn sexy for words. “You’ll do,” I told him and laid my hands on the black lapels, ignoring the way his pecs danced under my palm. My body was overheated, and I felt the moisture dampen my panties. I needed an hour or two alone with my vibrator which was back in California. An oversight on my part. “Yep, you’ll do nicely.”

He wrapped an arm around me and pulled me flush against his hard chest and harder abs. “Just nicely? I don’t do anything nice, Harper.”

“That’s too bad because nice is kind of my thing.”

“Bullshit,” he whispered. “How about you tell me all about this nice thing over a meal while they tailor this monkey suit for me?”

“Sounds good.” I wasn’t sure extra time with Gio was wise. Chances were good it would only revive my teenage crush, and I couldn’t handle that. Not now. Not ever.

“Perfect.” Gio leaned in close, and I heard the smile in his voice when he spoke. “I’ll go change. Want to come enjoy the show?”

Yes, please. I just knew he looked damn good in nothing but a pair of snug boxer briefs. “No thanks.”

“Liar.” He wore a smile, and his laughter sounded as he headed back to the dressing room.

“Food,” I mumbled to myself. “All I want is food.” Food and nothing else. No big, sexy, tattooed bikers that I used to pine after in my teenage years.

I stared out the shop window and watched all the people passing by, laughing and smiling, holding hands. Some walked with a purpose, and some seemed angry at the world. The main difference between them and me was that they could be oblivious. They could afford to be a little bit careless or reckless. I couldn't just step outside to get a fresh breath of air because life was unfair and ridiculous, and it was all mine.

“What are you thinking about?” Gio's voice startled me and when I turned, he was so close that my breasts brushed against his chest sending electric shocks from my nipples right down to my clit.

I swallowed a moan and blinked away my embarrassment. “Just that things are all screwed up now. You take for granted things like being able to step outside to get fresh air.”

Sympathy flashed in his eyes and a small smile lit up his face. “Come on, I'll get you an extra dose of that fresh air and you can tell me all about your fancy life in California.”

“Fancy?” I rolled my eyes. “It's hardly fancy but I live in Santa Barbara in a small one-bedroom apartment. It's about two miles from the beach not that I have any free time to go, but every week I promise myself to get there.” The job kept me too busy to make use of my bathing suit, beach towel and sun hat.

“That's sad,” he said. “So close to the beach but you never dip your toes in the water.”

We walked along the sidewalk chatting for a bit until Gio pointed to a steakhouse, “Sound good to ya?”

“Sure,” I said.

We went inside where we were seated immediately, I couldn't help but notice the way the hostess's eyes looked him up and down. Gio had that effect on women. Once we we'd gotten comfortable and ordered drinks, he turned to me and said, "Do you love your job that much? I mean you're risking your life going to this damn gala."

"Yes, I love it, but it's also incredibly demanding. People spend a lot of money on events, and they are often for a good cause. I deal with high-strung people who are incredibly demanding which means long hours, double, and triple-checking everything."

"Pretty sure if you love something it isn't a yes, but kind of thing." He smiled and turned his attention to the menu. "Appetizer?"

"Might as well indulge." If those bikers killed me, I'd hate to have skipped out on the crab cakes. "Tell me Gio, how is my brother?"

"He's good. Thriving after the Army and in the club. But I think he's itching for a woman to settle down with."

I laughed at that. "There are women everywhere in your club, it shouldn't be too hard."

"Wrong." His eyes sparkled as he leaned in close like he was telling me some big secret. "There's ass everywhere. If you want a good fuck, an easy fuck? That's everywhere. The only real women around the MC are with our brothers."

It should've been a turn off to hear him talk about women that way, but I appreciated his honesty. "Are you seeing anybody?"

"Nope. You?"

I wanted to ask more but I shook my head. “Nope. No time or desire.”

“Bad relationship?” His voice softened and that made me open up more than I otherwise would have.

“Terrible. He got angry about six months in and sent a backhand flying at my cheek. I left about sixty seconds after that, and I never looked back.” And I’d been gun shy about men ever since.

“What’s his name? Where does he live?” Gio’s jaw clenched tight. “Actually just give me his name, Slate can find the rest.”

I threw my head back and laughed, having a good time with him despite the constant fear that thrummed in my chest. “Are you gonna beat him up?”

His smile slipped into that serious tone that was lethal and hot. “If he’s lucky all he’ll get as a beating.”

Whoa. “That’s violent but oddly sweet and comforting.”

Gio wiggled his brows, a playful smile on his face. “Thanks.”

“I appreciate you coming through for me like this, Gio. I’m sure it screws up your personal life so, thanks. Even if you are bossy as hell about it.”

He laughed at that. “I’ll always come through for you Harper.”

Of course he would. “Because I’m like a sister to you?”

“No,” he sighed and fell back against the booth, taking a long pull from his beer even though his gaze never left my face. It was dark and dirty, and it made me feel funny.

“I definitely don’t think of you like a sister, but I do give a fuck about what happens to you. Nobody gets to threaten you while I have breath to do something about it.” He shrugged. “And I promised Cole,” he added as if he realized he said too much.

I allowed it because I wasn’t sure what to think about that admission. Not a sister. It shouldn’t have filled me with relief.

Damn him.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

“Wait one fucking minute.” Cole laughed and gasped so hard I had to pull the phone away from my ear. “Did you say you’re going to the gala with Harper. As her date?”

I held my breath and waited for him to give me the lecture again about not laying hands—or my dick—on his little sister. He’d mentioned it a time or two over the years, how he’d really love it if I didn’t seduce Harper. Treat her like a kid sister, he said to me, and I have. Mostly. But years had passed since I last saw her and now, well now she was a fucking knockout. “Yes. As her date.” I shook my head and pinched the bridge of my nose. “Did you hear the part about the Blood Reapers trashing her place and threatening her?”

He laughed again, loud and raucous. “Hang on,” he said and then the call dropped.

I stared at the phone with a frown and then back at my reflection. I looked ridiculous in this damn suit. It was navy blue with something Harper called a shawl lapel which she insisted made my jaw look sharper. Whatever the fuck that meant. Not that I gave a damn. The suit was to help me blend in so I could keep her safe, otherwise it was a waste of fucking money.

The phone rang again and when I looked at the screen I laughed out loud. “A video call, really?”

Cole shrugged. “I had to see this shit for myself. You haven’t dressed up like this since prom.”



“Yeah, and I got Tina DiMarzio’s cherry for the effort.” Which, of course, made me think of Harper and her cherry.

“Turn around and let me see all of you.” He motioned with his index finger for me to spin and I flipped him off. “Aw, you do look pretty.”

I flipped him off again. “Jealous?”

“Fuck no. I’m glad it’s you though. Harper is comfortable with you, so this won’t be too awkward.” He paused for a beat, his smile fading. “How’s she holding up?”

“Harper is strong, but she’s scared shitless even though she won’t say it. She’s listening to me which should tell you everything you need to know.”

“You couldn’t get her to stay home from this gala shit,” he added with raised brows.

“It’s her work, man. Not worth the argument.” She would’ve been devastated if I pushed the issue. “Plus I got this dope ass suit.”

A knocked sounded on the door and then it opened behind me. “Hey, are you ready?” Harper’s husky voice sounded slightly shy when she stepped inside.

I turned to face her and nearly swallowed my tongue. “Damn Harp, you look—”

“Watch it,” Cole’s voice came from the speaker.

“Nice,” I added with a side smile only she could see. “Really fucking nice.”

A sexy as fuck blush stained her throat and her cheeks. “Thanks. That suit fits you perfectly.”

I turned the phone towards her so that I could take my time and drink in the sight of her in that sparkly black dress that skimmed her mid-thigh, leaving miles of toned legs on display. The top showed off more cleavage than I expected her to have and nothing, but a pair of thin straps kept the damn thing decent. And those shoes? Holy fuck they were open toe with a thick ankle strap and a bow that made me think about how much I'd like tying her up. "Wow," I mouthed to her as she and Cole chatted.

"I'm fine," she assured her protective older brother. "Gio's been good to me and he's not nearly as annoying as you."

"Aw, honey, I knew you cared."

She rolled her eyes. "We have to get going, Cole. I'll call you when all this madness is over. Love you."

"Love you more. Take care of her," he called out, presumably to me.

I tucked the phone in my jacket and stared at Harper until she looked away. "Harper you look hot as fuck."

"Thanks," she whispered. "So do you."

"Yeah?" I went to her, desperate to be closer even though I shouldn't. "Then you won't have a problem pretending to be attracted to me." My hand instinctively went to her lower back as we left my temporary room, and I didn't miss the shiver that shook her body.

"Of course I'm attracted to my boyfriend. He's crazy about me, emphasis on crazy." Her tone was sarcastic and playful, and I loved it.

"That's just how I love, babe."

She laughed and the sound was music to my ears. I walked a little taller as we left the clubhouse.

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When we arrived at the ballroom, it didn't escape my attention that all eyes were on her. She was gorgeous with those black tendrils falling around her honeyed shoulders, those big blue eyes expressive and sparkling when she was happy. Plump red lips pursed when she was deep in thought or unhappy about a table arrangement.

Harper was in her element here, rushing around to take care of last-minute details. She wasn't frantic, she was at ease. She was relaxed because she knew what she was doing, and that was sexier than I thought it would be.

Who knew a career girl could be so hot?

After forty-five minutes I was tired of watching her flit about, directing her team here and there, and I swooped in to rescue her. "Hey babe, your guests are arriving. Have a drink and reset."

She stopped and turned to me, surprise flashed in her eyes. "You got this for me?"

"Of course." I leaned forward and pressed a kiss against her neck and immediately regretted it because she smelled like flowers and sugar and my dick liked that scent. A lot. "Have a sip. Time to shine." I handed her the whiskey and water, and she accepted it.

"How did you know?"

I smiled. "I've known you forever, Harp. I knew you needed to relax but you wouldn't want to be blitzed while you worked."

She sagged against me a little. “Thanks, Gio. You’re sweet.”

That was the first time anyone had ever called me that. Even when I helped little old ladies cross the street, they thanked me with a wink or a pinch to my ass. Never called me sweet.

I might actually like it.

“If you think I’m sweet, you should see how I taste.” I leaned in close and whispered the words in her ear. My chest swelled with pride at the way she stiffened and then shuddered with unrestrained lust. Yeah, I knew my power over women I just didn’t think Harper was one of those women.

A flush crawled up all of her exposed flesh and when she turned to me, her eyes were glazed over with lust. “Not the time or place. Oh and in your dreams. Honey. ”

I laughed. “Always sassy.” She’d always been a smart ass and now that she was older and smarter, her barbs hit harder and fuck me, but I liked it still. “Is that a challenge?”

Her blue eyes went round with shock or maybe it was fear, and she took a step back. “No, it’s not. Absolutely not.”

Another laugh escaped. “In that case, let’s put our game faces on. I’ll be your arm candy and you be the powerful and gorgeous babe you are.” I was here to protect her, and I reminded myself of that fact no less than four dozen times over the course of the damn gala.

Harper laughed easily with the guests whether they were old perverts who attempted to get a little fresh with them, older women who tried to make her feel small or younger women who blatantly ogled her boyfriend. She was a goddamn pro, always turning it back to the gala and raising money to help kids aging out of the foster care

system. “They all deserve a chance to achieve what you have,” she said to a heavyset woman in her fifties who couldn’t keep her eyes off the tats my suit didn’t hide.

“Yes,” she sniffed. “Well it is important that we make sure they become productive members of society rather than a burden.”

Harper stiffened beside me and her jaw clenched so imperceptibly that no one watching would notice, but I did. “That sentiment is exactly how I know I can count on you to set an example for the rest of the attendees, Mrs. Shift.”

Just like that the woman was easily placated and she turned away with her chin notched high in the air.

“You handled the snooty bitch perfectly.”

Harper laughed and bumped her shoulder against my chest. “They tend to be like that, at these things. People who have that kind of money also have a certain way of thinking. Offensive or not, their money will help a lot of kids get on their feet and she has no say in what career path they choose. Postal worker, biker, tattoo artist, as long as they can take care of themselves, I’m happy for them.”

That surprised me. “I always got the impression you didn’t approve of the Steel Demons.” It seemed like she hated it.

“I don’t not approve, but I hate the idea of you and Cole constantly in harm’s way. It was bad enough when he was in the military. He got out and I thought, finally I can relax. And then both of you idiots decided to always be in the path of danger.”

“That’s why you don’t like it?” My assumptions were all wrong. Again.

Harper turned to me and studied my face while I took another opportunity to let my

gaze roam her body. “You thought I was just being a snooty bitch?”

I shrugged. “Yes and no. I thought it was the whole outlaw biker thing that got your panties in a bunch.”

Her cheeks turned a pale shade of pink. “I mean I’d love it more if you both were accountants who just happened to ride motorcycles but it’s not my life and not my choice. All I want is for you to be safe. Both of you.”

“Both of us?”

She rolled her eyes. “Duh.”

I leaned in close again, inhaling her intoxicating scent before I whispered in her ear, “I knew you liked me.”

Her gaze met mine, serious and dark and impenetrable. “Sometimes I wish I didn’t.”

I wanted to ask what she meant by that but one of the people involved in the gala needed her and then another and another until more than an hour had passed where I could only watch her flit from one table to the next. Thankfully it was the last hour and most of the guests had already trickled out of the ballroom, tipsy with full bellies and wallets a little lighter.

“Need some help?”

She gasped and turned to me with a relieved smile. “Nope. The vendors will come collect chairs and tables in the morning and the cleaning crew will take care of the rest. Thank you, though.”

“What are loving boyfriends for?”

She smiled but it didn't reach her eyes. "Hey, what happened?"

"Nothing," she insisted a little too brightly.

I closed the small space between us and wrapped my arm around her waist. "You know the downside to dating someone you've known forever? You can't lie to them, especially when you're a shit liar."

"Am not," she insisted automatically, the way she always had as kid just to be contrary. "It's nothing, not really. I saw Carl and it just threw me off, that's all."

"He didn't say anything to you?"

"No," she sighed. "I'm not sure he even saw me, he was kind of distracted."

"Don't worry, I got your back babe. Besides, the guys have probably already looked around to see what's going on. We're good. Ready to get out of here?"

She nodded absently, still worried about something she wouldn't share. "Yeah, I'm more than ready to get out of here and away from all of this."

"When do you head back?"

"Since Cole isn't here, probably tomorrow evening or the following morning. Everything will be wrapped up late tomorrow morning. So I guess our great love affair is over, huh?"

"Too bad, you were my favorite girlfriend." I pulled her closer and we exited the ballroom that fed into the packed casino.

"Dammit, I left my purse somewhere."

“That little sparkly thing?”

She nodded. “Yeah, I think I sat it down to help with something. I’ll be right back.” Harper started to walk off.

“Wait up,” I called after her, but the determined woman just moved forward, forcing me to catch up to her. “What’s the hurry?”

“Nothing.” She shook her head frantically and her hands shook. “Just ready to be out of here.”

“Then it’s a good thing I’m here with you.” I took her hand, and we searched room by room for her purse until we found it.

“Okay, now we can go.”

“You’re jumpy as hell, Harp. Anything you want to tell me?”

“Nope,” she answered sharply and damn near hauled ass out of the casino. Harper let herself relax when we made it to the car and as I eased out of the parking spot, the tension fled her body.

“Better?”

She nodded and let out a shaky breath. “Some, yeah.”

The familiar thunder of a motorcycle engine drew my attention to the rearview mirror where I saw three distinct headlights. “Don’t freak out, but I think we got company.”

With a gasp, Harper spun around, and her eyes instantly bugged out. “Is that them?”



“Don’t know. Probably.” Seconds later I had my answer when they flanked the car, leaving me with no place to go except forward. “Stay calm, Harper. I won’t let shit happen to you. Promise.” It wasn’t just because she was my best friend’s sister, but because she mattered to me too.

The assholes took advantage of the congested traffic to kick at the car, an effort to intimidate Harper and her unknown date. I smiled.

“Is this amusing to you?”

“Buckle up, sweetheart.” I eased Sasha from the holster I had no choice but to wear under my suit jacket. And rested her on my right thigh. “They don’t realize you’re with me.” I stepped on the gas until we were off the strip and merging onto the highway.

“Is that a good thing?”

I tapped Sasha. “They don’t know the shit they just stepped in.” A gunshot sounded and Harper cried out, ducking low in her seat. I yanked the wheel hard to the left, sending one biker down in the middle of the highway. “Let down your window,” I ordered.

“What? Are you crazy, that guy has a gun!”

I flicked a glance at her. “Trust me. Open the window and lean back as far as you can.”

She hesitated for only a second and did as I commanded.

Biker number two leaned in with a smile that quickly faded when he came face to face with Sasha. “Oh shit,” he said as he realized his mistake.

It was too late though because I anticipated his move and tapped my brakes so we were dead even. I wrapped my forefinger around the trigger and squeezed. Twice.

“Shit!” Harper was freaked out, but I was sure that had more to do with the sound and the spray of blood than any real fear.

I slammed on the gas and put as much distance between us as I could until I was sure we weren’t being followed.

“Gio, what the hell was that?”

I smiled. “That’s what we call the element of surprise.”

“You’re not going to stop?”

“To give them a chance to shoot us? No thanks.”

Harper looked around after a few minutes before she finally asked what she wanted to know. “Where are we going?”

“I just wanted to make sure we weren’t being followed.”

She spun around again and squinted in the darkness. “Are we?”

“Don’t think so but we’re not going back to the clubhouse just to be sure. They don’t know who I am—yet—and I’d like to keep it that way a while longer.”

“So where are we going?”

A hotel was an option, and this town was littered with them, but there were too many fucking cameras everywhere. “My place.”

“What? Why?” Her tone was frantic, and I holstered my gun and laid a reassuring hand on her thigh.

“Because you’ll be safe there. I’ll keep you safe Harp, I promise.”

“I know.”

Her quick answer was exactly what I wanted to hear.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

Gio's home was not at all what I expected when I stepped inside. It wasn't your typical bachelor pad, decked out with high end electronics and no touches of personality. There was a big ass television and a couple of plush sofas but there were also photos of Gio with his nephew Nolan, his parents, and Rocky, and plenty with his biker brothers. "Nice place."

He flashed a warm smile. "Thanks. Peyton, that's Rocky's woman, said my place needed a touch of home."

"She was right." I barely listened to the details of the tour Gio gave of his small two-bedroom home because the feel of his warm palm pressed against mine was exactly the soothing balm I needed. His hand was soft but slightly roughened, probably from working on his bike, and steadying. His constant touches helped relax me after the shooting, but they also had a different effect.

Arousal, white hot and pulsing, coursed through me.

"You haven't heard a damn thing I said, have you?" There was nothing but amusement in his tone.

"Sorry, I was distracted." I shook my head and blinked at the bedroom decorated in rich, dark colors. An oversized bed dominated most of the space and my heart kicked hard against my chest. "I need a shower," I said and motioned to the blood splatter on my face, throat and dress.

“Shit, sorry.”

I shrugged. “I’m just glad he was wearing a helmet.”

Gio laughed and shook his head. “Come on, I’ll show you the bathroom.” He kept his hand pressed to mine as we stepped into his bedroom and then the attached bathroom. “Towels are here. Take your time.” Gio’s gaze lingered for a long moment before he finally left the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

I undressed quickly, eager to get the bloody clothes off my body. I cranked the water as hot as it would go and stepped under the spray with my eyes closed. Instead of the sight of the biker’s head exploding, my mind was full of images of Gio from tonight. Gio looking good enough to eat in that suit that hugged his muscles. The genuine smiles he sent my way. The heated touches that turned me on.

It was the perfect palate cleanser for the dramatic night, a sexy daydream about my brother’s best friend. It doesn’t have to be a daydream, my inner bad girl teased me.

I shook off those thoughts and stepped out of the shower, wrapping a big gray towel around my body before I grabbed another to dry my hair. I felt better, at least without someone else’s blood stuck to my skin, but I was still uneasy. On edge.

Uncomfortable.

I stepped out of the bathroom just as Gio entered the bedroom in nothing but a towel that hung low on his hips. My mouth watered instantly at the sight of him, all muscles and tattoos. One side was vibrant colors and rich detail and the other fine lines of black and gray art. He was even more beautiful than the art that adorned his body.

He looked up in surprise and then his gaze raked in every detail of my body that could be seen, which wasn’t much in the large towel. “Shit, Harp. Sorry I didn’t

know you were still in there.”

The heat in his gaze was the answer I needed for my bold side to come out and play.

“Don’t be. I’m not.”

His gaze flicked to mine. “What?”

I inhaled deeply and let it out slowly while I summoned all the courage I possessed. I wanted this, I wanted him. Badly. I told myself I could have what I wanted, and it would be average and then I’d go home with no regrets. Part of me knew I was lying, but I shoved that away and said, “I’m going back to California tomorrow.”

His dark brows dipped in confusion. “I’m aware.”

“I want you and I’m pretty sure you want me too.” At least I hoped so or else I was about to be really humiliated.

“I do,” he admitted easily, his gaze unwavering. “But we can’t.”

That wasn’t rejection, it was obligation. “Because of Cole.”

Gio nodded. “I promised him I wouldn’t.”

“Years ago,” I guessed. “Well I’m a grown woman and Cole isn’t the boss of me.” I reached for the top of my towel until my hand stopped shaking. “But if he’s the boss of you, that’s another story,” I teased him and loosened the towel to let it fall to my feet.

“Harper.” He groaned my name, an agonizing sound that told me this was hard for him.

Good. “No one has to know, Gio. Just you and me, and tonight. But if you’re not interested, say that.”

“I can’t say that.”

“Good.” I took one step forward and then another and another until I was close enough to touch his wet hair, his slightly damp back, hot and hard. “That’s all I wanted to know.” I placed my hands on both sides of his face and pressed my lips to his.

Gio was hesitant at first and I thought his promise to my brother might win out against his desire for me. But when my tongue swept across the seam of his lips, he opened up and took over the kiss. He speared his fingers through my hair and gripped it tight a few inches from the roots. The tender kiss was at odds with the possessive way he held me.

My toes curled and my belly clenched tight.

He deepened the kiss, flicking his tongue at mine until a moan escaped. The kiss grew hotter, all lips and tongue and teeth as he held me right where he wanted me to send me into another world. His hands left my hair and slid down to grip the back of my neck while the other hand slid down my spine, gripping my hip and pulling me right up against the towel covered monster hiding beneath.

“Gio,” I moaned when I pulled back, breathless and dizzy. That satisfied smile on his face was like a double shot of lust and my pussy clenched hard, flooded with desire.

“You sure about this, Harp?”

I nodded slowly and leaned in to nip at his lower lip. “Positive. I want you,” I whispered and licked a trail of heat up one side of his neck. “You want me too.” I

licked the other side and punctuated the move by nibbling his earlobe. “And I’m leaving tomorrow. This night is ours.”

“Yeah?” His voice was filled with awe and something dark and intense, something that said he wanted to devour me whole.

“Hell yeah.” My hands roamed all over his body, up his wide back and around his narrow waist before I gave myself plenty of time to focus on his abs and his chest, his broad shoulders. “You grew up nice, Gio. Really fucking nice.”

He snatched a handful of my hair, tugging back so that he could place tantalizing open mouth kisses on my throat and across my collarbone. “I love it when you tell me how much you want me.” He pressed his lips to one shoulder and then the other, soft and gentle.

I shivered at the way he was so effective at switching gears. One minute I was hot, ready to burst with need and then he pumped the brakes and gentled his touches, his kisses. It was enough to drive a girl mad. “Is that what you like,” I whispered, a little unsure of myself. “Ego stroking?”

He let out a huff of laughter. “Any kind of stroking is good.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” I reached between us brushed the back of my hand against the impressive erection behind the towel. “Nice,” I moaned and yanked the towel from his waist, and gripped his cock in my hand. “It’s hot, hard yet soft. Thicker than I imagined.” Who was this woman talking so dirty while she jacked off her brother’s best friend? It couldn’t be me because this was all so foreign to me.

“Fucking tease,” he growled and nipped at my throat. He took a step forward, forcing me to take a step back until I was falling back onto the bed. “You like what you see?”



I nodded and pushed up to my elbows, watching every movement he made, every bunch and flex of his muscles. “So much.”

He smiled and stroked his cock while his gaze traveled the length of my body before settling on my pussy with a groan. “Open those gorgeous legs and let me good a good look at that pink pussy.”

I gasped at the filthy words that fell from his mouth, but I did what he said, I spread myself wide and felt myself clench when his nostrils flared with heat. “Like that?” I let one hand slide down my body and rubbed myself under his fiery gaze.

“Fuck yeah, baby. Just like that.” When he spoke like that, his voice so rough and complimentary, I wanted to be bold and sexy.

So I was. I played with myself and rubbed my clit while he watched. My breath hitched and low moans dripped from my lips.

“Enough,” he growled. “Hands above your head.”

Holy shit. I did what he demanded and waited. And waited.

Eventually he knelt on the bed, one knee and then the other. His lips hit the inside of my thighs first, gentle, teasing kisses that made my ass muscles clench. He moaned when his tongue swiped at my clit.

My hips bucked off the bed. “Gio, fuck!” I felt his smile against my pussy and that little act made me relax. My fingertips found his head, massaging his scalp while my hips rolled against his mouth. “Yes, Gio. Fuck. Me.”

He moaned while he French kissed my pussy, licking and sucking and swirling his tongue around my clit until I begged for more. Gio ate pussy like he did everything,

intensely with a hint of playfulness that was irresistible. He growled again and I pushed my hips forward, enjoying the way he lapped me up as if I was his last meal.

I wanted to fight back against the pleasure that started at my toes, but the way Gio gripped my thigh with one hand and my nipple with the other was too much. The desire welled up within me and when he pushed my thighs farther apart, I knew what I had to do.

Let go.

My head fell back but I willed my eyes to fixate on Gio, to watch him while he ate me out and his hips pumped as he found his own pleasure in that intimate act.

Holy. Fucking. Shit. The orgasm hit me like a fucking tidal wave, fierce and strong, it left me powerless to do anything other than go with the flow of the waves. Let my body roll as it wanted to, because this kind of pleasure? It was the kind that people wrote poems and songs about. “Gio, oh my fucking...yes!” My hips bucked against his mouth, hard and fast, pressing my clit against his nose to prolong the pleasure. “Yes!” The word fell from my lips over and over until every last ounce of orgasmic pleasure was wrung from my body.

“You are hot as fuck when you come apart.” He kissed my thighs, my pussy lips, and my clit before he kissed his way up my body so slowly that by the time he reached my lips, I was ready for him again.

“Then wait until you see how I come on your cock.”

Another low moan escaped, and he pulled back, staring at me like I was the very air he needed to breathe. “Can’t. Wait.”

Me either. I watched as he rubbed his cock against my wetness, the sound as

wickedly delightful as I expected. The blunt head of his cock pushed against my opening and then he gave me an inch. And then another.

I reached out and put my hands to his chest.

He stilled, eyes full of concern. “Okay?”

I nodded. “You’re big but I like it, the pleasure-pain sensation.” It was as intoxicating as this man.

“You sure?”

I smiled bigger this time. “Positive. Give me more, Gio. A few more inches if you got ‘em.”

Fire lit his eyes as he gripped my thighs hard enough to bruise and eased in a few more inches. “Fuck, you’re so tight, you feel so good.”

I gritted my teeth, and my eyes slammed shut, but I willed them open because I needed to see this, every minute of it. “Yes, Gio. More, give me more.”

“Ah, fuck,” he shouted when he was buried balls deep. I felt eager for more of him, hungry and unafraid of his giant cock or the way my heart swelled at the sensation. “Harper, baby.”

“Yes, Gio. Give me everything. Please.”

He eased back and slammed in deeper, performing that particular move over and over again. “You’re close,” he growled. “I fell your pussy clenching around me, teasing me to fill you with my nut.”

“Dirty,” I panted.

“You like it,” he shot back, punctuating the sentiment with a rough thrust that made my nipples tighten.

“No, Gio. I don’t like it,” I gritted my teeth as he pounded into me hard and deep. “I fucking love it.”

“Shit,” he groaned and flung my legs over his forearms, fucking me hard and deep and so fast my breasts jiggled like crazy. The rough grunts of pleasure he released were sexy as fuck, hitting me low in my belly, deep in my pussy.

“Yes, Gio! Yes! Oh fuck, yes!” I was like a wild animal, pumping my hips to meet him, stroke for stroke as I squeezed him until a rush of hot liquid filled my body. “Fuck,” I cried out as every knot of pleasure yanked its way from my skin until I was loose-limbed, satisfied and smiling like a fool.

“Harper,” he shouted one final time, pressing deep into me until he was empty, and I was full.

Of him.

“My goodness, that was even better than I imagined.”

He laughed and leaned forward, pressing a soft kiss to my forehead as he fell to his side, our bodies still entwined. We faced each other with goofy, satisfied smiles. “So you imagined what it would be like to fuck me?”

I rolled my eyes but nodded in answer. “Too many times over the years.” And that was the truth I shouldn’t have admitted.

I blamed the orgasms. It was the only explanation for my loose lips.

Gio

Too many times over the years.

Those words stuck with me until the slow, even breaths of Harper tore through the air. She fell asleep quickly while I laid awake and wondered what the hell I just did, sleeping with my best friend's sister. I could chalk it up to a mistake, but nothing that good could ever be a fucking mistake.

I knew it would feel good to bury my cock deep in her wet and waiting body, but I never imagined it would be so fucking good. Never imagined that she would like dirty talk as much as I did, never imagined that she Harper would put her all into fucking the way I did. Fuck, I just didn't think we could be so compatible.

And now, for the rest of my life, I would never not know that information.

But even that didn't stop me when, in the middle of the night, Harper snuggled her ass against my cock and we both perked right up. I wasn't sure if she was deep asleep or mildly aware of what she was doing, but I placed a hand on her hip and stilled her, rubbing my now hard cock against that magnificent ass.

"Gio?" She moaned the question and turned over her shoulder to smile at me. One slice of moonlight lit up her sleepy smile.

"Yeah, I'm right here baby."

She moaned softly and turned to face me, hitching her leg up over my hip. "Right

here is a good start,” she whispered and fisted my cock, running the head through her slick folds. “But right here is even better.” She rolled her hips and arched her back as she fed my erection into her hot, wet pussy. “Yes,” she hissed out as I slipped inside. “So good.”

I gripped her hips tighter and pulled her close, pushing my cock until we were fully connected. “Harper, fuck baby.”

Her lips curled into a grin and one hand pushed against my chest while the other gripped my bicep. “Do you always wake up this hard?”

“No but your ass pressed against my cock was enough to get me hard as steel.”

“Mmm,” she moaned. “My good fortune.” Harper rolled her hips, hungry for more of my cock, which I happily gave her. “God, I can feel you pulsing inside my body.”

I growled at her dirty words. “Harper, baby. Ride me. I want you to ride my fucking cock and come all over me. Put those beautiful tits, in my face and use my cock.”

A wild sound shot straight from her chest, traveling the length of her arms and into her palms before it shot straight to my chest. She gave me a shove until I was on my back, and she was on top of me, her body swallowing my cock whole. “Oh, fuck Gio. That’s deep.” She rolled her hips and took my last inch, which made her head roll back and her eyes close.

“That’s right, Harper. Ride my cock. Take every inch of me. Deep.”

“Yes,” she moaned and rode me harder. Every stroke was wild and hungry, every moan she let out a testament to her satisfaction. “Gio. I’m already close.”

“I know it, baby. I can feel your sweet cunt pulsing around me. Greedy and hungry.

She wants what I have to give her.”

“Yes,” she moaned, her hips moving faster and harder. She changed the angle to give her clit some relief and I helped her out, one hand massaged her tit while the other tortured her clit. “Oh fuck, Gio! Yes!”

She squeezed me so fucking tight I wasn’t sure I could hold out until she came. My thumb moved faster, and she detonated like a nuclear bomb but she didn’t stop moving, didn’t stop chasing her pleasure.

Or mine. “Harper,” I gritted out just as another, bigger orgasm hit and yanked my orgasm straight from my balls. “Oh fuck, baby. Yeah, shit.” My toes curled and my back arched, shooting my full load deep into the recesses of her gorgeous body. “Yes!”

Harper shook and convulsed, her full lips curled up into a satisfied smile before she collapsed on top of my chest, kissing the center with a loud, smacking noise. “Gio,” she sighed and kissed my chest again. “It’s a good thing I’m going back to California because otherwise I’d never let you leave this room.”

Yeah, I knew the feeling except I wasn’t all that thrilled that she was leaving. I wanted another night, possibly another week. I needed to spend every night lost in her body until I’d had enough.

No matter how long it took.



## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

O utside the window the birds chirped. I kept my eyes closed and smiled as I noted all the delicious aches in my muscles. I slept with Gio. No, I did so much more than sleep with Gio. I fucked him. He fucked me. We shared pleasure and orgasms. We talked dirty and did dirty, dirty things to one another.

It was fantastic.

And it was over.

His warm body was curved around the back of mine, his muscles pressed against my back and one arm hung lazily around my waist. It was a nice sensation. It was better than nice, in fact, and I let myself savor this feeling for one moment. Okay, maybe two moments because my body was warm and still lit with the buzz of a proper post-orgasmic hum.

There was even a ringing in this distance that could've been warning bells or my libido telling me to get one more orgasm in before it was time to pack up and leave Nevada behind for good. Again.

The ringing persisted and I opened my eyes. Dammit the buzzing wasn't the buzz of bliss but of a vibrating phone. My phone. I jackknifed up into a sitting position and looked around the room, the only light a sliver of sunlight that filtered a stripe across the bed.

I reached for my phone and squinted at the screen. Nicole. I cleared my throat and

rubbed my eyes. “Hello?”

“Harper, good job on the foster kids’ thing. The place looked fantastic, and the event host was beyond satisfied with your work.”

I frowned, unable to understand this complimentary version of my boss. “Thank you, Nicole.”

“Right. Of course. Serena is thrilled, of course, because she’s been wanting to expand into the Vegas market.”

I rolled my eyes at the emphasis she put on Vegas as if the word alone tasted like shit on her tongue. “I’m glad I could help. I’m headed back this afternoon once I make sure the venue space is set back to rights.” I resisted the urge to look at the sleeping hottie behind me, afraid my resolve my crack.

“Oh no you’re not,” Nicole said, her tone unusually even. “Serena has, against my better judgment, ordered that you stay put.”

“But I thought you said—”

Nicole cut me off, which I swore was her favorite thing to do. “I did. There are two events coming up over the next five or six weeks. A Week of Stars which is for a bunch of childhood cancers,” she added dismissively. “It’s a week-long event, fundraisers every night, all themed with varying guests lists. According to Serena it’s a who’s who of Vegas, whatever that means.”

I rolled my eyes. Again.

Gio’s phone rang and my whole body stiffened. Thankfully Nicole didn’t notice, not that it was any of her business.

“Anyway, there’s another event that’s smaller but just as important. A political fundraiser for a state senator that’s being held in ten days. Say you’re up for this, Harper.”

I grinned because I was more than ready to move to planning my own events, but I finally peeked over my shoulder because there was one thing I wasn’t yet ready for. Staying here in Steel City and dealing with the fallout of sleeping with Gio. And the fact that I wanted to keep sleeping with him and I no longer had the protection of distance to keep me from doing it. “I’m up for this, Nicole.”

“Excellent. I’ll send you all the details today. Call if you have questions or need help.” Nicole, as usual, ended the call before I could ask any questions.

Bitch.

I was thrilled at the opportunities Serena, the owner of the company, was giving me but I wasn’t as thrilled about the prospect of staying in Las Vegas or Steel City. There was Gio and then the matter of the bikers who may or may not be out to get me.

Shit. Things would definitely get awkward now. Wouldn’t they?

“Yeah, Cole, she’s fine. I’m fine too.”

Yep, definitely more awkward. I turned on the bed and watched the planes of his back move as he sat up and readjusted on the bed. Cole, my stupid, meddling, overprotective, loving brother. He was the reason Gio had been so hesitant at first, which meant last night was definitely a one-night event.

He turned to face me, a sheepish smile on his face. “Just checking in,” he mouthed to me as he nodded at whatever my brother was saying. His gaze, dark and intense, raked over my naked body while he casually chatted with my brother. “Yeah,

positive. Annoying but safe. And she's leaving today or tomorrow."

I shook my head at those words and pointed to my phone as if that was some sort of explanation. My nipples stiffened at the heat in his gaze and the way he reached forward and traced a thin line up the inside of my thigh.

Gio stood and turned to face me while he nodded and chatted with Cole. "Yeah, I'll make sure."

His gaze was like fire on my skin and suddenly I didn't care about any awkwardness or the fact that I had to stay here. All I cared about was this moment with this man, right now. I laid back on the bed and spread my legs, sliding my hands up the insides of my thighs, enjoying the way his gaze riveted in on my slick center.

He groaned and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Yeah, I'm listening." He sighed heavily. "Hollywood's release has been delayed. Shutdown at the prison."

One hand fell between my thighs, massaging my clit with my palm, fucking myself with two fingers. The other hand pinched my nipple, and I smiled at the pained expression on Gio's face, licking my lips at the way his cock surged to life and pointed to me.

His nostrils flared and then he knelt on the bed and mouthed one word to me. "Naughty."

I licked my lips and arched into his touch. "Oh!" My hips bucked when Gio added one of his thick fingers to mine, filling me up completely. He pumped his finger in time with mine and my body vibrated with electricity. "Fuck," I whispered.

Gio pulled his finger free and sucked it clean before pressing one finger to his lips to quiet me. "Quiet," he mouthed with a smile. "Yeah, she's around here somewhere."

Want to talk to her?”

I shook my head. There was no way in hell I could talk to my brother right now, when I had two fingers in my pussy and I was this close to a good morning orgasm.

But Gio’s face tilted into a mischievous grin that stole my breath and distracted me just enough that I accepted the phone before I realized what I was doing. “It’s Cole,” he said loudly to make sure Cole didn’t realize we were in bed together.

I fell back against the bed and closed my eyes, saying goodbye to that good morning orgasm. “Hey Cole. How’s it going?”

There was a smile in his voice when he greeted me. “Harp, I’m good. How are you holding up?”

I knew what he was asking, and I nodded even though he couldn’t see me, thankfully. “Yeah, I’m fine. Like Gio said, safe and annoying.” My eyes slammed open at the feel of Gio’s finger as it sank into my hungry pussy. “So fine,” I whispered.

Gio put a finger to his lips, a reminder to keep quiet.

I pointed to the phone with wide eyes. How in the hell was I supposed to keep quiet while he was touching me like that? “Yeah, Cole. I was a little scared but I’m good.” I kept my eyes shut and reveled in the way Gio touched me, his strokes alternated between long and slow and gentle, and hard, fast and demanding. My breathing shortened and my hips rolled, my mind focused more on Gio’s fingers than whatever Cole was saying.

“Harp, you still there?”

I nodded and sat up, grabbing Gio’s wrist to still his movements. I clamped my thighs

tighter around him when he tried to pull away. “Still here, Cole.”

“I’m gonna be gone a little longer than expected so maybe I’ll swing through before heading home.”

“No need,” I told him and pushed up onto my elbows, my gaze fixed on Gio’s. “I’m not leaving just yet. I have two more events to plan so I’m here for another month. At least.” I held my breath and scanned Gio’s face for his reaction. Was he happy or was he disappointed that he wouldn’t be seeing the back of me?

“That’s good. Gio will keep an eye on you until I get back.”

I groaned and my eyes fluttered shut when Gio used his shoulders to spread me wide and started finger fucking me again.

Cole laughed. “Gio isn’t that bad. You used to have a big crush on him,” he reminded me with another laugh.

I let out a strangled laugh. “Maybe I still do,” I shot back and ended the call.

“You’re staying,” he said, his gaze fixed on my face, studying me.

“I am,” I replied breathlessly. “Are you okay with that?”

He nodded and laid on the bed, chest down, with his head between my thighs. “I am, but,” he began and closed his lips around my clit.

I cried out my pleasure and pushed my hips towards his mouth, gripping his head to seek my own pleasure. “Yes!”

“But I’ll need another taste just to be sure.”

His mouth was magically efficient, somehow bringing me to the heights of pleasure and doing it quickly. The orgasm hit so swiftly I barely got a chance to enjoy the feel of his mouth and tongue on me. Again.

But it was the best damn good morning orgasm I could've asked for.

Gio

It was never hard for me to leave a woman's bed, and I never left a woman in my bed, but it took all the strength I possessed to leave Harper and head to the clubhouse. I didn't want to. Hell, I could've spent all damn day buried deep in her body, savoring her sweet pussy and making her scream my name.

But I had shit to do and so did she, because apparently, I had another month of Harper in town and—I hoped—in my bed. But more importantly, since she wasn't going back to California today, I needed to talk to the guys about what happened last night as well as what came next. Besides me. Already I couldn't wait to get back to my house and to Harper because I wasn't close to satisfied. Yet.

"Hiya, Gio." Cindy stopped in front of me the moment I stepped inside the clubhouse and wrapped her arms around me. "Ready to pick up where we left off the other night? I'm sure we can find someplace private."

Shit. I stopped and stared at the busty blonde. Had it really only been a few days since I had my dick buried in her throat? It seemed like a lifetime ago. "Not now. Business."

She pushed her lips out in a pout. "Find me when you're free. I need you baby."

I stared at her again and shook my head. I wanted to tell her that I didn't think so, that it likely wouldn't happen again but I didn't need the headache or the drama. "Gotta go."



Half the guys were in the office with Slate, who noticed me first. “Well, well, if it isn’t Cinderella back from the ball.”

I flipped him off. “It was a gala, not a ball.”

Slate frowned. “What’s the difference?”

I shrugged. “How the fuck should I know?” I stepped inside the room and scanned each face. Diesel and Hawk were here, Maverick and Rocky were too, but there was no Rebel. “Something happened last night.”

And just like that all the chatter in the room stopped and all gazes swung to me. “What’s up,” Diesel asked.

I gave my brothers a rundown of last night after the gala. The bikers. The shooting. Everything except fucking Cole’s sister until my balls were empty and my cock ached to do it again. “Even if they haven’t realized exactly who I am, it won’t take them long to figure it out.”

“This problem should go away in a few hours, right?” Rocky stared at me with an unrecognizable expression.

“No. She’s gotten two more events over the next month. At least,” I added using her words that were either a warning or a simple explanation of her uncertain timeline. “And they’re at the Regency.”

“Fuck,” Diesel groaned.

“Yeah,” I sighed. “She’s at my place and I’ve talked to Cole.”

“Stick to her like glue,” Rocky instructed.

“I will.” Of course I wouldn’t let anything happen to her, with or without Cole.  
“What did we find anything at the hotel last night?”

“Yeah,” Slate began and launched into a detailed tech explanation that none of followed. “I was able to get into the casino footage, but I didn’t find anything, which means the deal didn’t go down last night or they did it someplace without cameras. Which if I were dealing in shady shit, would be my choice too.”

“Then what the fuck were the Blood Reapers doing at the Regency last night?” It was a rhetorical question, and the answer came to me immediately. “They were there for Harper. Fuck.” She was in more trouble than either of us realized. “Then I’m glad I took one of those fuckers down.”

An annoyed growl sounded behind me that could only belong to one grouchy asshole.  
“So you’re the reason the Blood Reapers are shitting bricks today.”

“Rebel, so nice of you to join us.” I flashed a shit-eating grin that earned me the middle finger.

“Asshole,” he muttered and shoulder checked me as he walked past and dropped down in the first chair he found. “I was keeping an eye on those Blood Reapers, and I couldn’t figure out what all the activity was about. Now it makes sense, you killed one of their men.”

“They were chasing us down the highway and kicking at the car. I did what I had to.”

“Yeah, and now we’re probably looking at war. Again.” Rebel scrubbed a hand over his face.

“Or not.” My mind raced with possibilities that didn’t involve another all-out war.  
“Did you see any guns, like more than usual?”

“No, but they weren’t carrying big ass crates of guns in and out of their clubhouse if that’s what you’re asking.” Rebel shook his head.

“They’re worried about this deal which means it’s a big deal for them, enough that they’d go after Harper for what she might have heard. We find those guns or who the guns were meant for, and we fill the need.”

“Get in the middle of some Blood Reapers business?” Rocky let out a low whistle and shook his head. “That’s a bold choice when they haven’t done anything but wreck a rental.”

“Maybe,” I conceded. “Or we stop the shit before it gets started.” But we needed to know more first.

“Slate, what did you find on their connection to the Regency?” Diesel was always all business when it came to the MC, which was why he was our president.

“Maverick and Hawk saw a few Reapers hanging around but the only person they were with the entire time was Carl Miller.”

“Yeah, smarmy guy going bald with a growing beer baby,” Hawk said with a smile and patted his belly. “What’s his deal anyway?”

“No deal,” Slate offered. “He is as boring as they come. Middle manager at the Regency for the past six years. He makes fifty grand a year, minimal debt that you’d expect in the form of a mortgage and car payments, a few credit cards. His mom is dead, and his dad lives on the East Coast with wife number three. Nothing important or interesting, other than his association with the Blood Reapers.”

That didn’t make sense. “No blood or familial ties to any of the Reapers?”

“None I can find,” Slate sighed heavily. “But I don’t have names on all of them. Yet.”

It wasn’t what I wanted to hear but that wasn’t Slate’s fault or anyone else’s. “So what do we do until then?”

“Keep Harper safe,” Rocky ordered. “Stick close and be the best damn fake boyfriend she’s ever had.”

Rebel laughed. “You really think that’s going to keep the Blood Reapers away from her?”

“Maybe not,” Diesel chimed in. “But when we make our next move, they’ll know exactly why.”

That was ominous as hell, and I liked it. “I’m in,” I shot back. “Whatever the plan is, count me in.” With club business out of the way, it was time to get back home to Harper.

I had plans for her that would last all afternoon and late into the night.

Harper

Gio ordered me to stay at his house until he came back but hours have passed, and I've gone over the materials Nicole sent me—twice—and I'm ready to do more. Now. My rental car was likely at the clubhouse, which was where Gio was, and I couldn't go there without him freaking out. That was the first thing I noticed when I got up this morning—that my car was missing. I wasn't sure how I was gonna explain the bullet holes and dents on the side to the rental agency. I knew there was an auto repair shop at the clubhouse, so maybe that's why Gio took it. And then there was the small matter of having nothing to wear other than the dress I wore to the gala last night. It took some time, but I put on Gio's blue shirt over my dress and tied it at the waist, foregoing stockings in favor of a casual daytime look. Satisfied, or merely resigned to my appearance, I grabbed my laptop and pulled up a rideshare app and headed to the Regency to speak to Carl.

He wasn't happy when I stepped into his office, as evidenced by the deep scowl he wore and the angry noise he let out when he spotted me. "What in the hell are you doing here?"

I smiled. "It's good to see you too, Carl." I didn't care that he wasn't happy to see me. The only thing I cared about was living and putting on these two events, not to mention kicking ass while I did it. "Good news or bad news?"

He tossed his pen across the desk and raked both hands through his thinning hair. "I don't imagine there's any good news."

"Then you would be wrong. There are two more events booked here," I shared the

information with a smile while I told him about the fundraisers on the schedule.

“And you’re the one in charge of them, right?” His lips pursed into a thin line. “No offense but you’ve pissed off a lot of people.”

“Oh, bullshit,” I shook my head. “I’m damn good at my job Carl and that’s all I’m here to do. I told you and your friend that I didn’t hear a goddamn thing and still they came after me. Tell them to leave me the fuck alone because I didn’t hear shit and there won’t be any problems.”

“Don’t you think I told them that?” His voice grew louder, and his eyes went wide.

I smacked my palms on his deck and leaned forward to make sure there was no confusion. “I don’t know, Carl and you know what else? I don’t care. I’m here to do my job, not get involved in whatever illegal shit you have going on. And by the way, your buddies trashed my rental and I’m not paying for it. Figure it out.”

He nodded. “Submit the expense and I’ll take care of it. I didn’t mean to get you mixed up in this Harper, but now you are. Just go back to wherever you came from and have someone else do this.”

“I can’t do that. Tell them to back off and if they do that, nobody has anything to worry about.”

“I can’t tell them anything, Harper. We’re business partners but not like that. They’re worried you might talk to someone in law enforcement about this deal, which you don’t know anything about.”

“Exactly.” I folded my arms and lifted my chin high, showing off false bravado to cover the fear.

“You should get out of town, for your own sake. I didn’t tell them about your boyfriend but I’m sure they’ll figure it out.”

That was the same thing Gio said. “And if they leave me alone, they’ll be able to go about their business without any interference. That’s a promise.” I hoped.

Carl shook his head and scrubbed one hand, and the other, down his face. “It’s out of my hands, Harper. Sorry.”

“Yeah, you seem really sorry.” I rolled my eyes. “I want to live, and I want to do my job so that when I do make it back home, I have a big fat promotion waiting for me. I’m not trying to be a hero, okay?”

“It’s out of my hands. If you need anything for the events, let me know.”

I knew when I was being dismissed but I didn’t let it bother me the way it usually did. I had more important things to worry about, so I left his office and went in search of schematics for each ballroom inside the Regency. I had a guest list for the political fundraiser and that was my top priority. Ten days to plan an event, I must be crazy.

And I should’ve been paying attention to where I was going.

“Just who I was looking for.” The deep, masculine voice was menacing and when I looked up, I wasn’t surprised to find the infamous Viper glowering at me.

“You must have me confused with someone else.” I took a step back and attempted to go around him.

He stepped to the side and blocked my path. “No, it’s you.” He took a big step forward and before I knew what he was doing, one giant hand closed around my throat. “Listen to me, bitch. If you say anything to anyone about what you think you

heard, I promise I will gut you like a fish and watch you bleed out. Slowly.”

My heart raced but I tried to breathe evenly, refusing to let this creep see my terror. “Nothing to tell.”

Anger sparked in his pale green eyes. “Who drove you home last night?” He squeezed tighter, constricting my airway. “Who killed my man?”

“Don’t. Know.” My hands went to his forearms when he squeezed tighter.

“Who, goddammit!” He eased off when I dug my nails into his arms.

“Nothing to tell and there was no home to take me to because you and your goons destroyed my rental.”

“Then maybe you should go back to wherever you came from,” he offered with a grimace and tightened his hold on me again.

“Or maybe you should do business in more private places.” I shoved at his chest, but he only held me tighter, lifting me until my feet no longer touched the floor.

“I won’t let anyone stand in the way of this deal. Especially not some snooty bitch like you.”

Snooty. Who in the hell was he calling snooty? I clawed at his forearms, but he didn’t let up and I moved my hands higher, scratching down his face until he released me with a roar of pain. “Asshole,” I grumbled and ran down the hall.

His heavy-booted footfalls sounded behind me and before I knew it, he was on me and spun me around. “Bitch!” He pulled his hand back and smacked me across the face. “Keep your fucking mouth shut and get the fuck out of my town.” He glared at



me and then spit in my face before he turned and walked away.

I watched until he was out of sight, and then I ducked into the first empty room I found and called Gio.

“You’re not home,” he growled.

“I’m not,” I said in a shaky voice. “I’m at the Regency. Come get me, please. I need you Gio.”

There wasn’t even a pause before he spoke. “I’m on my way.”

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

Motherfucker.

I stormed into the Las Vegas Regency on a warpath, ready to fuck up whoever stood between me and Harper. The ride to the hotel was quick but the whole damn time my mind replayed the sound of Harper's voice, small and uncertain. Fucking terrified.

"Excuse me, sir, can I help you?" I didn't want to snap at the woman in the pale blue skirt suit but goddammit I was furious.

"Carl Miller. Where the fuck is he?"

She winced at my words.

"I'm sorry. Where is he?"

The woman pointed to a set of doors that led away from the casino. "Through those doors, last door on the left."

"Thank you. And I'm sorry." I didn't wait for her to accept it or not—I didn't give a damn—I simply followed her directions and went in search of Carl Miller, soon to be dead man. As I wandered down the hall, every man and woman I encountered diverted their gazes and made way for me. None of them wanted to be on the wrong side of my anger.

I spotted the man I knew to be Carl and quickly closed the distance between us. I

snatched the fucker up by his cheap shirt collar and pressed him against the wall.  
“Where the fuck is Harper?”

“I don’t know. She left my office close to an hour ago.”

“Yeah, and then you sicced your friend Viper on her?”

His eyes went wide, and he shook his head. “Fuck no, man. I tried to get her to leave because they won’t let up. She didn’t like that and she left, that was the last I saw of her. I swear.” His fear was real, but I didn’t give a shit. He struggled against me, and I laid a forearm across his throat.

“He put his fucking hands on her!” That was the part I couldn’t move past. “I’m holding you personally responsible, Carl Miller. I know where you live. I know everything about you. Choose wisely.” I released him and spun in a half-circle. Harper said she was in the main banqueting hall from last night, which was where I was.

“Harper, where are you baby?” I shouted.

For a full minute the hall was silent but eventually her voice sounded, it was small and shaky. “In here.”

I glared at Carl and stalked to the nearest door, opening each one until I found her. “Fuck, Harper!” I exclaimed when I spotted her curled up against a metal shelf with her arms wrapped around her legs.

“Gio?”

I stepped inside. “Come here, baby.” She looked so fucking small and helpless. So scared. I pulled her to her feet and wrapped her in my arms. “You’re okay Harper.

I'm here now. I'm here." I stood in that tiny ass closet and held her close until her body stopped shaking, until her heart pounded normally against my chest.

"Thank you for coming, Gio." She pulled back just enough to meet my gaze.

"Always, Harper." I held her chin in my hand, turning her left and right as my anger grew. "He did this?" I ran my thumb along the angry red mark on her left cheek.

She nodded and put her hand against mine over the red mark. "He was angry," she whispered. "He wanted to know who shot his friend and he, um, threatened to gut me if I told anyone what I heard."

"That motherfucker is dead," I growled. "Anything else?"

She nodded and tilted her head backwards. "He grabbed me by the throat, really hard. At one point my feet were dangling in the air, but I'm fine now," she insisted. "Just a little shaken up."

A little shaken up. This woman was stronger than she gave herself credit for. "You're gonna be fine." My hands fell away from her body and clenched into hard fists. It took every fucking ounce of restraint I had not to hunt Viper down and set his whole fucking life on fire.

Harper shook her head. "I'm sorry, Gio. I know you told me to stay home but I thought if I could get a few things done ahead of schedule," she sighed and shook her head again. "It doesn't matter what I was thinking. I should've stayed put."

I smiled. "I'd love to get that in writing when you're not shaking and in shock." I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and guided her out of the closet. "You've always been hardheaded."

She gasped. “Have not.”

“Of course you have.” I leaned in close enough that my lips brushed against her ear. “The only time you seem to listen is when my face or my cock is buried between those soft thighs.”

She gasped again, her cheeks flushed, and her gaze filled with heat. “What can I say, that’s the only time you really make me want to obey you.”

Blood fired my cock up and too soon he was pressed against my zipper and begging to come out and play. “Good to know. How about a ride to clear your head?”

Wariness filled her gaze. “I can’t,” she whispered softly. “I’m not wearing any panties.”

Okay this was going to test my patience. “I don’t mind. Just be sure to press against me real tight.”

She studied me for a long minute. “You’re not mad?”

“Hell yeah, I’m mad. I’m pissed off that fucker put his hands on you and scared the shit out of you. I’m mad that Carl thought he could run you out of town. But I’m not mad at you, Harp.”

Her shoulders relaxed and she flashed a weak smile.

“But next time, a call would be nice.”

“I didn’t want to bother you.”

I smiled. “That’s never bothered you before and it’s never bothered me either.” I slid

the helmet over her head and hopped on my bike first. “Come on, this motorcycle ain’t gonna ride itself.”

She smiled, bigger and more genuinely this time. “It would be really cool if it could.”

Her words managed to put a smile on my face but the more miles my bike ate up, the more my anger festered and stewed until it was a bubbling, piping hot cauldron of rage. Harper didn’t deserve what happened to her, hell no woman did, but especially her and now the Blood Reapers would have to pay. Viper and his entire crew would regret they ever thought of threatening someone who mattered to me. Carl too, that motherfucker would pay because he’s the one who put Harper in harm’s way.

No matter what it took, no matter how much blood would be shed, how many lives were lost, I would have my fucking revenge.

I would relish it.

I would lean into it.

Have fun with it until the threat was neutralized.

Permanently.

Tonight, without realizing it Harper had saved their lives. The feel of her pressed against my back, the way her hands grazed over my abs soothed me in a way I couldn’t put into words but by the time we got back to the clubhouse, I was calm enough to plan my revenge.

It would be more effective that way.

Harper

“Y ou know you can’t spend every single day here watching over me, don’t you?” There was laughter in my voice as I looked over at Gio who sat hunched over a round table, gaze fixed on something on his phone. In the two and a half weeks that I’d been staying with him he was an almost permanent fixture at the corner table of the small office I’d been given use of while I was working at the Regency.

He shrugged before looked up and his gaze slammed into mine. “I don’t have to be here every day, just the days you’re here.” He flashed that irresistible grin never failed to put a smile on my face. “And you said today was a short day. Right?”

I shook my head, a teasing grin lifted the corners of my mouth. “The one guy who actually listens to me is my bodyguard,” I mumbled, more to myself than to Gio.

He barked out a laugh. “First of all, I’m glad to see that your taste in men has improved. Second of all, I am so much more than your bodyguard.” The teasing glint in his eyes turned them more gold than hazel and there was an answering pulsing between my thighs.

“So much more? How so,” I asked even though I knew I was playing with fire. Gio wasn’t just an arrogant biker, he was funny and charming and protective. He cared about me, and he made my body sing. He was just... more than I ever gave him credit for. “I’m waiting?”

He wiggled his brows. “If you need an explanation, I’m happy to go lock that door and show you what I mean.”

Yes, please. That's what I wanted to say, instead I shook my head and turned back to the finalized guest list. "Maybe later. We still have an hour of work to do." I had to focus on the work because if I didn't then I would be forced to think about how terrified I was to even set foot inside The Regency, and if I thought about that I might just pack my bags and head back to California on the next flight. And that would derail my career which just might send me back to Steel City.

A prospect that wasn't as unappealing as it was a few weeks ago.

So I was determined to buck up and deal with the fear. I had Gio and the Steel Demons at my back and if that wasn't enough then nothing would be.

"Okay, I'm done." It was a little longer than an hour, which explained why Gio's expression of relief was so dramatic it teased a laugh out of me. "Ready to go?"

"Yep." He jumped to his feet and shoved his phone into some hidden pocket in his vest. "Let's get the hell out of here." He snatched my hand and clasped our palms together. "How do you spend your days inside these windowless rooms?"

It wasn't the first time someone posed that question to me, and I always gave the same answer. "You don't notice it after a while."

"You grew up in the sunny desert and now you live in the sunniest fucking place on earth, no way it doesn't bother you." He pulled me close when a group of tipsy men stumbled out of one of the gaming rooms.

He was right but the truth was sad. It was pathetic. "I spend more time in those windowless rooms than the sunshine so actually this," I waved towards the sky, "is more jarring than ballrooms."

"Hmph," he groaned and handed me a helmet.



“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.” He made his eyebrows jump before turning away to throw his leg over the bike. “Come on.”

I was curious to see what this surprise was even though I was pretty sure it was just sex, which was amazing because sex with Gio was always amazing. In fact it surpassed that mild word every single time—mind-blowing was more like it. It’s temporary, I reminded myself even as I hung on tight and pressed my body to his, though as I’d been staying at his place for coming up to three weeks, I was getting a bit too used to being around him. Being on the back of Gio’s motorcycle was always such a rush, a thrilling and terrifying rush that left me breathless and a little wobbly in the legs when we arrived at our destination.

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I’d thought he was taking us to the clubhouse but then he headed out of town towards the warehouse district. Eventually we went down a dirt track and pulled up at a large building. I jumped off and looked up at the building with metal and wood twisted to make a skull, the words above and above it declared it to be Demon Head Guns. “Is this your place?”

Gio flashed a proud smile and nodded. “It belongs to the MC so yeah it belongs to all of us.”

That was an interesting bit of information. “Right. You’ve been with me so you’re probably not getting a lot of work done.”

His lips tugged to one side, and he hooked an arm around me and led me inside. “I’m not bringing you to work with me, Harp. This is for you, and for me.”

I stopped but Gio pushed me ahead with a short laugh. “How’s this for me? I don’t own a gun and I don’t want to know how to shoot one.” My heart pounded against my chest so loud it almost blocked out the sound of guns being fired beyond that giant metal door.

“You don’t own a gun, yet. And you do need to learn how to shoot one because it could be a matter of life or death. Like you said I can’t be around you twenty-four-seven even if I want to be, and this way we can both rest easily knowing you can handle some shit if it goes down.”

My heart went completely still, and his words sank in. There would inevitably come a time when Gio wouldn’t be at my side and even if that time never came there might come a time when he couldn’t do it all on his own. I would have to step in and don my own cape to help save myself. I didn’t like it, and it scared me shitless, but he was right. “Okay. Fine.”

His smile brightened and his chest puffed out proudly.

“But if I don’t like, we stop.”

“You’ll love it, I promise.” He dragged me towards the door and punched in a code. “It’s nice when there are no life-or-death consequences on the other side.”

“That sounds like bullshit but I’m here and I’m willing to give it a try.”

Of course Gio was a good teacher, and he went through the motions to teach me about gun safety, how to load and unload the damn thing. It was all very mechanical, and his bland delivery helped take the mystery out of the murder machine. Eventually I was ready to give it a go.

“Got it?”

I nodded. “Yep, I think so.”

“Good.” He smiled and nestled up behind me, cradling his hands around mine. “Get a feel for the gun. Grip the metal and let the weight of it sit in your hands.” His words came out on a grunted whisper. “Yeah, just like that.”

I barely suppressed the shiver that his breath words sent down my spine. “Okay. Now what?”

“Now line up your shot. Aim for center mass. It’s the biggest part of the body and increases your chances of landing a bullet.”

“Okay. Squeeze the trigger slowly and keep your hands steady.”

I sucked in a deep breath, and I let it out slowly while I squeezed the trigger. The whole world slowed down as I watched the bullet travel down the alley before it tore through the paper target. “It landed! It landed!” I jumped up and down and spun to find Gio right in front of my face. “Did you see that?”

He wore a heart-stopping smile. “Yeah, I saw it. Great job.”

“Thank you.” I took a nervous leap forward and wrapped my arms around his waist. “Thank you,” I whispered again.

“You liked it didn’t you?”

I shook my head. “It’s way too loud and even now my heart is racing like crazy. Honestly? I hope that I never have to shoot a gun but, but it feels really good knowing that if I need to I can.” I hugged him again. “That means a lot to me, Gio.”

His arms went around me and squeezed tight. “Anytime, babe.”

I smiled and took a step back to practice loading the gun on my own. “Babe? Is that what you call your women?”

He laughed. “I don’t call them.”

I glared at him. “Seriously?”

He nodded and shrugged nonchalantly. “They know the score so no one’s feelings are getting hurt. I’m not a bad guy.”

“I know you’re not it’s just, that sounds callous and gross.”

“Now you sound like your brother.” His smile dimmed but only for the questions of seconds. “What about you?”

“What about me?” I fumbled with loading the magazine, grunted a curse and tried again.

“Tell me about your life in California.”

I didn’t want to share the details because they were depressing as hell and hearing them out loud sounded downright pathetic. “Not much to tell. I have a few friends, but I work too much to actually spend any time with them. There’s no one special and there hasn’t been, not even a pet.” I was too scared to look up because I didn’t want to see pity in his hazel eyes. “I can hear you thinking, Gio.”

He sighed. “It’s just that it doesn’t sound like you. When I thought of your life out there, I thought you were happy and full of life with lots of friends, maybe a chubby cat who left hair all over the place. Movie nights at your place, beach parties and road trips.”

I sighed heavily and took aim at the paper target once again. One steadying breath and I squeezed the trigger three times and then three more times. “You really imagined my life like that?”

“Yeah. Of course I did. You were meant to have that life, Harp. I don’t like that you don’t have it.”

I laughed and turned to face him. “The picture you painted does sound pretty nice.”

His gaze was serious. “Have you considered working for yourself?”

“I have,” I admitted with a nod. “But I’m not ready, at least I don’t feel as if I’m ready. I have some contacts but not enough to rival the big names, and I’m not sure my connections with vendors are enough to get priority over other event planning companies.” I had given it quite a lot of thought over the past twelve months and I was pleased he was so attentive and caring about my career. None of my other boyfriends—not that Gio was my boyfriend—had ever even asked me about work.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

I shrugged. “You’re just really sweet, Gio.”

He rolled his eyes, but his cheeks went a little pink. “Yeah, that’s me. Sweet as pie. Come on.”

I watched him interact with the guys working the gun range and the store and it reminded me so much of the boy I crushed on throughout my teenage years. He was charming and friendly, so damn personable that everyone around him felt better just by interacting with him.

After I’d handed the gun back and we’d left the range, we stopped beside his bike and

he turned to me, circling his hands around my body. “Okay, ready to head home?”

I shook my head as my breath hitched and put my hands on his shoulders. “Not yet.” I pressed my lips to his and he groaned, letting his hands slide down until he was gripping my ass. I pushed closer, deepening the kiss until I was hot and needy and ready to jump him right there in the parking lot.

Gio pulled me close enough that I felt his cock, long and hard against my belly. He growled again and kissed a trail of heat from my mouth to my throat.

I moaned and ran my fingers through his hair, tugging just enough to get his attention. “How fast can we get back to your place?”

He flashed a wolfish smile and put the helmet on my head before he jumped on the bike and motioned for me to join him.

I did, smiling at the cool wind on my skin as Gio pushed his bike to the limits in a hurry to get us home.

Harper

The sound of the bike engine as it died was deafening inside the garage or maybe that was just the loud pounding of my heart. My body was strung tight, like a violin string ready to snap and my whole body vibrated with need. My thighs still trembled from the feel of the bike engine as it roared between my thighs and my nipples were so hard they ached inside my bra.

“Harper.” Gio’s voice was dark and gravelly, rough as though he struggled the way I did.

I blinked and looked up with a question in my eyes. “Did you say something?”

His lips curled up at the corners. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I answered even as I shook my head no.

Gio’s hazel eyes sparkled with mischief. “If you get off the bike, I promise to find your boo-boo and kiss it better.”

Fuck yes, please. It took another moment but finally I jumped off the bike and nearly fell when my legs wobbled. “I’ll hold you to that.”

“Good.” His face lit up as he got off the bike and set my helmet on the seat. “Because I plan on holding you a lot. All night.”

“Good.” My body vibrated and Gio reached out to grab me before I went down,

holding me close.

“Let’s go.” Before I took one step, Gio bent and tossed me over his shoulder. One hand gripped the back of my thigh possessively as he weaved down the hall and up the stairs that took us to his bedroom. He dropped me on the bed unceremoniously and started pulling off his clothes. “Fuck, the way I want you Harper.”

His words were so fucking rough and visceral that I felt them down to my toes. “It’s a good thing I’m right there then, isn’t it?”

“So fucking good.” He nodded as the last of his clothes hit the floor. Gio was beautiful as he stood and stared at me, beautifully naked. His cock was thick and hungry, but most of all it was leaking at the tip and my mouth watered.

My brows arched up. “Very good indeed.”

His cock twitched at my words, and I got to my knees and crawled to the edge of the bed. “Harper, I’m close. Too close to the edge.”

“Perfect.” I gripped his cock in my hand and gave it a rough squeeze, loving the tortured groan that fell from his lips. “I think I might like having you on the edge.”

His lips curled into a sexy snarl. “Mouth open,” he demanded.

Instinctively my mouth opened, and I stuck out my tongue, offering it to him with a teasing expression, daring him to do what he so clearly wanted to do.

“Fuck,” he groaned the minute the heavy weight of his cock landed on my tongue. “Harper, babe.” His hips thrust in long slow strokes, grunting his pleasure at the wet slide against my tongue and to the back of my throat.



I moaned as the salty bead hit my tongue and his whole body shook.

“Harper,” he grunted and gripped a handful of my hair, fucking my mouth. “Show me how much you like this cock.”

I tightened my lips around his length and flattened my tongue, sucking him hard and deep. The sounds he made were so fucking erotic, so desperate and needy, it was like its own aphrodisiac. I took him as deep as I could before I gagged, and then I took him a little deeper. My pussy was so wet it gushed with every stroke of his cock and I ached to get out of these clothes and take his cock in my body.

“Stop,” he growled but I didn’t listen, I sped up, sucking him harder and taking him deeper until his legs shook and he gripped my hair so tight it hurt. “Harp,” he started again but I pulled back just enough to swirl my tongue around the swollen head of his cock. “Harper.” He pulled me back and bent low, so his gaze met mine. “Out of these fucking clothes. Now.”

My breath hitched and I stepped off the bed, stripping out of my clothes as fast as any woman ever had. And when I was naked and shaking with need, I stood there and stared at Gio’s beautiful naked body.

“On the bed.”

I sat calmly on the bed and used my arm strength to scoot back before I laid back and spread my legs. “I’m so wet, Gio. Need you know.”

He knelt on the bed and gripped my thighs, pushing them open uncomfortably and then he watched me, his gaze raked over my body as he stroked his hard length. It was an erotic sight, his jaw clenched tight, and his nostrils flared. “So fucking wet. Is that wet pussy just for me?”

I nodded, moaning when he teased me with the blunt head of his cock. “Only for you, Gio.”

Heat flared in his eyes as he pushed in just an inch, his shallow strokes drove me wild and then he gave me another inch, repeating the move over and over again until I felt the heavy weight of his balls against my ass. “Fuck. I love how wet you are Harper. Wet as fuck and so tight,” he growled instead of finishing the sentence. He pulled out and slammed deep. Again and again.

“Again,” I urged and dug my heels into the mattress.

His hips picked up speed and he dug his fingertips into my thighs, pounding harder and harder until the bed smacked against the wall and my breasts jiggled. “Fuck, baby.” He moved like a man possessed, fucking me hard and fast.

“Gio,” I moaned the warning as my toes curled beneath my feet and pleasure started to work its way up my body.

“I feel that sweet pussy pulsing around me. You’re so close.” His hands slid up my thighs until he found my clit, both thumbs double-teamed my clit until the dam broke and my body erupted like a long-dormant volcano.

“Gio!” I cried out and the sound was loud and animalistic, blending with the sound of slick skin smacking together the perfect harmony of orgasmic bliss.

Gio fucked me harder and harder until he let out a loud roar of his own, pumping those last strokes until I was full of him and his essence. “Fuck, Harper babe. So fucking good.” He collapsed on top of me, kissing my jaw and my neck before he rolled off and brought me with him. “Never gonna get enough of you.”

Oh how I desperately wished that was true.

Gio

I was in trouble, and I knew it and that trouble had very fucking little to do with the Blood Reapers, at least directly. It was Harper. She was... fuck, she was more than I expected. More than I could have ever anticipated a woman could be and the only thing that mattered to me was keeping her safe and in my arms.

I was in a bad way and there was only one group of men I trusted to have my back and keep my head on straight. My brothers in the MC, which was why I found myself marching into the clubhouse in determined strides after I made sure Harper made it to The Regency safe and sound. I was a man on a mission, and I would not be distracted or waylaid.

“Hiya, Gio.” Cindy stepped in my path wearing a tight, white tank top that told the whole world she wasn’t wearing a bra and a tiny denim skirt that said she might not be wearing any panties either. She pushed her tits against me and stuck her lips out in a blood-red pout. “How’s it going?”

“Fine,” I muttered distractedly as I attempted to go around her. “I’m kinda busy right now.”

She stepped in front of me again with another pout. “You owe me. I didn’t get a full night and I’m not giving up until I get it.”

My jaw clenched in annoyance at her persistence. I grabbed her arms tighter than I needed to, but I wanted to make sure she got the message. “I get to decide if or when we have another night, Cindy. Not you.”

She pouted again and licked her lips. “But you loved the way I took your cock, didn’t you?”

Under any other circumstances that pout and the mention of her head game would’ve swayed me, but I had something more than that, an interesting woman who I had feelings for and who handled my cock like a pro. “Doesn’t matter. I have shit to do Cindy and you aren’t on the list.” I took a step forward, this time daring her to interrupt me again.

She didn’t—wisely—and I found the guys in our meeting room waiting for church to start. I was the last one to arrive, which pissed me off, but it couldn’t be helped since I had to make sure Harper was safe first. “Well, well,” Rocky shouted the moment I walked into the room with a mischievous smile on his face.

I flipped him off and took my seat, anxious to say what I needed to say but first there was other administrative shit to deal with, including the state of the trip that Cole and Rebel were still on. “Apparently there’s some shit going on with the corrections people so they’re twiddling their thumbs waiting for Hollywood to get let go.”

Slate frowned. “They still haven’t released him?”

“Nope. It’s not his shit that’s the problem, there was a riot and now they have to clear everyone set for release. It’s paperwork but you know how the government works, in its own sweet ass time.” It wasn’t ideal or maybe it was—the longer it took, the more time it would be before I had to come face to face with my best friend and what I’d done to his sister.

Diesel nodded from his perch at the head of the table. “And what about the Blood Reapers?” he asked Slate. “What do we have on them?”

Slate nodded, sucked in a breath and let it out slowly before he gave us all a rundown.

“The Blood Reapers MC is into some bad shit, and I don’t mean shit that makes suburban moms and old people clutch their bags and cross the street, I mean actual bad shit. Most of their business is with the cartel,” he began and showed photos of them meeting with three different cartel bosses. “There are no second chances with the cartels, so Viper doesn’t take any chances. One fuck up on their end could mean the end of the entire MC.”

“Good,” I grumbled. “It means they have a lot to lose.”

Slate nodded. “Yeah, but it also means we need to be extra careful unless we want to go head-to-head with the Santangelo Cartel, the Blood Reapers biggest customer.” He shrugged at my scowl. “I’m not saying it can’t be done, I’m just saying that we need an abundance of caution here.”

“We can be cautious,” I replied easily. “But we have to respond before they start thinking they can walk all over us.”

“He’s right,” Diesel answered in a serious, deep voice. His agreement surprised me, not because he didn’t always have our backs but because it was his job to be cautious. “But I happen to know that the Black Devils MC is expecting a big shipment of coke and weed.”

Hawk frowned. “That all-black MC from Henderson? Do we really want to get in the middle of that shit?”

Diesel nodded. “We don’t want to, but we have to. We take those drugs, and we gift them to the Black Devils MC. We won’t make a fucking dime, but it’ll be worth it because it’ll look like the Reapers tried to cut the cartel out of the deal.”

The room fell silent, each of us in awe at the brilliant mind that was our president. Rocky wasn’t surprised but everybody else looked at the man like he had some kind

of superpower. “So, what’s the plan?” I was eager to make life difficult for Viper and his crew since he was determined to make life difficult and terrifying for Harper.

“What’s the rush?”

Shit. I realized my mistake and then I nodded, sharing with my brothers what happened yesterday. “That fucker had his arm around her throat with a gun to her head.” Just thinking about it pissed me off. “She’s family. Period.” She was a hell of a lot more than that but that was a conversation for another day.

“Is that all she is,” Hawk asked, his keen eyes didn’t miss a damn thing.

I nodded. “As far as you’re concerned, yeah.” My brows furrowed and I glared at all of my brothers, daring them to say anything else which, in hindsight, was a big fucking mistake.

Rocky was the first to chime in. “Seems like she’s more than that, sleeping at your house and probably in your bed. Spending time together and the history between you two.” He held up his hands as if he was just making conversation.

“Drop it, Rocky.”

“He’s right,” Maverick said with a grin. “Seems like you two have grown... close.”

“Does that change our plans?”

“No, though I’m guessing you and Sniper are gonna be having a conversation when he gets back. You can wave your balls goodbye then,” Diesel muttered. Determined to move forward with the current plan, he got back to the matter at hand, “Tonight we’re going to grab those drugs and gift them to our fellow MC brothers and then our trap is set.” He looked around with that stony expression he usually wore and gave a

curt nod. “Everyone not already assigned to be someplace else, meet back here in eleven. Don’t be late.”

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After our meeting I was desperate to get back home and check in with Harper, but she texted me saying she was back at my place and safe, so instead, I hung out at the clubhouse and prepped for the mission ahead. At eleven we met, gathered our arms and solidified the plan before we headed to the Blood Reapers warehouse that posed as a legitimate business. Slate had managed to hack the digital entry pad and in less than a minute we were inside the warehouse, filled with drugs and guns and other counterfeit goods that were so fucking tempting to take.

But Diesel urged restraint. “We’re here with a very specific mission tonight. If you have something else in mind, bring it to the table tomorrow.” He looked each of us in the eye to make sure we understood and then we moved into place, executing the plan.

The warehouse was gigantic, and we moved stealthily until we found what we were looking for. I laughed at the way it was laid out. “Thankfully we aren’t dealing with a criminal mastermind.” Hawk shook his head as we found the crate labeled with the Black Devils MC. “Let’s do this shit and get the hell out of here.”

We loaded up the waiting van that T-bone had driven to the warehouse until the Black Devils crate was empty. Slate had looped the footage so there wouldn’t be any trace we were ever here, so we moved quickly and got the hell out. Quickly.

“Time to go,” I grunted after thirty minutes of loading bricks.

Diesel nodded. “Now we split up. Me, Hawk, and Maverick will drop off the gift, the rest of you head in the other direction and make sure you’re seen. Make a big fucking

deal out of it. Make it look good.”

It was a good night even if I didn't get to fuck shit up. The Blood Reapers MC would pay one way or the other for threatening Harper, for making her feel scared and unsafe. This was their penance and if they wanted to fight about it, I was willing to do just that.

For now, all I wanted was to head home to see my woman.



Harper

Gio had gotten home late last night—home, there was that word again—and he was up early, making breakfast when I walked into the kitchen. “Good morning.” His smile was wide and made it all the way up to his eyes despite the exhaustion behind them.

“Morning yourself,” I grumbled and sniffed the air. “Is that coffee I smell?”

He nodded. “Yep. I’m making breakfast. Hungry?”

“Starved.” He’d been oddly quiet about what he was up to last night but given the hour I suspected it had something to do with the Blood Reapers. I wanted to ask, badly, but I sucked down hot black coffee instead. “Why are you up so early?”

He shrugged his broad, bare shoulders. “Couldn’t sleep.”

That was my opening. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, everything is fine. I think.” He piled a bunch of scrambled eggs, toast, and too many strips of bacon, on two plates and brought them to the table where he motioned for me to join him. “Do you have to go into work today?”

I frowned at his out of the blue question, but I shook my head. “No. I can get things done from here. Why?” My heart rate instantly kicked up and I sat up a little taller. “What’s going on?”

He shook his head and blew out a breath before he stabbed at his eggs. “Some shit went down, and I’d feel better if you were here or at the clubhouse.”

“Okay,” I answered easily. “Can you tell me more than that?”

His gaze locked with mine. “I’d rather not, at least not right now.”

I swallowed the long list of questions I had and nodded instead. “Yeah, okay. Sure. I’ll work from here today.”

His shoulders relaxed and his jaw unclenched. “Okay. Good. Thanks.”

I reached across the table and put my hand on top of his. “Are you sure you’re okay, Gio? Even if you can’t tell me everything, you can tell me how you’re doing.”

His lips kicked up to one side in amusement. “You really are too good to be true, Harp.”

“Nah, I’m just good enough Gio.” My heart pounded at his words and warmth flooded my veins. “So?”

“Nothing,” he said and stabbed angrily at his eggs. “I just can’t stop thinking about the way that asshole came for you at work, and I wasn’t there to protect you. It makes me so fucking angry when I think what could have happened.”

I understood well. I hadn’t shared it with Gio, but I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it either, the nightmares of being kidnapped and tortured came regularly and no amount of orgasms could stop them. “Me too.”

Gio’s nostrils flared. “He’s gonna fucking pay for it.”

I stole a slice of his bacon and made a big show of biting into it. “I’m okay, that’s the main thing.” I tucked into the breakfast like a woman starved and we ate in silence, cleaning up afterwards in a comfortable silence that was foreign to me. I wasn’t used to feeling so at ease with a man and I liked it. A lot. Possibly too much.

“I need to go take care of some things around town. You gonna be all right here alone?”

I nodded, ignoring the way my heart donkey-kicked my chest. “I think so. If not, I know how to reach you.”

He nodded. “You know where the guns are, don’t be afraid to use ‘em Harp.”

“I won’t,” I promised sincerely. As much as I wanted to live in a world that didn’t require me to know where guns were squirreled away around the house, I wouldn’t be naïve and let my hopes interfere with reality. “I promise.”

He studied me for a long minute, and I let him, meeting his gaze head-on. “Thank you.” Then he pulled me in close and wrapped his arms around me tight, pressing his lips to mine in a slow, soft kiss that quickly turned hot—white hot—and threatened to burn the whole damn house down. When Gio pulled back we were both wide-eyed and panting. “Gotta go.”

“Yeah, and I have work to do.” I flashed a grin and took a step back before pointing a finger at Gio. “You gotta go, remember?”

Gio took a step forward, a teasing glint in his eyes. “I’m sure I could be a few minutes late for the right reasons.”

I tossed my head back and a loud laugh escaped. “Or you can get everything done and we’ll have all night for all the wrong reasons.”

Heat darkened his gaze, and his jaw tightened. “Deal.” He pressed a hard kiss to my lips before he walked to the garage and soon enough the roar of his bike engine was loud, slowly fading as he left to take care of MC business.

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I spread my work materials across Gio’s coffee table and curled up on the sofa while I juggled planning two events at once. Everything was coming together nicely and every once in a while, Gio’s question came back to me. Could I do this for myself? I shook my head because all the reasons I gave him were still true, and I didn’t want to be a little guppie in the great big ocean. I wanted more than that, which was why I was staying put for now.

The guest lists had been finalized this morning, but any good event planner knew the guest list could change as late as one minute the event began so I made seating charts with room to grow, double-checked with vendors I was uneasy about and went over no less than a dozen different checklists. The devil was in the details, as they say, and when it came to event planning life was all about the details.

I’d been working for a few hours, when a knock sounded on the front door. It was sharp and fast, and it startled the hell out of me. My next breath caught in my throat, and I scanned the living room and then the door as if I could see through it. I stood at the second round of knocking and reached for the gun Gio had hidden underneath the table right beside the front door.

I inhaled deeply and gripped the gun in one hand, unlocking and opening the door with the other. A deep exhale rushed out of me as I stared at three familiar feminine faces. “Oh. Hi.” My heart still raced but it was slowing down as I stepped back and waved them in. “Sorry, I just need a second.”

Peyton frowned, “Shit, sorry. We scared you.”

“It’s okay,” I brushed her off and shook my head. “I’m a little jumpy and I wasn’t expecting you.” My gaze landed on my unexpected visitors, Peyton, Ellie, and Laura, who I only met once before. “What brings you by?”

“You,” Peyton answered. “We’re here to take you to lunch.”

“You are. Why?” I hardly knew these women and they didn’t owe me a thing, so it didn’t make sense. “Gio sent you.”

“Not exactly,” Laura said as she stepped inside last and closed the door behind her. “He said you were working from home today and that you might want a break at some point.”

Dammit, why was he so thoughtful and sweet? “Oh. That’s nice of you.”

“Right?” Peyton’s full lips stretched into a teasing grin. “Come on, we’re going out for food and girl talk. We have a child-free afternoon and we’re gonna make the best of it with cocktails and gossip.”

It was something I hadn’t done in too long and suddenly it sounded like just what I needed. “Okay. One second.” I organized my work materials, shut down my laptop before I changed into casual wide-legged pants and a loose tank top. “Ready.”

Thirty minutes later we were seated inside a cozy booth with whiskey cocktails in front of us while the ladies each told me how they came to be linked to the Steel Demons. “I used to date Nolan,” Peyton admitted. “I only came to Rocky because I’d heard how badass he was, which was true. But he was and is a lot more than that.”

I laughed at each of them as our barbecue platter arrived, loaded up with succent meat, three types of potatoes and more coleslaw than four women could possibly eat. “So they each came to your rescue, and you fell for them.”

“That about sums it up,” Laura added with a smile. “Hawk and I were pretending and somewhere along the way it became real.”

“Wow.” I shook my head. “That’s incredible. Good for you ladies.”

“Right?” Ellie waved a dismissive hand in the air. “What we really want to know is what’s going on with you and Gio.”

“He’s just an old friend,” I answered diplomatically. “We practically grew up together. He and Cole are closer than blood brothers.” This was girl talk and I needed a sounding board, so I took another sip and said what I was thinking. “It’s just sex,” I said, more to myself than the girls.

Peyton laughed first, probably because she had the most insight into Gio as his sister-in-law. “Oh please. Has it been more than three nights?”

My brows tugged into a frown. “It has. Why?”

All three women gave each other knowing glances before Peyton leaned forward as if she had a big secret. “Gio doesn’t do more than three nights with the same woman. Ever.”

I sat back against the plush booth seat with a shocked sigh. “That can’t be right.” Gio was a gorgeous single man so I didn’t think he’d been living the life of a monk before I came to town but that sounded so... callous.

“It is,” they all replied in unison.

“I’m telling you, Harper, this isn’t just sex for Gio. It can’t be. He wouldn’t go after a brother’s sister unless he meant it.”

I shook my head against those words even though they made me feel good and warm inside. “I don’t live here,” I tried weakly.

“Maybe not,” Ellie began, “but that’s easy enough to change for love.”

Love. That word hit me with the force of a Mack truck. This wasn’t love. It couldn’t be. It was too soon. Right? Sure I felt things for Gio, warm and fuzzy things, sexy things, affectionate things. But not love.

“I think we’ve shocked her enough,” Laura said with amusement in her voice. “Let’s talk about something else.”

Conversation moved on but the sentiment and the conversation stayed with me throughout the night and into the next day.

Harper

Love. That word pinged around in my head as I flitted around the ballroom in preparation for the political fundraiser in four days' time. It was unusual to have so much time to set up. Back in California we were constantly working insanely long hours because the venues were in such high demand that we had to set up the night before or even the morning of an event.

This was a nice change. I didn't have to rush around, which increased the chances of making a mistake or missing something significant. Having everything set up early meant I could add flourishes that would make the event better, which meant a satisfied client and more work. So rather than running around like the Energizer Bunny, I had a leisurely few hours to prepare the room.

It was just after three in the afternoon, and I was close to going home for the day, when the side door to the ballroom smacked open, startling me once again. I put a hand to my chest and told myself I really needed to stop being so damn jumpy. Still on alert, I jump-turned and found Carl approaching in long strides, a completely terrified expression on his face.

"Carl. What's going on?"

He didn't stop until less than an inch separated us. His brown eyes were jet black and he kept looking over his shoulder as if he expected some boogeyman to jump out at any time. "Harper, look, something's going on. I don't know what exactly, but something big has happened. Viper is beyond pissed off and stressed, and worse? He was asking questions about you. And the Steel Demons."



I opened my mouth to say something, but Carl simply shook his head and held up a hand.

“I don’t want to know because I don’t give a shit. I’m already in this too deep and I don’t want to know more than I already do just... be careful.” He looked around again with wide eyes, his whole body strung tight with fear and then he took off and left me alone in the ballroom.

I didn’t realize my hands were shaking until I felt around for my phone. “Calm down,” I muttered to myself. I inhaled and exhaled the way I did on those rare occasions I was done with work early enough to go to a yoga class. I needed to calm down because freaking out wouldn’t accomplish anything. “Calm. Down.”

It took two full minutes of deep breathing before my hands stopped shaking long enough to send Gio a text about what Carl said to me.

Me: Can you come here?

His response came a few seconds later.

Gio: On my way.

I couldn’t help but smile at his instant support with no questions asked. It was even better than my brother because Cole would also come but he’d also have ten million questions while he provided the help. I packed up my tablet and my notes, seating charts, and everything else, shoved it into my bag and high-tailed it towards the front exit.

My legs shook uncontrollably even though it was almost eighty degrees outside, and I dug my heels into the concrete to keep still. The minutes ticked by, and my anxiety increased with every second. There were people everywhere, too many faces to make

out any real details so every single person I saw filled me with fear and anxiety.

The roar of Gio's bike sounded above the crowd and my heartbeat slowed as I descended the short cement stairway and shot one hand in the air just in case he didn't see me. I smiled and slowly I felt my body relax. I felt the heat at my back about a heartbeat before two arms snaked around my body, one hooked around my waist and the other covered my mouth before I could scream.

"Scream and I'll slit your pretty little throat."

His words meant nothing to me, and I screamed as loud as I could, hoping someone would hear the muffled noise through his meaty hand. I kicked and screamed as hard as possible, but the guy was taller and bigger than me, and when he leaned back my feet left the ground.

This is it, I thought to myself. This is where I die.

I closed my eyes for a long moment and then opened them when the man yanked me backwards and then backed away from Gio's approach. With every step he took, Gio got farther away. He couldn't move quickly with the line of cars and suitcase trolleys that cluttered up the area, and I was terrified that he wouldn't get to me in time. "Gio," I shouted through his hand needlessly.

My gaze darted around for details, as the noise of the crowd died, the deeper he dragged me down a service alley. Heart thumping, I kicked harder and thrashed my body around hoping to knock him off balance or loosen his hold on me, but the fucker was too strong.

"Let her go!" Gio shouted the words as he got off his bike and pulled out his gun, shortening the distance between us quickly.

“And if I don’t?” He held me tighter and ducked his head behind mine. “You gonna risk your old lady just to get to me?” He laughed and the sound was grotesque and deep and menacing. I hated it instinctively.

The sound of footsteps behind me made my whole body seize up with fear. My eyes went wide, and I hoped Gio could read my expression.

“It won’t come to that if you let her go.” Gio walked and spoke with such confidence that I believed him.

“Nah. You’ll have to decide,” the other man said. “Risk killing her just to get to me or kill my boy first and risk being too late to save her.” He laughed again and I was really starting to hate that sound.

“Or,” Gio began with a slow smile as he lifted his gun, aiming the barrel at my captor and his friend, back and forth in a teasing gesture. “I could just shoot both of you and walk away with my woman.”

His woman. It was a ridiculous thing to focus in given the severity of what was happening but still, it was nice.

I suddenly had an idea, I winked at Gio hoping he’d understand that I was about to try something. His brows dipped in confusion. He didn’t get it, and I sighed, dropping my head forward before I swung it backwards as hard as I could until I made contact with my captor.

“Ow!” he cried out, and before he could say anything else Gio squeezed the trigger, and the world slowed. The man’s arms loosened around me instantly and warm blood hit the side of my face, the back of my neck and my hands.

I screamed at the feel of something heavier than blood on my face and hair before I

dropped to my knees on the concrete. “Gio!”

His gun was aimed at the other biker. “Live to fight another day or die right here with your buddy?”

He narrowed his gaze at Gio. “This shit ain’t over. We know what you did, and we know it was you. Watch your back.”

Gio simply grinned. “I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about, but you better watch your back. Even when you sleep, watch it, because I have a long fucking memory and I’m not a forgiving man.” He waited a few seconds and didn’t relax until the man took off at a fast run, jumped on his bike and got gone quickly. His gaze swung to me with a frown, and he was at my side in an instant. “Harper, shit baby. You okay?”

I nodded and then shook my head, and then I nodded again. “Scared but okay and my knees are a little scraped.” Gio helped me to my feet and gathered me in his arms.

“Seriously?”

I nodded. “I’m... okay. Or maybe I’m not, but I’m not hurt.”

“No,” he growled. “You’re not, but the Blood Reapers are gonna hurt. A lot.” Gio kept his arm around me and led me back to his motorcycle. He got me on the bike and put my helmet on. “Hang on Harp.”

I did what I was told and laid my head against his back and stared unseeing at the city as it whizzed by. The ride felt eternal but soon enough we were at the clubhouse and I was inside the room he put me in the first night I got here just a few short weeks ago.

It felt as if an entire lifetime had passed since then and throughout it all Gio was here,

at my side.

My lover.

My protector.

Potentially, my everything.

Gio

What the hell is taking her so long?

I sat inside the room I used when I stayed at the clubhouse, which I did a lot over the past eighteen months that I spent as a prospect, wondering if Harper would ever emerge from the bathroom. I took advantage of her time to herself to leave a message for Cole because it was best that he found out from me, rather than anybody else, that the Blood Reapers had attempted to kidnap or kill his baby sister. “She’s fine, at least in terms of physical injury. You know Harp, she’s putting on a good face, but I can tell it got to her, because of course it did. She’s a normal fucking person and this is far from the usual of her life. Anyway, yeah, that’s what happened. Call me when you get a chance.”

I stared at the green door that separated me from Harper, wondering if she was okay in there because she’d been in there with the shower running for twenty minutes—at least—and I hadn’t heard a fucking peep out of her. Every part of me wanted to go in there to check on her, but I knew she needed time and space to process everything. It was Harper’s way. She wasn’t a dramatic woman, but she always required space to deal with change. And trauma.

“Gio, are you there?” Her voice was small on the other side of the door, muffled by the shower spray.

But I heard it, and I stood right at the door for a full minute before I twisted the knob and stepped inside. “You okay, Harp?”

She shook her head in the shower as she scrubbed her skin. “No,” she answered in a small voice. “I can’t get the smell of his blood out of my skin or my hair. I can still feel his brain on my face. I can still see it,” she cried, and I was at her side in an instant.

“Harper, you’re okay,” I told her and gripped her shoulders. Her body was naked and beautiful, and I let my gaze rake over every inch of her, appreciating the view while also taking her concerns seriously. “The blood is gone, your mind just hasn’t accepted it yet.”

Harper shook her head. “No, it’s not. I need you to make it stop. Make it go away, Gio. Make me forget it all. Please.” Her voice was a soft, gentle plea and one I knew I was powerless to deny.

“Harp.” My hands slid over her wet hair and down her water-slicked body until they settled at her hips.

“Please, Gio.”

It was a bad idea, to give into our desires when we were both in such a delicate state, but I also knew that I couldn’t deny her—or us—this moment. I couldn’t stop myself if I wanted to and the last thing I wanted was to stop the bullet train that was Harper and I. Something within her called out to me and when she beckoned me, I came. “Anything you need, Harp. I’m here.” I stripped down quickly and joined her under the hot shower spray.

She smiled up at me, her full lips soft and pliant, her gaze dark and filled with affection as she cupped my face. “You are too good to be true, Gio.”

“Maybe I just want you that bad,” I said and cupped her face for a long moment before our lips made contact. I kissed her slowly at first but when I bit down on her

lower lip and she moaned, all hope for anything slow, and gentle was lost. “So fucking bad,” I pressed my forehead to hers.

Her gaze was black with desire as she slid her hands up my abs and over my chest until her fingers speared through my wet hair. “Yes,” she moaned and pushed her body towards mine.

I pulled back from the kiss and reached for the soap first, lathering up her body in slow circles until her breaths came out in short, sharp pants. I tackled her hair next, lathering it up and letting the hot spray rinse the soap from her hair and her body. “I like you like this, wet and slick and sudsy.”

“Yeah,” she asked breathlessly. “You do?”

“Fuck yeah,” I growled. “Your tits are shiny, and your nipples are hard. The leftover suds are hiding in interesting places.

She gasped at my touch, crying out when I pinched one nipple and then the other. “Gio.”

I smiled to myself as I turned her to face the shower wall, placing one hand and then the other on the wall before I spread her legs wide. “Arch for me baby.”

Like a good girl, she did as I demanded.

My fingers found her wet and hot, pulsing with need. I fucked her with my index and middle finger, pumping in long strokes that stoked the flames of her passion until she trembled with the need to come. “You’re so fucking wet. So hot. I love it.”

“Show me,” she said, her voice filled with lust.



I stepped behind her and in one smooth move, I was buried balls deep in her wet heat. “Fuck,” I growled.

“Yes, Gio! Oh fuck,” she panted and smacked the shower wall.

“You like that?”

She nodded and sank her teeth into her bottom lip. “Love it.”

“Good.” I held her hips and pumped into her, harder and harder until my hips hammered into her from behind, hard and deep and so fucking fast I was getting dizzy with it. “Harper.”

She arched her back, and I sank deeper as she started to clutch around me. “Gio, yes! Fuck me just like that, oh yes! Harder. Deeper. More.”

Her erotic commands, her needy, greedy pussy was too much for me to bear. My balls gathered up tight and I slammed my cock deeper and deeper until her whole body shuddered and then her pussy hugged me tight like a possessive lover.

“Gio,” she cried again and pushed back against me, sending me as deep into her body as I could possibly get, before she exploded in a fiery orgasm that shook her body and made her legs quiver. “Oh fuck yes,” she moaned and tossed her head back against my shoulder, arching into my every stroke.

“Harp,” I moaned and nipped at her ear as I tensed and then exploded before emptying inside of her hot, wet body. “Fuck Harper, baby. This pussy is so good. It’s mine.”

She shuddered at my words and gave me her weight. “After that display I’ll be whatever you want me to be.”

I held her close and kissed her temple. Her collarbone. The back of her neck. “Just what I wanted to hear.”

A nervous laugh escaped but she leaned to the side to give me better access to her neck. “Thank you, Gio. For saving me back there. For coming when I needed you. For making me feel the way no one else ever has.”

Her words made my chest squeeze tight and I pressed another kiss to her temple before I dragged her from the shower. “My pleasure, Harp.”

She turned in my arms with a sly smile. “I’m pretty sure it was my pleasure too,” she purred.

“Even better.” I kissed her neck and down her spine while my cock slipped from her body. “You feel so fucking good.”

“So do you,” she moaned and arched into me with a shaky sigh. “Gio.”

I stepped from the shower and brought Harper with me, half drying her off with a towel before I carried her to bed, laid my weight on top of her, ready to do it all over again. “I love the way you’re always wet for me.”

She smiled. “You just have a knack for making my pussy wet.”

I growled at her dirty words and my cock found her, hot and wet and pulsing wildly as I buried myself deep. “Fuck, Harp.”

“That’s the idea,” she said in that sassy tone of hers. “Show me what you got, Gio.”

I smiled and pulled out nearly all the way before I slammed deep in her still pulsing, still quivering core. “Fuck,” I whispered in her ear before I sank my teeth into her

neck. “So goddamn perfect.”

Harper’s eyes fluttered shut and she arched into me, wrapping her legs tight around my waist. “You’re so hot and thick inside me. I can feel your cock swell and twitch.”

“Dirty girl.” I kissed my way down her neck and slicked my tongue across her collarbone while my hips pumped slow and deep.

“Yes,” she moaned. “Yes, Gio.”

I smiled as I kissed my way down to the center of her chest and around the underside of her plump tits. I found one nipple hard and aching before I sucked it deep into my mouth.

“Oh, god,” she moaned and bucked off the bed.

I was a man possessed as I fucked her in long, deep strokes while my hips pumped hard, pounding into her until she let out the wildest, most feral sounds as she begged me to fuck her harder. Deeper.

“Gio,” she moaned her warning.

“Let go,” I commanded her as I moved to the other nipple and sank my teeth into the sensitive flesh.

“Oh!” Her eyes popped open, and her gaze met mine, watching while I sucked and licked her nipple even as my hips continued to fill her with deep thrusts. She was so wet, dripping with it, that me or my cock didn’t stand a chance. “Yes, Gio! Just. Like. That.” She pushed her hips up to meet mine, matching me thrust for thrust even as she shook with pleasure.

I pulled back and fixed my mouth over hers, pumping harder and deeper while I devoured her mouth until she exploded around my cock and her body shook and quivered, squeezing me so tight that I couldn't hold back anymore. "Oh fuck, Harper." Her tight, wet cunt squeezed every drop of me until I was totally spent, hot, sweaty and pulsing my release into her body.

She was soft and wet, her body melted into the mattress as the quivers that shook her body slowed and eventually stopped. A gentle laugh escaped, and she played with my hair as a contented sigh escaped. "Gio, fuck. That was incredible."

"It was," I groaned. "I need you again, already," I grunted.

She laughed. "You can have me," she panted. "In a few minutes, I'm all yours. Again. And again."

I liked the sound of that.

Too fucking much.

Harper

After the deepest, most dreamless sleep of my life I woke up feeling refreshed and satisfied and wearing the biggest damn smile. I couldn't remember a time I'd ever woken up with a smile on my face but today it was all about Gio and the way he'd rescued me yesterday. The way he'd protected me. How good he made me feel after everything.

And it was that reminder of everything that wiped the smile quickly from my face. Those guys had tried to kidnap me. No, they had kidnapped me and if not for Gio who knew what fresh hell I'd be going through right now. This situation with the Blood Reapers was becoming all too real and I knew I'd have to be more careful and more vigilant going forward.

With that thought at the forefront of my mind, I sat up and noted that Gio's side of the bed was cold, which wasn't all that surprising. He'd slept fitfully last night and was probably eager to get with the guys to tell them about what happened and make a plan to retaliate. Retaliation. It was inevitable in this life and despite the fear when I thought of what they did to me—attempted to do—I knew it required a response from the Steel Demons.

I accepted that.

More than that, I was fine with it.

My stomach rumbled and I glanced at my phone with a groan. I needed to get dressed and get some food in my belly before I headed back to the hotel. It was the last place

I wanted to be and when I answered Nicole's call half-dressed, those words were on the tip of my tongue. I kept my temper in check even though my jaws clenched hard enough to crack a tooth. "Yes Nicole, everything is coming along just as it should. I'm on schedule and everything."

"That's good," she answered with a heavy sigh. "I wasn't sure if you were ready, but I guess I was wrong." She ended the call after that.

"Bitch," I grumbled out of habit and shoved my phone into the pocket of my jeans, which served as another reminder. I needed to go back to Gio's to change my clothes, and then pick up the rental car which was still at the hotel. I let out a sigh, nothing about this morning would be easy, so before I did anything I'd grab myself some breakfast.

When I got downstairs, the clubhouse was buzzing with activity even though it was just after ten in the morning. There were trays of food loaded up on a table at the far end of the room and a few of the old ladies and their kids sat at tables eating and quietly chatting. The club whores moved around efficiently but almost silently, taking care of the details.

It was an odd dynamic the way these women coexisted, and I wondered as I piled scrambled eggs and sausage on my plate with one biscuit, how they all dealt with it. I further wondered if I was strong enough, trusting enough to handle this dynamic.

And then the question popped its peroxide head right in my line of sight. She was bottle blonde and busty, dressed scantily and pouting in a way that some men seemed to appreciate. "Gio is mine," she snarled in my face, the stench of cigarettes and cold coffee hit me with a strong gust of wind.

This was his type?

I studied her for a long minute, and I laughed to myself. Of course she was Gio's type, she was every guy's type, at least temporarily. But after last night I wasn't in the mood to be good little Harper. "Well Gio never mentioned you to me so if there's a problem you should take it up with him."

She smacked her palm against the table holding the food. "I'm taking it up with you, bitch. He's mine. Leave him alone."

The conversations halted immediately, and I didn't need to glance around to know that all eyes were on us. I fixed her with a steely look and said, "Since you asked so nicely, I'll tell you what, no I don't think I will leave him alone."

Her gaze narrowed and she took another step forward to make sure she was right in my face, leaving me at a disadvantage with the plate of food in my hand. "Leave him alone. Walk away or else."

I took a step forward too and my plate found its way smashed against her big fake tits. "Or else what?"

She gasped in surprise, and I smiled because I knew her type well. She was good at playing the role of the bully until challenged. "I was in his bed before you came along. He's mine."

I nodded. "Well I'm there now and if he wants you back in his bed instead of me, he'll tell me. I've never known Gio to hold his tongue in all the years I've known him." Yeah, bitch, take that little reminder that I've known him longer than you have.

"You'll regret this bitch," she snarled again, oblivious to the spittle that flew from her red painted lips. She was angry as hell and that gave me pause. And questions. A fuck load of questions.

I gasped when a pair of arms wrapped around my waist but settled when Gio's familiar scent also wrapped around me. "What's going on here?"

"Nothing," the blonde said quickly.

"Your friend was just telling me that I needed to walk away from you, or else. She staked her claim."

His arms tightened around me and his whole body tensed. "You said that, Cindy?"

"Gio," she squeaked. "You don't have to fuck her to take care of her!" The only thing missing from that whine was a foot stomp.

If she hadn't threatened me, I'd almost feel sorry for her. "I need to get going since my breakfast is ruined and my appetite is gone." Both were true. The reminder of Gio's past was just what I needed to remember that whatever this is, it's not permanent. He didn't do permanent. "My car is back at the hotel, and I need to get to your place first to change clothes."

"She's staying with you?" Cindy's voice was a mix of disbelief and a pout.

Gio ignored her and spun me to face him. He cupped my cheek gently as his gaze searched my face as if he heard my thoughts and sought to wipe them from my head. "I'm taking you to work today and for the next few days. After everything I can't leave you alone."

Why did he have to be so sweet just when I reminded myself to keep an emotional barrier between us? "Thank you." I wanted to argue. The strong, independent woman in me was desperate to argue but the woman who couldn't forget yesterday was happy as hell to have him with her all day. "I appreciate that."



“Of course,” he moaned and pressed a gentle kiss to my lips.

Cindy huffed loudly and stomped away even louder.

When Gio pulled back, I arched one eyebrow at him and shot a look to his former conquest. “Want to talk about that?”

“No,” he groaned as if that was a real choice. “Look, I fucked her a couple of times and that’s it. She was on her third night,” he began and shut his eyes as if he was embarrassed. “The night Cole asked me to come get you.”

I knew all about his three-night rule. “And that was going to be it?”

He nodded but his gaze was fixed on the floor.

“She wants her third night,” I teased. “And a fourth and forever.”

He shrugged. “What she wants doesn’t matter to me. I know what I want, and I think that’s what you want too.” He pulled me close, and I felt his heart race beneath my palm. “Want to grab breakfast before I take you to the hotel?”

“I do.” Breakfast with Gio—it sounded so normal, like something a real couple would do. It wasn’t something I pictured Gio doing with a woman, and after a quick stop off at his place so I could change my clothes, we ended up sitting across from each other at a cute diner while we ate.

And talked.

“Cindy seems really angry.”

He shook his head, seemingly unconcerned about the woman. “She is but she’ll get

over it. She knew the deal going in and it's not my fault she thought she'd be the one to change my mind." He reached across the table and took my hands in his. "She never stood a chance. I realize that now."

I wanted to ask what the hell that meant but I was too much of a coward. Still, those words stuck with me throughout a completely uneventful day at work.

Gio

“L ook.” Viper started and then stopped and raked a hand through his shaggy brown hair and let out a sharp breath. His eyes closed and then open on Diesel. “I just want my product back. Whatever else is going on between us, I need that product back.”

I smiled to myself, happy that Hawk was in front of me to shield my expression from Viper and the other Blood Reapers who’d shown up for this meeting in the desert. It was the ideal place since there was nothing around. No buildings or anywhere else to hide. We were all out in the open because we didn’t trust each other for shit.

Diesel stared at Viper for a long damn time as if he could read the man’s mind. Finally he spoke, his words deliberately slow and lacking all emotion. “I have no idea what you’re talking about. Have you misplaced some of your product?”

Viper’s jaw clenched so tight I heard his molars crunching. “Bullshit!” He spat the word out angrily, his eyes darted around to each of us until he found mine and then they darkened to black. “Your boy is pissed off that his bitch is in my crosshairs. Maybe we should ask him what happened to my product.”

My own jaw clenched tight, when he finally addressed me. My hands balled into tight fists, ready to lunge forward and punch that motherfucker at any moment, but my brother was beside me and he gripped my shoulder until a lot of the tension left my body.

“Well boy, what do you have to say for yourself?”

I took a step forward and pushed Hawk to the side. “Who the fuck are you calling boy?”

He laughed, looking over his shoulder for validation from his men. “The only boy I see around here.”

I looked at each of his men and my smile grew. “I don’t think you brought enough men, Viper. I’ve already taken out two or was it three of your fucking pussies, I mean Reapers. ”

He glared at me so hard that I felt the heat of his hatred from a few feet away. I knew he was pissed because that shipment we gifted to the Black Devils belonged to the cartel, who they had to pay no matter what. “What the fuck did you do?”

“I didn’t do shit because if I had, I would’ve burned it right in front of your fucking clubhouse. I would’ve made sure you knew it was me for having your men attempt to take my woman.”

“She knows too much.” Viper grunted angrily and stepped forward. “I had my man at the hotel tell her to get the fuck out of town, out of respect for you,” he said to Diesel before he turned back to me. “But she’s still here.”

Viper’s VP, Howler, stepped up right beside his president with a serious expression that did fuck all to hide his worry. “We’ll make you a deal, give us our shit back and we’ll leave your bitch alone.”

Viper’s nostrils flared, proof he wasn’t on board with that plan.

Diesel, for his part, maintained the MC line. “What product? Tell us what we took and maybe I can help you.”

Viper scowled. “What the fuck, are you wearing a fucking wire?”

Diesel’s lips pulled into a grin. “Fuck no,” he growled. “And don’t ever accuse me of that shit again or we’ll have real problems.”

“We already do. If we don’t get that product back, we won’t be the only ones in trouble.” He got right up in Diesel’s face, getting angry when he didn’t get the response he wanted. “You know the Santangelo Cartel?”

Diesel gave him nothing.

“Well that shipment belongs to them and if they don’t get the drugs or the money, they’ll take their payment in blood.”

Diesel shrugged. “Then I suggest you track down your shit and get the fuck out of my face.”

He laughed and looked around but none of us missed the way his right hand balled into a fist before he telegraphed the punch aimed at my prez.

Diesel moved fast as fuck for a man his size, a quick step to the right and he easily dodged the punch before ducking down to avoid the second hit, sending two punches—one to the gut and a jab to the nose—back. “Next time you come for me, don’t fucking miss.” Diesel smirked at Viper who was still doubled over with both arms wrapped around his gut.

“You’ll pay for this, asshole.”

“Maybe. But now that we know you stole or sold product that belongs to the cartel, that’s information we can use to our benefit. Thanks for the tip.”

Viper paled visibly and I let my smile fly, satisfied to see that fucker worried. Scared.

The same way he made Harper feel.

“Oh,” Diesel stopped and bent down to get right in Viper’s face. “Stay the fuck away from Harper or I will unleash my boy on your whole fucking MC. Got it?” He didn’t wait for a response because he didn’t need to.

We had Viper and his MC over a barrel, and we all knew it.

The only thing we didn’t know was how Viper might respond.

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“He’s losin’ it,” Rocky said when we got back to our bikes. “I’m not the only one who saw that shit, right?”

Diesel shook his head, brows pinched with concern. “No, he’s more than on edge. He’s fucking terrified and he should be, the Santangelo Cartel doesn’t fuck around. They leave people in parts—and that’s if they left anything to find.”

“He’s gonna blow soon.” I pushed the words past my lips with great effort because I knew what I would do in this situation. “He’s going after Harper again and he’ll try to use her for leverage.”

Rocky clapped me on the back. “She’s got the wildest, most violent shadow around. She’ll be fine.”

She would be because I would make sure of it. No matter what Viper and his men tried to pull, I would keep Harper safe.

No matter how many men would have to die at my hands.

We rode back to the clubhouse quickly, feeling good about how the meeting went but extra cautious because we all knew the dangers of a man backed into a corner, which we'd essentially done by stealing that shipment. There was a tension in the air when we got there, each of us knew that some kind of war was coming, the only unknown was who our enemy would be.

"I came all this way to see you fuckers and it's like a goddamn funeral." The familiar, always amused voice of Hollywood broke through our thoughts.

And right beside him was my best friend, Cole.

Harper's protective as fuck older brother.

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Harper

“Are you sure you’re okay?” I posed the question to Gio about halfway through the political fundraiser because he’d been acting strange since he picked me up from the hotel yesterday afternoon.

He nodded but his jaw was clenched tight as his gaze scanned the room. “I’m fine, Harp.”

“You’re not, but tell me to mind my fucking business,” I whispered. “Don’t lie to me. Don’t ever lie to me.” I walked away, angry and hurt because it was like a switch had been flipped and suddenly, he was distant and aloof.

I guess my three days are up too.

“Ms. Davis, may I have a moment of your time?”

I turned with a professional smile for Marla Washington, the chief of staff for Senator Merchant. “Mrs. Washington, how may I help you?” She looked more like a political mover in D.C. than in Las Vegas with her long silver braids twisted into an intricate bun, her wine-colored dress a perfect contrast to her smooth brown skin.

“This event has been wonderful, and we’ve already exceeded our fundraising goal for the night.”

“That’s great. Congratulations!”



“Thanks to you. The Senator is quite pleased with this event, and he would like you to handle another fundraiser, but this one will be more intimate. It’s a high dollar dinner fundraiser meant only for the movers and shakers, you understand?”

I nodded. This event would be filled with the richest, most influential people in the state, possibly the country. At least the ones who had financial interests in this city. “I understand completely.”

“Good. Here’s my card, give me a call in the next few days and I’ll get you all the details.” She handed me a heavy business card with fancy raised lettering and walked away.

Holy shit. Another job! I was beyond excited, but it was quickly tempered by two thoughts. The first was that I’d be staying in Vegas even longer and the second was that it might be without Gio, at least without the Gio I’d gotten to know.

And fallen for.

My gaze landed on him instantly, sitting at a table where an older woman draped in jewels talked his ear off. God he was so handsome it took my breath away and it hurt that he wouldn’t share what was bothering him. Still, I played the role of the dutiful girlfriend and rescued him.

“Me and my friends own several businesses in Steel City,” he shared with the woman.

I wondered how she’d react to him because even in his suit, his tattoos and bad boy appeal couldn’t be hidden. “That’s wonderful,” she shouted over the noise of the crowd. “It’s important for young people to invest in their community.”

His lips twitched. “I couldn’t agree more, Agnes. It’s important to have pride in

where you live.”

Her smile lit even brighter. “Exactly my sentiment. Give me a call, my company is always looking for ways to invest in the metro area.”

Shock was written all over his face. “Sure thing, Agnes. Make sure you be careful out there on the dance floor.”

She stopped and arched a brow at him. “You think I can’t handle myself?”

He laughed. “I don’t think they can handle you, Agnes.”

She laughed and pointed at Gio. “It was nice meeting you Gio.” She gave me a polite smile as she sauntered off towards a group of older men.

“Making friends everywhere you go?”

He shrugged. “Something like that.”

I could get lost in that smile, I thought to myself before I wiped it from my mind. “Glad to see you’re having fun.”

He noticed my shift in attitude and jumped from his seat, closing the gap between us until I was wrapped in his arms. “I’m sorry, Harp.”

“Don’t be.” I squirmed to get out of his arms, but he held me tighter. “Look Gio, I get it. Our time is up and because of our history and the fact that you’re keeping me safe makes this awkward. It doesn’t have to be.”

“That’s bullshit.”

My eyes widened. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me. You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

I let out a bitter laugh at that. “Yeah, because you just went silent and refused to talk about it.”

“I know and I’m sorry.”

He let me go after that, and I spent the next couple of hours wondering what the fuck had happened. Was he sorry for unceremoniously dropping me? Sorry for giving me the silent treatment? Or was he sorry for something else he’d done?

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The moment the fundraiser was over and I was free to leave, he took me home. We drove back in silence, once we were in his house I couldn’t stand it any longer, “Talk to me Gio, what’s wrong?”

He was silent for a moment and then said, “Yesterday we had a meeting with the Blood Reapers. It didn’t go well, and I haven’t been able to shake it yet. I didn’t want to get in your head before your event, that’s all.”

“Wait.” I shook my head as I tried to process his words. “You kept this to yourself because you didn’t want me to... Gio,” I sighed. “That was wildly misguided but incredibly sweet.”

“That’s me,” he grinned, his voice pitched in a seductive tone as he pulled me closer. “Wildly misguided. Incredibly sweet. And really fucking turned on.” His lips found my shoulder first, kissing up to my neck and around my throat. The kisses were soft and intoxicating. Possessive.

They consumed me. My hands had a mind of their own as they danced across his body, removing his clothes piece by piece. We were hungry for each other, and in that moment me and Gio together were the only people who mattered. "Gio," I moaned.

"Right. Here." He licked his lips as his gaze raked over my body. "Right fucking here." He laid me down on the sofa and kissed every inch of my body until I trembled.

"Please, Gio." His shoulders spread my thighs wide, and his hands gripped them to hold them back while his tongue flicked against my clit. It was nothing but pure clitoral stimulation and within seconds I was on the edge of carnal bliss. "Gio," I warned.

His response to was lock my clit between his teeth, sucking while his tongue rubbed the tip back and forth with ever increasing pressure. He moaned and the tension within my body snapped. I came hard and fast, hands fisted in his hair while I ground against him until my limbs relaxed.

"More, Gio. Need you now." I was hungry for him. Needy and greedy to have his cock fill me up.

He growled and gave me exactly what I asked for, every long, hard inch of him. He stretched me deliciously, his thickness scraped against every wall, every free space within me. "Harper," he groaned. "So fucking good."

My lids fluttered shut as his presence washed over me and slid deep, filling me until I was so full I could hardly breathe. It was beautifully spectacular. I had no words, only sensations as he filled me up and made me feel better than anyone ever had. "Gio."

He flipped me onto my side, so we were back to chest, his cock long and thick as it

slowly invaded my body in long, deep, punishing strokes. “Fuck baby, you feel so good. Too good.” His fingertips dug into my hips as he fucked me harder and deeper, making me feel lost in whatever this was. “Harp.”

His hips moved faster, and I met him inch for tantalizing inch until he was buried so deep that I couldn’t tell where he ended, and I began. So deep that I didn’t give a damn where we ended or began. It was crazy, intoxicating and all-consuming. I couldn’t push away or pull back. I didn’t want to. “Gio, oh fuck.”

He growled his pleasure, filled me completely and then let loose, emptying himself into me as if this really was forever and not just temporary. “Harp. I’m never gonna get enough of you.”

His words hit me in that spot I thought long dormant, and I let myself smile and absorb those words. Never. Enough. It was what I always wanted but never let myself truly want for real. “Don’t,” I purred. “There’s enough of me to go around.”

With another groan, he filled me perfectly and made me long for things I’d long since given up, things I thought were out of reach. Things like Gio.

And love.

I was barely finished shaking from my orgasm when he was on top of me, his cock hard again, as it rubbed over my so sensitive clit. I moaned as he slipped inside of my body and pushed deep, filling me completely. “Harp, fuck.” That visceral sound hit my body in all the right places, making me shake and shiver until he was buried deep. “So, so good.”

I smiled and wrapped my legs around his waist, pushing my hips up to meet him stroke for stroke. “Yes!”

He palmed my breasts and pounded into me, hard and deep. It was so good that my bones melted, and my skin became a torch with every stroke. It was an all-consuming sensation that I leaned into and gripped him tighter. “Harp.”

His mouth tugged into an anguished grin before he pumped deeper. Harder. Faster. “Yes, Gio. Give it to me. Give it all to me.”

His jaw clenched and he fucked me exactly the way I needed, hard and fast, pounding until sweat slicked both of our bodies. Until my hips ached from matching his every stroke and my throat is sore from screaming my pleasure. “Let go, Harp. Come all over my cock, baby.”

His dirty words struck me and before I knew what was happening, my body tensed and then exploded in pleasure. His name fell from my lips on a throaty cry, over and over as he pounded until me until I was full of pleasure and his seed. “Gio!”

He grunted and groaned, kissed my collarbone. “I love the sound of my name on your lips. Not sure I’ll ever tire of hearing that sound.”

My fingertips danced along his jawline. “I think we should test out that theory,” I teased as he collapsed on top of me.

“Challenge accepted,” he grinned. As soon as Gio caught his breath he grabbed me in his arms, carried me upstairs and we started all over again.

And again,

And again.

It was an exhausting sort of satisfaction, and I fell asleep with a smile on my face and his chest pressed against my cheek. It was peaceful all around.

Until the sound of broken glass woke me from a deep sleep.

Gio

The sound of breaking glass woke me in an instant. I jackknifed up and looked around the dark room where I found Harper sitting straight up. “Harp?”

She swallowed hard and then nodded before her hand reached out to touch me in the dark. “It woke me up. It’s them, isn’t it?” Her whispered words were calm, not full of the fear I expected.

A long breath rushed out of me. “Probably.” More glass shattered downstairs, and I realized just how vulnerable we were, naked with nothing but a sheet covering us. “Get dressed.”

Harper paused and exhaled deeply. “Okay. Dressed.” She jumped from the bed and bent over, giving me a glimpse of her perfect heart-shaped ass in the moonlight. She stood up quickly and slipped my t-shirt over her head. “Good enough.”

Her words spurred me into action, and I snatched my boxers from the floor and stepped into them before I stood and grabbed my gun from the nightstand. “Stay here.”

“Fuck that,” she said automatically.

“Harp,” I sighed. “We don’t have time to argue about this.”

“Exactly,” she snapped. “You taught me to shoot for a reason and that reason is downstairs, probably to kidnap me or worse. Now give me a damn gun and let’s go



scare these assholes off.”

I love you.

The words came to my mind instinctively and I bit the inside of my jaw to keep the words to myself. Harper wasn't ready to hear it any more than I was ready to say it. “Fine. There's another gun in that nightstand. It's a nine-mil just like you shot at the range.”

She smiled but it dimmed as she pulled out the gun and checked the clip.

I got my phone and sent a nine-one-one text to my club brothers while I kept an eye on Harper. She inhaled for several long seconds and gripped the gun tighter before giving herself a mental pep talk. “You okay?”

She looked up with big, guileless blue eyes and nodded nervously. “I'm good. Let's go.”

“Stay behind me and don't shoot me.”

That made her smile. “Don't give me a reason to and I won't.”

“Noted.” I crept to the door with Harper at my back and opened it as quietly as I could. The sound of glass breaking, of utter fucking distraction intensified when the door was open, but she gave me a gentle shove towards the stairs, a subtle reminder to keep moving forward.

“The living room,” she whispered.

I nodded and urged my feet to move. Halfway down the steps the Blood Reapers came into view. There were three of them ripping shit apart, breaking things. Like my

fucking flat screen. I raised my gun and went down a few more steps until my aim was perfect, and I squeezed the trigger with a smile as the bullet hit him right in the back of the thigh. “Get down,” I shouted a second before they started shooting back.

“Shit!” Harper’s foot slipped and she slid down the stairs.

My heart pounded as bullets flew in her direction and my legs moved on their own, pumping bullets out like a factory worker, to protect her. “Harp,” I shouted over the gunfire.

“I’m good,” she called out and shot in the direction of the Blood Reapers as they dragged the third man out. “Fuck!” The gun fell from her hand and both of them went to her thigh.

“Assholes,” I shouted and finished coming down the steps, shooting at them until my clip was empty. Two of them were hit as they limped out and jumped on their bikes. “Dead men walking,” I mumbled to myself and turned my attention back to Harper.

“It’s okay,” she grunted and pulled her bloody fingers away from the side of her right thigh. “Just grazed me. Hurts like a motherfucker though.”

I grinned. “Yeah, that’s the dirty secret of gunshot wounds.” I lifted her in my arms and took her to the kitchen where there was less glass and debris on the floor.

“Your feet,” she warned.

“I’m fine Harp.” I set her on the countertop and examined her leg. As she said the bullet had just grazed her, which was fucking lucky. “I’m going to kill them.”

“I got one,” she said proudly, wincing while I disinfected the wound. “Right in the arm.”

“Good job, babe.” I grabbed a bandage from the first-aid kit on top of the fridge and fixed her up. “You’ll be okay.”

She sighed and cupped one side of my face. “Thank you, Gio.”

I frowned. “What for?”

“For trusting me. For teaching me to protect myself. For keeping me safe.” She leaned forward until her lips, soft and full, were on mine. Harper pulled back with a sleepy, sexy smile. “For wanting to kill them for giving me a flesh wound,” she laughed and kissed me again, slower and deeper.

My hands slid up her thighs and I groaned when she opened up to give me better access to her pussy. One hand continued under her shirt until I found a nipple, hard and aching, while the other one went right between her thighs where she was hot and wet. Just for me.

“Gio,” she moaned against my lips and pushed her hips forward, begging for my touch. “Yes,” she hissed out when two fingers slid over her clit before pushing into her.

I swallowed her moans as I fucked her with my fingers, enjoying the way she rolled her hips, hungry for her next orgasm. Her pussy clamped down around my fingers and she bit down on my bottom lip as her body shook and convulsed, squeezing the life out of my fingers. I only wished it was my cock.

“What the fuck is going on?” That was the sound of my best friend’s voice.

Harper froze and I waited for her to pull away, but she didn’t. She kissed me for a few more seconds before she slowly dragged her mouth from mine with an easy smile that she aimed at Cole. And half the Steel Demons. “Cole. You’re back.”

Yeah, earlier I hadn't told her that was the other thing on my mind.

His nostrils flared angrily, and his hands were clenched into fists. His anger wasn't directed at Harper because of course it wasn't, it was all aimed at me. "You took advantage of my little sister." It wasn't a question it was a fucking accusation.

"You really think I would do that?" I shook my head, determined to ignore the hurt that his words caused.

"All I know is that I asked you to keep her safe, not stick your fucking dick in her!"

"One thing has nothing to do with the other," I shouted back. "Look around Cole, do you see the state of my fucking house? And look at Harper, perfectly fucking safe."

Cole crossed the living room and headed into the kitchen, stopping right in front of me. "She's my sister."

"Yeah, I know who she is Cole. I have kept her safe but that meant spending time together and getting to know each other as adults. Things changed. We've changed."

"Bullshit," he grunted and shoved me backwards. "You saw what you wanted, and you took it. Like you always do."

I pushed him back. "Glad to know what you really think of me. I'm surprised you even let me near your sister if I'm so goddamn useless." I shook my head. "Glad to know where we stand."

"What the fuck am I supposed to think?" He shook his head. "You haven't seen each other in years and now you're kissing her and, and... fuck I don't even want to think about what else."

“Look at her,” I shouted. “She’s not a little girl anymore, Cole. She’s a beautiful grown woman.”

He laughed. “Don’t even try that shit with me.”

“Shut the hell up!” Harper shouted and used my shoulders to help her get off the counter before she whirled on her brother. “You think I’m such a stupid little idiot that I’d let myself be used by anyone? What if I’m using him? What if we’re using each other?” She threw her head back and laughed. “What if we’re in love, then what? You’re gonna hate your best friend until the day he dies? Grow the fuck up Cole.”

“Harper,” he began in vain, but she pushed at his chest.

“No, shut up. I’m talking now!” She pushed him again. “I’ve been living my life without you for years, Cole. Years! I don’t need you to protect me and I’ll continue to do live without you if you can’t respect that I’m a grown ass woman with wants and needs.” She shook her head. “I love you Cole, but I won’t stand for this.”

He looked properly chastised, but he wasn’t done yet. “It’s not about you, Harp. Gio isn’t the settling down type.”

“I haven’t asked him to! People do have sex without getting married as I’m sure you know.”

“But Harper.”

“No! Gio looks at me and sees a capable woman. Instead of keeping me hidden, he taught me how to shoot so that I can take care of myself no matter where I am and it ever occurred to you to do that, so whatever you think of your best friend, I think he’s pretty fucking great.”

He knew when he was beaten and I saw in his eyes that he knew it, but Cole was a stubborn bastard where his sister was concerned. He wouldn't give up, I knew that. "Come with me, Harper. I'll keep you safe now that I'm back."

She stepped away from him when he reached for her. "No thanks. I have work to do and I won't have you keeping me caged up. If you don't piss me off again, maybe we'll have dinner together."

Cole glared at her retreating form before he turned that glare my way and I read it loud and clear.

He wouldn't forgive me for this.

Not ever.

That was a worry for another time. I turned to the rest of the MC who looked on with a mixture of amusement and worry and motioned to the destruction. "The Blood Reapers were sending a message I assume. We were asleep and they never even attempted to come upstairs. I wounded one and Harper wounded the other. They'll survive but they'll be limping."

Rocky nodded and stepped forward. "We're gonna have to do something about them, sooner rather than later."

Better to deal with war with an enemy than with my lifelong best friend.

Harper

“Go easy on him, Harp.” Gio sighed and pressed his forehead to mine the minute he stepped off the bike. “He has every right to be pissed. I promised him, years ago, that I wouldn’t make a move on you. I broke that promise.”

I scoffed. “Yeah, you agreed to that when I was a teenager. I’m grateful you didn’t come after me back then but now? He’s being unreasonable.”

“You’re his sister.”

“Yeah,” I sighed. “I am but I’ve also been living my life and getting hurt for years and he hasn’t been any wiser about it. He doesn’t get a say in this. Promise me that.”

War swam in his eyes, and I held my breath because it wasn’t until that moment that I realized I wasn’t sure who he would pick if he had to. But then his hazel eyes cleared, and he nodded. “If I could resist you, we wouldn’t be here in the first place.”

Those words shouldn’t have made me all warm and fuzzy inside, but dammit they did. “You mean that?”

“Fuck yeah, I do Harp. The last thing I ever wanted was to fuck up my friendship with Cole. But you were also the last woman I expected to knock me on my ass.”

I smiled at his gruff words. “That was kind of sweet.”

He grunted out a laugh. “Thanks, babe. You bring it out of me.” He winked and

wrapped his arm around me. “So you’ll go easy on Cole?”

I nodded. “I’ll go easy-ish on him and that’s all I can promise.”

“Good enough for me.” He held the door open with a smile which grew when I kissed his cheek.

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I felt Cindy’s gaze on us the moment we stepped inside the clubhouse, but I didn’t have time for her bullshit, not today. I glanced around until I spotted Cole and marched over to where he sat laughing with Maverick, Hawk, and a man I didn’t recognize. “Cole,” I growled. “You wanted to talk. It’s now or never.”

His smile faded and he nodded. “Yeah, let’s talk.” He walked down the hall past the bedrooms and out of another door that led to an outside area. “We’ll have some privacy, at least for about ten minutes before the guys or one of their old ladies lets their curiosity get the better of them.”

I ignored his smile. “Right.”

“You’re still pissed.” His back was to me as he watched the horizon where the sun had just started to make her descent, the sky was a beautiful splash of colors. “Gio is a player, Harper. He doesn’t settle down.”

“And you think I only have sex with men I’m considering for marriage?” I laughed and shook my head. “I like Gio, and he likes me, why isn’t that enough for you?”

“Because you’re my little sister.”

“Correction, I am your younger sister Cole. I’m not a little kid anymore and you



know something else? I'm not a virgin."

"Harper," he groaned. "Please."

"Seriously. We like each other. I'm your sister and he's your oldest and best friend in the world, who exactly do you think you're protecting with your shitty behavior?"

He laughed. "Gio has a three-night rule, you know. He doesn't fuck a woman for more than three nights, period." His words were meant to shock me, and he frowned when he didn't get the desired response.

"Yeah, I know all about it. The girls told me and then he explained it."

"And you don't mind, Harper? What the fuck?"

I shrugged. "It's gross, I'll give you that, but I understand that he doesn't want to give them the wrong impression."

Cole laughed. "And you won't get the wrong impression?"

"No, I won't. For starters, it's been a hell of a lot more than three nights. It's been weeks, Cole. I like him and he likes me. I don't know where it's going but right now, I don't care. He's the same Gio only better, and with incredible sex."

"Could've lived without knowing that last bit."

"I know you made him promise not to touch me a million years ago but that was then. Things have changed. We both have changed—in case you haven't noticed."

"You think he's changed. Did he tell you about Cindy?"

I nodded. “She did too. When she threatened me.” His eyes widened in surprise. “Yeah. He told me she had her three nights, and she wants more. He doesn’t.” And the truth was that if he got tired of me, it would hurt but I’d lick my wounds when I was back in California.

“You really like him?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I really do Cole, and you were an asshole to him, treating him like he’s scum or something.” He opened his mouth, and I shook my head. “And don’t give me that little sister shit, either. He’s your friend. Your brother.”

“Yeah, fine. I’ll talk to him but when I’m ready.”

“Good because he really has done a good job of looking after me.” I wasn’t sure how much Gio told him, so I relayed the attempted kidnapping and the shooting. “He’s been good to me.”

“Yeah, I knew he would be.”

“Then stop being an asshole.” I took his hand in both of mine and squeezed it. “I mean it. Now let’s go have a drink while I tell all about this thing Gio does with his tongue.”

“Yes, to the drink, fuck no to the things you said that I’ve instantly erased from my mind.”

“Fine.” Just as we stepped inside Cindy stepped out of Gio’s room wearing nothing but a towel. She stopped and looked at me, a slow smile creeping across her face.

“Motherfucker!” Cole growled beside me before he took off for Gio’s room. “He’s dead.”

“Cole,” I called after him. “It’s not... Gio,” I said when I caught up to him and found the man I didn’t recognize zipping himself up.

“Hollywood, what are you doing in Gio’s room?”

He shrugged and flashed a million-dollar smile. “Gio said I could use it while I figured my shit out. Got a knock on the door and a welcome home blowjob. Who’s this?”

I smiled. “I’m Harper, Cole’s sister.”

He flashed a knowing smile. “And Gio’s woman?”

“Yep, that too. How’s freedom feeling?”

He laughed. “Damn good, thanks. We’re not gonna let those fucking Reapers hurt a hair on your pretty little head, that’s a promise.”

“I appreciate that, Hollywood.” I grabbed Cole’s arm. “Back off. Gio and I need to figure this out on our own, yeah?”

He nodded reluctantly but it was the best I’d get under the circumstances, and I understood.

Gio

“We’re fine, Diesel.” Cole insisted and scrubbed both hands over his face. “We don’t need whatever lesson this is supposed to be.”

Diesel glared at Cole, surprised at his almost defiance. “If you’re fine this shouldn’t be a lesson, just an order for you to follow.” His jaw clenched tight. “Go keep a fucking eye on the Reapers and let me know what they’re up to.” His gaze bounced between both of us and made it clear our personal bullshit would not be tolerated.

“Fine by me.” I didn’t have a problem with Cole. Sure, I was pissed as hell that he thought so little of me, but he was my brother in every way but blood. “I’ll meet you there.”

“I’m coming,” Cole grunted as he caught up with me out in the parking lot.

I pushed my bike to the limit as we rode out of Steel City and through Vegas until we were on the other side where the Blood Reapers had their clubhouse. Unlike ours, their clubhouse was a converted old warehouse that sat in the middle of a now-defunct industrial area. There was a clear view from the building across the street so that’s where we set up.

I knew Cole had plenty to say but I wasn’t in the mood to talk so I waited him out. The first hour was nothing but silence as we watched a few of Viper’s men go in and out with small satchels filled with drugs. In the second hour they did a gun deal with a few Asian guys without any distinct affiliation.

“Leave Harper alone,” he finally said halfway through the third hour.

“I can’t do that. I won’t.” Not only would it hurt Harper, which I wouldn’t do, it would hurt me because I wasn’t ready to give her up.

“You’d really fuck up our friendship over a few fucks?”

I laughed and shook my head. “If you really think I’d risk our friendship for orgasms, then you really don’t know me all that well. Maybe we’re not the friends I think we are.”

“Don’t pull that shit with me, not when you’re fucking my sister.”

“I’m not fucking her,” I spat out. “I mean of course I am, but that’s not all I’m doing Cole. For fuck’s sake do you even know Harper? She’s smart and stronger than she knows. She’s beautiful. She’s fucking incredible. Believe me, I didn’t mean for this to happen, but it did.” I turned back to the Reapers just as a van full of women arrived.

“You like her.” Cole’s voice was filled with genuine surprise.

“Of course I do,” I answered without looking at him. “I’ve known her most of my life, she’s just all grown up now.”

“She lives in California.”

“I know. I also know she hates her boss.” I looked at him. “She’s got more events to plan here.”

“And you think you’re gonna convince her to stay?”

“Not sure. It’s too soon and I don’t know what she’s thinking. We haven’t really talked about it on account of the shit with the Reapers, ya know?”

“Yeah, I know. Just tell me keeping her safe is your top priority.”

“It is. You should’ve seen her when I first taught her to shoot, she had her eyes closed every time she squeezed the trigger. But last night she aimed and squeezed without hesitation.”

“Holy shit. You really like her.”

Yeah, I did. “Shit, look.” I pointed to the row of black vehicles that pulled up outside. One by one the doors opened, and two dozen well-dressed Mexicans stopped out. They were all business as they went inside without knocking. “Ambush meeting?”

Cole squinted. “They’re tired of waiting. They want answers.”

I jumped to my feet. “We need to get back to the clubhouse. Viper thinks we took those drugs and that’s what he’ll tell the Santangelo Cartel when they ask.” I pulled out my phone and texted Slate since he would answer the fastest.

“Harper.” Cole’s voice was frantic and filled with worry.

“I’ll go get her. She’s meeting with Senator Merchant’s chief of staff today about planning a private fundraiser.”

He stopped and his brows shot up. “Seriously?”

“Yeah. She’s pretty excited about it. I’ll pick her up and you haul ass back to the clubhouse and let them know everything we saw today.”

“Yeah, okay.” He nodded but he had more to say. “Keep her safe Gio.”

“I will. I promise.” It was a promise I would die before breaking.

Harper

“You’re a local girl.” Marla Washington eyed me over her ultra-stylish red eyeglasses, the words sounded more like an accusation than a question. “I didn’t realize that, which makes this even better.”

I blinked. “How does that make anything better?” I’d run from Steel City as fast as I could and I never looked back, hadn’t even considered coming back until I landed here by accident.

Marla smiled. “In politics, local is everything, that’s how.”

This was the oddest meeting I’d ever been invited to. I wondered if Serena dealt with oddball clients like this all the time before she passed them along to the planners who worked for her. Marla didn’t seem like she’d work for a politician. She seemed more like a society wife or a cutthroat fashion editor, but her demeanor was very girl next door. It was confusing and I was on edge from the moment I walked inside her local office inside a nondescript office building in downtown Las Vegas. “Well, okay.”

“I think you’ll do a great job with this event, Harper. And if so, just remember that this fundraiser will be filled with people who spend half of their lives attending or hosting various fundraisers.”

I nodded, understanding her meaning clearly. “I will do my best.” The budget for this thing was outrageous and the expectations were high, but not demanding. “I like to get everything down before we do another meeting, if that’s all right. I know you’re busy, so I find it works best to approach with options and costs for everything before



we make anything official.”

“That sounds perfect, Harper.” She stood and I did the same. “I appreciate you coming down here for this meeting. I have three more scheduled today or else we could’ve done this at a restaurant.”

“Not a problem. I’ll be in touch.”

Her phone rang in the middle of her goodbye and I found the exit on my own, happy for a moment to myself. Marla was intimidating as hell, but this opportunity was one I couldn’t pass up, and I wouldn’t. But the short elevator ride to the lobby was more than enough time for me to freak out over whether or not I needed to inform Nicole and Serena about it. This was a local job, and Marla had come to me, not Serena.

Still, it didn’t feel right. But it didn’t feel wrong.

I stepped out onto the sidewalk just as my phone rang. Gio’s name popped up and a smile instantly lit my face, which was something I’d worry about at a later date. “Hey! You must have a sixth sense or something because I just finished up with Marla.”

“Harp.” Gio’s voice was tight with tension. “Whatever you do, don’t leave the building. I’m on my way to get you right now but some shit might be going down and I need you to stay inside.”

My heartrate kicked up and I looked left and then right, finding the busy street lacked danger. I relaxed and backtracked into the building with a smile for the receptionist who mostly directed traffic. “What’s going on?”

“Not sure yet but I just have a bad feeling.”

“Okay. I’m inside.”

“Good. I’ll call you back when I’m outside.” He ended the call before I could say anything, which was good because my hands shook so badly that I dropped my phone, and it took three attempts to pick it up.

Gio was a lot of things, but he wasn’t a worrier. Despite the dangers of the MC life, he was capable and prepared, and he knew how to handle just about anything that came his way, so hearing the worry in his voice had me freaked out. I tried to keep calm but as I paced up and down the lobby, every worst-case scenario played in my head. Thankfully I didn’t have much of an imagination because both scenarios involved me or Gio getting tortured and then killed.

The familiar ringtone that belonged to Gio sounded in the lobby and startled me from my thoughts. I answered the call, “Gio?”

“Yeah, I’m right outside.”

I nodded and looked through the glass door. “I’m on my way.” I stepped out into the chilly evening air and Gio seemed so far away. The sidewalk was wider than most, but every step felt like it took great effort. I was walking fast but it seemed like I was making no progress as my gaze scanned the area for threats.

Suddenly a shot rang out and my feet stopped moving. I looked in horror as Gio’s body twisted back and to the left before he toppled off his bike.

“Gio!” I don’t know how I got them moving but I started to run towards the bike, towards Gio. “Gio,” I called out again but suddenly my legs were off the ground. I was floating. No, I wasn’t floating, someone had grabbed me. “Let me go!” I kicked and screamed and squirmed with every ounce of my body.

“Are you sure this is her? She looks like a business lady.” The voice was muffled and lightly accented.

“Yeah, this is her. The bitch said she would be here, and here she is.”

Bitch? What bitch?

Confusion weighed heavily on me, but I didn’t stop trying to rescue myself so that I could get to Gio and make sure he was okay. “Gio,” I called out again, utter fear seized my vocal cords.

“Stop. Fucking. Moving.” The men were having trouble carrying me because I wasn’t a willing victim. “Stop!”

“Fuck you,” I shouted and kicked backwards, aiming for whatever body part I could find. “Let me go!”

“I like ‘em feisty,” one of them said with a menacing chuckle.

Gio stood up and relief coursed through me, but fear returned at the sight of the blood dripping down his left arm. His gaze met mine and he shook his head, which I took to mean that I shouldn’t call out for him, so I didn’t.

“Asshole,” I grumbled to provide a greater distraction.

Another shot rang out and I screamed with my whole body as a now-familiar warm spray landed on my right side and I realized Gio had taken one of my kidnappers out.

The other man’s grip tightened around my waist as he dragged me towards a waiting van. I went slack, giving him all of my weight to slow him down but the fucker was determined, which only heightened my fear.

Three more shots rang out and my gaze sought out Gio, who had put three bullets into the van. A second later the sound of a car horn went on and on as if someone was lying on it. Or dying on it.

“Shit,” the kidnapper mumbled.

“Save yourself,” I whispered. “Let me go and get the fuck out of here so you can live to fight another day.”

He laughed but there was no humor in it. “I might as well put a bullet in my own fucking head if I come back without you.”

With those words, I knew my fate was sealed.

More shots rang out and I lost sight of Gio as the man shoved me into the back of the van. He pushed his dead friend out of the driver’s seat and took off.

Gio’s bike was right behind us, but more bikes sounded in the distance, and I knew the Steel Demons couldn’t have possibly gotten here that fast, which meant Gio was outnumbered.

Shit.

Tears streamed down my eyes as gunshots rang out in loud bursts. Gio would have no choice but to escape to save himself. If he didn’t, he would be shot to death.

A loud sob escaped when the sound of the group of motorcycles grew closer and I knew whatever happened, Gio was no longer chasing the van.

I was completely alone now. Gio wouldn’t know where they were taking me which meant any rescue effort would take more time than I likely had.

I never told Gio that I loved him. Now that I was faced with the reality of death, I knew what I felt for Gio wasn't just an intensified version of my lifelong crush. It wasn't the effect of great sex either, at least not just the effect of great sex. No, I loved him. Loved the man he'd become, gorgeous and charming and protective without stomping on my need for independence. I loved him, I was wildly and madly in love with my brother's best friend.

And I would never get the chance to let him know.

I cried until my tear ducts were dry, until my body ached, and my throat burned. Regret washed over me that I hadn't told Gio how I felt, that I hadn't taken full advantage of our time together. That I hadn't gone after my dreams and started my own event planning company and hadn't told Nicole to go fuck herself.

There was so much I wanted to do that I hadn't done yet. So much that I put off for later and now it looked like later wouldn't be an option.

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I was so lost in my thoughts and in my woes that I hadn't realized the van had come to a stop, or how long we'd been driving. I hadn't done any of the things everyone says you should do if you get abducted, and now we were here.

"Come on." The only guy left standing wasn't as aggressive when he untied me and dragged me into a dark building. "Wait here and don't try anything funny."

I ignored his words and the minute I was alone, I looked around and squinted in the dark in search of doors or windows, anywhere that might provide me with an escape option. I couldn't see shit. "If only I had my... oh shit." I patted my body suddenly remembering that I hadn't put the phone back into my bag that was now lying on the sidewalk outside Marla's office, I'd stuffed it in my jacket pocket when I'd seen Gio.

I pulled it out and turned on the flashlight. Empty shelves filled the room and even though windows covered three walls, they were all about fifteen feet above the floor. “Double shit.”

Turning off the phone, I dialed Gio. His phone rang and rang. Feeling desperate, I almost hung up until I heard the sweetest sound. “Harp? Fuck baby, I’m so sorry.”

“Gio, you’re okay!” Those whispered words were filled with relief. “I’m glad. I was so worried I’d lost you.”

“Ask her where she is,” a male voice asked.

“I don’t know. It looks like an empty warehouse of some sort, but I don’t know where we are. Sorry.”

There was some shuffling and then Gio cursed before another voice spoke. “Leave your phone on Harper. Just set it down somewhere and leave it so I can track you.”

“Slate,” I whispered. “Gio said you were a tech nerd.”

“I’ll give him shit about that later. Hang tight Harper, we’ll be there soon.”

The sound of a squeaky hinge startled a shriek out of me. “Someone is coming. Gotta go.” I hurried on my tiptoes back to the spot where I was left and crossed my arms, watching as half a dozen men walked towards me.

I recognized the man in front as Viper, the man responsible for my shit luck since I came home. “You’ve caused me a lot of fucking trouble, bitch.” Before I could say anything, he unleashed a full body backhanded slap against my cheek.

It stung instantly and knocked me back a few steps. My face felt like it was on fire,

but I refused to give him the satisfaction of my pain, muffling all but a closed mouth grunt. I hated this man more than I've hated anyone in my whole life.

"You could've just fucking left." He wasn't just angry, he was worried and afraid.

I glared at him and held the side of my face. "I didn't hear anything, and I wasn't going to say anything until you and your goons started threatening me!"

"Well, it's too late for that now ain't it?" He held his hand out and someone placed a phone in his palm. His smile was wicked while the phone rang. "I have something you want now too. My product for her life. You have twenty-four hours before I start leaving her body parts on your doorstep." Viper's gaze never left mine as he ended the call and walked away, leaving his men to follow behind him.

And I was left alone.

Again.

Gio

It's been twelve goddamn hours since Viper called with proof that he had Harper and still we were arguing over the best course of action. I was pissed off. She'd called and given us a lead that Viper and his men couldn't possibly know about, but still we were too late. We found her phone less than an hour after Viper's call, but the building was empty.

Harper wasn't there.

"Look, no plan is perfect," I heard my brother say in an effort to be the voice of reason. "If she'd kept the phone with her, they'd have found it, and we wouldn't have tracked them this far. But we can't sit here and debate this shit until the end of time. Harper is counting on us." Rocky knew how hard this was for me and for Cole and I appreciated him fighting when I was unable to.

My mind was too full of Harper and what Viper might be doing to exact his revenge. The Blood Reapers were fucking psychopaths, known for their vicious retaliation methods that included torture and murder, but they were also known to capture loved ones of their enemies and get them strung out on drugs before they pimped them out until they were all used up.

Fuck that shit. If we didn't come up with a plan right fucking now, tonight would be another night of carnage for Viper's MC.

"We have to find her first," Slate began. "She did good by leaving the phone on but now we have no fucking clue where she is."



“We will if we call Viper and tell him we have his product,” Cole offered, his voice was thick with tension because it wasn’t an ideal plan.

“That’s our last resort plan.” Diesel’s voice was calm but there was an underlying hint of anger, and I was sure I was the cause. “Sheriff Cross paid me a visit this morning,” he began, and I felt the weight of his stare on the side of my face.

Cole asked what none of us had the courage to ask. “What did he want?”

One by one the gaze of everyone in the room fell to me and tension filled my body.

“What the fuck did you do?” Cole was the one who asked the question, and I didn’t bother to look up.

“I did what I had to do.” I wouldn’t apologize for it. “Someone had to do something.”

“Goddammit Gio,” Diesel yelled and smacked the table with his fist. “You burned down two of the Reapers’ stash houses and a tattoo shop.” Diesel was furious and he has every right to be.

Still I wasn’t sorry. “I did? Prove it.” Maybe outright defiance wasn’t the best option but dammit, somebody had to do something.

“You’re damn lucky there is no evidence,” Diesel added. “Or else we’d have even bigger problems.”

“How could these problems get any bigger? Huh? They have Harper and who knows what the fuck they’re doing to her!”

“I get it,” Cole said. “She’s my fucking sister, man, I totally get it and I’m glad she has you in her corner. But what you’re doing right now? It’s gonna get you killed. Or

Harper. And it's gonna suck us into a war we're not ready for."

"Ready." I snorted and shook my head. "Who the fuck is ever ready for war?" I looked around at each of the men gathered in the room because they knew there was no preparation for war. It happened and you made decisions in the moment and hoped they worked out. "The truth is that Viper can't be trusted. We might get Harper back and we might not, but I'm worried about what the fuck she's going through now, while you decide what we're gonna do about it." I felt sick to my stomach thinking about what they could be doing to her.

"Well we have three less properties to search for her at," Slate offered up with a laugh. His comment seemed to release some of the tension in the room. "It's not great but it's something."

"Then whoever is doing it should keep doing it. Eventually he'll find her." I wouldn't stop. I couldn't.

"Stop this shit, Gio. I get it man, they have your woman and you're spiraling out of control. I've been there but it's not going to help, not now and not with Viper." He inhaled and let it out slowly. "We're meeting with Viper and his number two tonight."

"With what package? The Black Devils have probably sold most of that shit by now."

"We have it taken care of," Diesel answered vaguely. "You've been up all night wreaking havoc on Blood Reapers' properties, go take a shower and have a fucking nap."

A nap, like I'm a fucking child. "I'm fine."

"It's not a fucking suggestion," he shouted. "Cole, make sure he goes home and rests

and then make sure you get his ass back here tonight. One hour before the meeting with Viper.”

“You got it.” Cole stood and stared at me until I got to my feet. “Don’t make this harder Gio.”

I stood, anger colored my every move as I shoved the chair back until it tipped over. “What the fuck ever.” I stormed out of the room and made a beeline for my bike because a ride was just what I needed to get rid of some of this anger and tension.

Harper was gone and I wouldn’t be able to rest until she was back here and safe in my arms. “Wait up, Gio!” Cole called after me, but I ignored him.

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My mind wouldn’t focus on anything. Every fucking blink took me back to that office building where they’d snatched Harper from. When I closed my eyes, I felt the bullet as it tore through my arm and sent me to the ground. When I stood up again, there she was with that asshole’s arm hooked around her, yanking her backwards. They took her from me, dammit and I’d done all I could, but it wasn’t enough. “I shot one of those fuckers right in the head,” I grunted. “I should’ve shot the other one, but he used Harper as a shield.”

“You did what you could,” Cole insisted.

“And it wasn’t enough!” I shook my head. “She was so fucking scared man, the look in her eyes when she realized I was a fucking liar and I wouldn’t save her. I can’t forget it.”

“Harp won’t blame you, trust me.”

Maybe she wouldn't. Harper had a big heart like that, but it didn't mean that I wouldn't blame myself for a long damn time. "I have to find her before they destroy her."

"We won't let that happen."

Damn right because I had a plan. "Right." We rode side by side for close to an hour before I finally exited the highway and headed home. It wasn't home without Harper there, but she would be back where she belonged.

Soon.

"I'm gonna hit the shower and get some sleep," I told Cole.

He eyed me carefully. "Good. I thought you'd put up more of a fight."

I shrugged. "Yeah well, a man's gotta sleep, or try anyway. Won't be any fuckin good for Harp if I'm dead on my feet." I was too wired to sleep, and a hot shower was just what I needed to give me another burst of energy. I stayed in there longer than usual because I needed to clear my fucking mind. I needed to make sure I saw everything when I found Harper because I would find her.

I dressed quickly and quietly before I locked my bedroom door and left out the window. I couldn't risk alerting Cole, so I pushed my bike down the driveway and to the corner before I fired it up and took off. I had a list of other businesses and stash houses that belonged to the Blood Reapers, and I decided that a systematic approach would be best. Last night I'd gone for the properties that would hurt that motherfucker the most, but today my only goal was to find Harper.

Fourteen hours with Viper was too fucking many.

The methodical approach worked well because it kept me focused on one goal at a time, one foot in front of the other. The first stash house was locked up tight with no guard because it was just a bunch of weed and a few guns, nothing worth stealing or fighting over.

But losing it would still hurt the Reapers so that's what I did, filling the bathtub with every liquid I could find and dumping the drugs into it. Maybe they knew some fucking chemist who could separate that shit out, but it would cost them any profit. No fire, so nothing for Diesel to bitch about.

The second stash house had two bikers standing guard. The first one was smiling at his phone which made it easy to sneak up on him from the backyard and slide my knife across his throat. The second man put up more of a fight, but I had rage on my side, and she was the best backup I could've had. He put up a good fight and landed a few blows that slowed me down.

When his gun came out and he smiled, I smiled wider and took a step forward to grab the wrist that held the gun before I stuck my knife under his chin and pushed up. He crumpled like a paper bag, and I kicked him out of my way before I searched the house.

Instead of Harper, I found neatly wrapped drugs stacked up in room after room, hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth, I was sure. The basement and the attic were empty too, so I struck a match but then I froze as Cole's words hit me in the gut.

A war we're not ready for.

He was right. This amount had to belong to the Santangelos, and we didn't want shit with them, so I left it as it was and kept moving.

The next location was an empty bar, and Harper wasn't being held there either so I

smashed up every fucking bottle I could find until my rage only simmered. Location after location came up empty and was left in total fucking carnage.

Still, no Harper.

The fifth location was a brothel that sat as the lone house on a block filled with apartment buildings. It was a three-story Victorian style which meant lots of rooms and my arms started to tingle. This was the perfect place to hide her in plain sight.

It was early enough in the day that the place wasn't busy but still, I had to be careful because I didn't know who was inside. My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I knew it was Cole before I even looked at the screen. I ignored the call, and the stubborn fucker called right back.

“What?”

“What the fuck, Gio? Are you trying to get Harper killed?”

I sucked in a sharp breath. “You know that's not what I'm doing. I'm making sure that the Harper I get back is still the woman I love, okay?” Shit, I hadn't meant to say that. “I'm not waiting until she's bloodied and bruised, battered, or fucking traumatized Cole.”

“You left me behind.”

“Yeah, because you're a fucking Boy Scout and I can take the heat of this myself as long as Harper is safe.”

“No, fuck that. We're brothers before the MC, we do this shit together.”

He was right. “Not this time Cole. I can't explain it, but I have to do this. It's my fault

she's gone, and I have to save her, no matter what it takes."

"I could have Slate track your phone."

I nodded, surprised he hadn't done that already. "You could but you won't. I'm close Cole, I know it. I'll call you when I find her." I ended the call and turned off the ringer. If something happened to me, I needed Slate to track my phone to get Harper to safety.

Now it's time to save my woman.

Harper

I wasn't sure how long I'd been locked up in the small, dark, windowless room. I didn't know if it was day or night. Viper and his men had moved me from the original building which dashed my hopes that Gio or anyone would come to save me. They had no clue where I was and neither did I—if I even had a way to reach out to them, which I didn't.

For the first few hours I couldn't hear much, but after a while footsteps and muffled conversations sounded all around me. I couldn't tell if it was right beside me, below, or above me, because the room was pitch black. I could stand up, but two or three steps in any direction had me right up against a wall. It had to be a closet or the world's tiniest room.

I had nothing to do but think. Would Diesel and Rocky agree to Viper's terms? I knew what Cole told me about the MC, that it was a democracy but there were times that Diesel and Rocky could override the vote if they decided it was best for the MC. My biggest worry was that they would decide that the mission to rescue me would hurt the MC more than anything and they would choose to let me hang.

I knew, of course, that Cole and Gio wouldn't go for that which made my eyes fill with tears because I also knew what that meant. If forced to choose, Gio and Cole would make the foolish choice to attempt to save me without regard to their own safety. I couldn't live with that, so I listened carefully, tested the door handle and tried for any weakness in the room where I was being held. I hadn't found a way out, not yet, but I wasn't ready to give up. I still had some fight in me, and I would use that until my last breath.



Wherever I was being held was busy. Music played and there were dozens of voices and noises, mostly sex sounds, all around me. I'd tried shouting, but either no one had heard, or no one cared. This was either a party house or some kind of brothel or sex club, I wasn't sure which and even less sure that I wanted to know. I still didn't believe that Viper planned to let me go, which had my mind racing with what else he had planned for me.

I couldn't let myself think about that, I had to think about how I could get the hell out of here. Though with every minute that passed, it became clearer to me there was no way out without help.

This can't be how it ends, how I end.

I refused to let this be how I ended.

I started kicking on the door, determined to get someone's attention. I didn't care who, even if it was one of the Reapers it would mean someone was listening, was paying attention to me. But a loud hush fell all around me, and I wasn't sure if I should keep kicking the door or stop.

A woman's scream sounded but that was it, there were no other sounds of distress, and I didn't know how to respond.

Heavy footfalls sounded next, and I tensed, backing myself up into the farthest corner I could find to save myself, or maybe to give myself time to react, I wasn't sure of anything anymore. But I braced myself for the worst.

Grunts and groans sounded that I chalked up to sex sounds until I heard the door handle jiggle and then it was yanked open. "Harper? Thank fuck!"

Gio? "Gio is that you?"

“It is,” he answered in a low relieved whisper before I felt his hands on my waist, pulling me to my feet before they were lifted off the ground. “Fuck I’m so glad to see you,” he whispered. “I wasn’t sure if I would find you.”

“You did,” I cried. “I knew you would, but I wasn’t sure how long it would take.”

“Felt like a fucking eternity,” he muttered and carried me down one flight of stairs and then another. He fell silent as he carried me, and the next thing I knew there was a cool breeze on my skin. My feet hit the ground, and a loud sob escaped. “You’re okay, Harp. You’re safe, anyway.”

I clung to Gio as if he was my whole world, because in that moment he was. Hell, in general he was everything to me. “Gio, you came for me.”

“Of course I did.” His voice had an edge to it, and I realized we weren’t out of danger yet as he urged me forward, “Come on, Harp, we need to put a lot of fucking distance between this place and us. Quickly.”

I nodded and accepted the helmet he handed me. I wanted to argue that he needed it more than I did but I knew there was no arguing with him right now. I held on tight and keep my gaze on the scenery that zoomed by, making sure that there were no motorcycles or vans following in our wake. My heart continued pounding against my chest because I knew there would be a chase or a retaliation. My brain wouldn’t let me believe that my rescue had been so easy, so free of consequences.

Too soon the Steel Demons clubhouse came into view and everything else I’d suppressed came back to me with reckless abandon. Tears slid down my cheeks and my body shook uncontrollably as the bike came to a stop and Gio killed the engine.

“Harper, you’re okay,” he whispered and held me close while I cried into his strong, broad chest. “You’re okay, baby. I got you.”

His words were soothing but still I couldn't stop the tears. "I just," I started and paused for more sobs to shake my body. "I just can't believe you came for me. I wanted you to, but I never dreamed..." my words trailed off because there was nothing else to say other than, "Thank you, Gio."

He shook his head above me, but I held him tight. "Don't thank me, Harper. I should have kept you safe, I fucking promised. I'm so fucking sorry."

"No!" I pulled back and shook my head. "Don't you dare. They were organized and somehow, they knew I'd be there." I froze as moments from my abduction came back to me. "Can we go inside? Please?"

"Yeah, of course." He wrapped his big body around mine and guided me around the building and through the rear entrance where nobody could see us. His hand rubbed soothing circles against my back and once we were locked inside his room in the clubhouse, he pulled back and stared at me. "Harper."

The smile that touched my lips was small but filled with fire and gratitude. "Gio, I need you to stay calm."

"I can't."

"Try because I have to tell you something and you're not going to like it." I worked hard to remember everything I could just in case I found myself in this position. "They knew where I'd be." The words rushed out of me. "When they grabbed me, they said the bitch said she would be here." I shook my head and cleared the fog. "At first I thought I was the bitch but the more I thought about it the more I realized that someone told them where I would be."

His jaw clenched tight. "You heard that?"

I nodded and held his face in my hands because I felt him spiraling. “Who would do that? Who hates me so much they’d want me dead?” I stopped as the realization hit. “Cindy wouldn’t do this, would she?”

He stiffened with tension, and I could feel the anger course through his body until he was just a rage-filled vessel. I quickly tried to defuse the situation—I didn’t want him to go off half-cocked on the club girl without any evidence. “We don’t know it’s her, but I’m safe now Gio, because of you. I’m right here, right now because of you.”

He shook his head, ready to take on the burden of my kidnapping but I wouldn’t let him. “I promised.”

“And you got me. Here I am,” I reminded him. “I’m fine, Gio. I’m safe and other than a few bruises, I’m good. They stuck me in a room and kept me there, no one touched me.” I held his face and forced his gaze to mine. “Thank you Gio. Thank you for saving me from a fate worse than death.”

His smile spread slowly, and he held my face in return, pressing his forehead to mine. “I’m in love with you, Harper, I couldn’t do anything but burn the whole fucking world down until I found you.”

A shaky breath escaped at his intense, heartfelt words. “Gio.” My lips met his in a kiss that was hot and hungry, so raw with emotion that more tears filled my eyes.

The door to Gio’s room opened and my brother appeared with an angry scowl on his face. “You might have just burned the whole fucking world down, brother. Diesel wants to see you.” His anger subsided slightly when his gaze met mine. “Fuck Harp, it’s so good to see you.”

“Good to be seen alive,” I told him while I clung to Gio.

“Harper.” He whispered my name before he planted the softest, most intense kiss of my life against my lips. Everything he felt was contained in this kiss and I held him close and tight, reluctant to let him go. “I’ll be back.”

“I’ll be here,” I assured him. Where else would I be when the man of my dreams just declared his love for me? Those words stuck with me through a hot shower.

I’m in love with you.

Gio was in love with me, he had risked his life to rescue me. It was surreal but every atom that made me pulsed with the belief that his words were real. Genuine and sincere.

Gio loved me.

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After my shower I sat on the bed wrapped in a towel. I didn’t want to put on the outfit I’d been abducted in, but I had nothing else to wear. I was about to reluctantly get back into yesterday’s clothes, when a knock sounded. I tentatively went to answer and when I opened the door Peyton, Ellie, Laura, Grace, and Emma were all standing there, wearing tentative smiles and heavy expressions of worry. “Harper, you look better than I expected.”

Peyton’s words made me laugh. “I feel better than I expected and it’s all thanks to Gio.”

The women stepped in and produced several bags. “We brought you a few things Gio thought you might need.”

“Thank you.” More tears filled my eyes at their kind gesture and the fact that Gio had

thought to ask them. The bag was filled with clothes and underwear, toiletries, and anything else a woman could need to feel normal. “Seriously, thank you ladies.”

“We’re a team,” Laura said with a smile. “We help out when and where we can.”

“This is just what I needed.” I took the bag into the bathroom and quickly changed into a pair of black yoga pants and a loose t-shirt. Once I was done I returned to the living room, “Seriously this is so kind of you all.”

Ellie brushed off my words. “How are you doing? Really?”

That was the question, wasn’t it? I sighed heavily and assessed my emotions. “My cheek is bruised, and it still stings but I’m okay. Mostly.” I turned to them and shrugged. “Gio says he’s in love with me. I didn’t even think that was a possibility so what do I do with that?”

Ellie grinned. “Easy, you just have to figure out how you feel about him.”

I didn’t need to figure it out because I knew. “I love him. I’ve loved him since I was a girl.” He was the only person I thought about when I thought I would die.

“Then you have your answer. Tell him how you feel and grab that love by the balls,” Peyton offered with a cheeky grin. “This life is too dangerous not to live with the most intense love you can find every fucking day. Tomorrow isn’t guaranteed so grab today by the balls and make it your bitch.”

“Yeah, that,” Grace offered with a smile. “But maybe with a little less violence.”

I laughed. “I will, but first I need to tell you something. I told Gio but I’m not sure how this all works.”

They all gathered closer, and I felt safe and protected. Confident enough to air my suspicions. “What?”

“Someone tipped off the Reapers about where I would be.” I told them what I heard. “I can only think of one person, but I thought they were just as loyal as you ladies.” I shook my head and covered my face. “I only told Gio, so someone had to have been listening in to share my location.”

“Shit.” Laura shook her head. “That’s not good.”

“Right? I felt crazy thinking it but it’s the only thing that makes sense.”

“You told Gio,” Ellie began with a sad smile. “The guys will take care of it how they see fit. It’s what they do,” she explained. “It’s how they operate.”

I swallowed around the lump in my throat. I wasn’t completely sure what that meant but I nodded anyway. “What’s going to happen?”

“I don’t know for sure,” Peyton said, a sympathetic smile on her face. “But it won’t be good.”

A small part of me was happy with the answer but the other, bigger part, hated to think I might have put a target on another woman’s back, even if she wanted me dead.

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

“What the fuck were you thinking?” Diesel’s voice was a thunderous roar that echoed off the walls the moment I stepped into our meeting room. I knew I wouldn’t be safe from his wrath and that he’d kept himself in check for Harper’s sake. “Of that stupid fucking things to do, going off on your own Gio. What the fuck, man?”

I shrugged. “I couldn’t just sit around and do nothing. I know it was wrong and I’m sorry that I disobeyed you but I’m not sorry that I went after her.”

“I’m not mad you got Harper back either, man. Fuck!” He raked both hands through his hair and let out a long, slow breath. “Just tell me what other damage you did?”

“I didn’t set anything on fire.” It was a lame ass attempt at a joke. “I think that shows incredible restraint.”

Diesel’s mouth kicked up into a reluctant grin. “Asshole.”

My smile joined his and low laughter went up around the room. It stopped as soon as I told them what I’d found, “They had her locked in a storeroom. Inside one of their fucking warehouses.” The words dripped with venom as they came out of my mouth and I shook my head, angry all over again.

“Otherwise she’s good?” Cole’s voice was tight with both tension and gratitude.

I nodded. “Other than a slap she said she was fine, they didn’t touch her. She’s shaken but okay. Physically at least”



“Thanks, man.”

“Of course.”

“That was really fucking stupid,” Rocky added because of course he did. “You could’ve gotten yourself killed.”

“I know but I didn’t, and I couldn’t risk what Viper might’ve had planned for her.” That was never going to fucking happen.

“I get it,” Diesel said. “We all get it Gio and we’re happy Harper is back safe and sound. But now it’s time to deal with the fallout.”

“Yeah. I killed a few Reapers, and I fucked up some shit, a bar, and some drugs ended up in a bathtub with a bunch of cleaning products. Not much damage, just enough to fuck with them.” That was fun shit, but this was serious. “The house on Oak Street is filled top to bottom with bricks though, and I left it as it is because I assume that’s cartel shit.”

Diesel’s shoulders sank in relief. “Good. So fucking good, Gio. I’m glad.” His gaze met mine and he gave a short, grateful nod. “We only have a couple hours before we meet with Viper.”

“Yeah, and they’ll definitely notice Harper is gone before then.”

I wasn’t so sure. “Only if Viper was acting in good faith and planned to give her back. There was no fucking security where she was being held.”

Diesel and Rocky wore matching expressions of anger and worry, which I understood down to my goddamn bones. “Then a straight trade was never on the table.”

“Exactly.” I smacked both my palms against one of the bar tables as I sat, grunting my frustration. “Look guys, there’s something else.” I sat up straight and looked each of my brothers in the eyes. “Harper told me something she remembered from when she was taken. The Reapers knew she would be there at that office building. They said the bitch said she’d be here . Those are the words Harper heard them say.” The idea of it still pissed me the fuck off. “I have a pretty good idea who their informant is.”

“Fucking Cindy,” Cole muttered. “She warned Harper away from you.”

Rebel shook his head. “Told you about sticking your dick in crazy. No pussy is worth that... or this.” He motioned around the meeting room, empty except for the patched brothers.

“Yeah,” I shrugged. “But that’s what the club whores are for, right?”

“Fuck that,” Hawk spat out. “We’ve all stuck our dick in these girls at one time or another. They are MC property, they’re supposed to be loyal to us, goddammit. This shit can’t stand.”

“It won’t,” Diesel answered confidently. “But for now we need to decide what we’re gonna do.”

“How about we torch that brothel where Gio picked up his woman? They come running and we take ‘em out. Easy-peasy.” His wide grin underscored just how insane this motherfucker was at times.

Maverick gave Hollywood a side-eye and shook his head. “Good to see that prison didn’t cure you of crazy.”

“Never, brother. Not fucking ever,” he laughed.

“I have a better idea, but if mine doesn’t work then I say let’s welcome Hollywood home in style.” I flashed a smile at the only other club member who could rival my crazy.

“We’re listening.” I had Diesel’s full attention.

“Our informant. She can call them with more information that will give us the edge.” It wasn’t a fully formed plan, but it had to be enough of a plan to work. “She can tell them we’re going to get Harper from the brothel and when they show up, we’ll deal with them however our Prez sees fit.” Silence fell around the room, and I waited for all the reasons my plan was stupid and wouldn’t work.

“That’s a good start.” Diesel grinned. “If you left the Santangelo product alone, I say we call them too.” When his grinned turned devious I knew whatever the plan was, it would be fun. “Gio, go get Cindy.”

My heart pounded against my chest as I got to my feet and headed to the bar. My hands balled into fists as my feet moved forward, anger pulsed through me, and I wanted to strangle the woman. “Fine.” The last person I wanted to talk to was Cindy, but she had to answer for her crimes, and I needed to be there to make sure she did.

“Cindy,” My voice was as light as I could make it. She sat around with the other club girls at one table while the old ladies and Harper were gathered at another. I caught Harper’s eye, and I could see she had an idea what this was all about.

When Cindy realized it was me, her blue eyes lit up and her red lips parted into a happy smile. “Hiya Gio.” She stood and sauntered over to me, oblivious to the turmoil twisting inside of me. “What’s up?”

“Come with me.” I kept my voice low, and I didn’t wince when she wrapped her arms around my waist.

“Thought you’d never ask,” she cooed and looked over her shoulder, no doubt to make sure Harper saw everything.

My woman was surrounded by Petyon, Ellie, Laura, and Grace and each of them threw dirty looks at Cindy. But Harper’s gaze was firmly fixed on me and when I gave a subtle shake of my head, she returned it with a subtle nod of understanding.

“Later.” I mouthed the words to her before I led Cindy past my room and to our meeting room.

“Hey, I thought we were going to make up for lost time. I’m not even mad that you basically ghosted me for weeks for her.”

“I didn’t ghost you, Cindy.”

“Got distracted,” she replied with a laugh as she rolled her eyes. “Whatever. We’re gonna be good together. You’ll see.” It was only when she came face to face with dozens of angry expressions that she finally realized what was up. “Gio, what’s going on?”

I shoved her forward until she came face to face with our prez and VP. Diesel growled out, “Who did you tell about Harper’s whereabouts?”

She blinked, batted her long lashes slowly as if she could seduce her way out of this. “I don’t know what you’re talking about I don’t know anything about her.”

“Don’t lie to us Cindy.” Rocky used a soft, honeyed voice, the good cop to Diesel’s bad cop which she hadn’t seen yet. “Just tell us who you spoke to.”

She opened and closed her mouth a few times before she shook her head and flashed a bright smile. “Look guys, I don’t know what she told you, but I didn’t tell anybody

anything.”

I wasn’t taking anymore of her shit, I pulled out my gun, holding it against her temple. “Wrong fucking answer, Cindy. I will end you right here and now, but the only shot you have of making it out of here alive is to tell the fucking truth.”

She sucked in a terrified breath, her tear-filled eyes met mine. “That is the truth.” She squealed when I applied more pressure to her temple.

“Wrong answer. The guys who took her told her it was you so tell us who you spoke to, or better yet, call him. Now.”

She stomped her foot and turned to face me, forcing the gun against her forehead. “You were supposed to be mine, Gio! Mine, not hers!”

“Shut the fuck up and make the call.” All I needed was one little push and I would squeeze that fucking trigger.

“I don’t know the number,” she shouted, her voice was thick with fear and her eyes wide.

“Well then I guess you’re useless to us.” I wrapped my index finger around the trigger and dug the barrel into her flesh.

“Okay, wait! I’ll call, okay? I’ll call him!”

“Do it now and don’t make me ask again.”

“Gio, please.” She looked at me with pleading eyes, hoping I would save her but that wouldn’t fucking happen. “Don’t make me do this.”

“You did this to yourself.” I shook my head. “You almost cost Harper her life.”

“So what? She could have any guy she wants, why did she have to take mine?”

“She’s my fucking sister,” Cole roared. It was in that moment we all realized that Cindy was done. No matter what happened she couldn’t stay with the Steel Demons.

“Fine,” she whispered. “I’ll make the call.”

Damn right she would.

Harper

“Are you sure you have to go?” It’s a silly question born of nothing but my own fear that I’ll lose Gio forever. “There are a lot of bikers in this MC.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “There are, but that’s exactly why I need to be there. We always have each other’s back. Plus these fuckers have to pay for what they did to you.”

My heart swelled at his words, the possessive nature of his tone. “I know. You’ll be safe?”

He nodded and pressed his forehead against mine, his warm breath fanned over my face. “All I want is to come back to you, Harp.”

“Good because I love you and I just found you, Gio. I’m not ready to lose you yet. Or ever.” My heart pounded as I waited for him to say something. Anything.

He let out a soft laugh. “There’s no fucking way I’m going anywhere, Harp. You, having you here with me is the best fucking thing that’s happened to me and I’m not ready to give it up. Or you.” He kissed me gently, a soft chaste kiss. “I might be a little banged up, babe.” He deepened the kiss and held the back of my head in his firm grasp before his tongue slicked across my lips. His tongue moved seductively, and I moaned into the kiss, following when he pulled back. “But I’ll be back for you Harp. I fucking swear it.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” I whispered and then watched him walk away.

His head was down the way it was when he was deep in thought. Rocky joined him on one side and then Cole, three brothers headed into battle.

Together.

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The moment I no longer heard the roar of their motorcycles, worry kicked in. Hard. I sat at a table as the background noise of the clubhouse swirled around me. Everyone here was worried about someone specific, or all the men combined. This was their family and here I was sulking like I was the only person with someone at risk.

Still I couldn't help biting my nails and nibbling my bottom lip as my mind raced with worst case scenarios. Would Viper take it out on Gio that he no longer had his only bargaining chip? Would tonight end up in a bloodbath? Would Gio really come back to me?

"Okay ladies," Peyton stood up with a wide smile on her face, her red hair in a messy topknot. Even though Ellie had been around the longest and was married to the president, Peyton seemed to be the de facto leader of the old ladies. "We can't sit around and worry or else the next few hours will be hella hellish, see what I did there?" She laughed. "Shots for everybody who isn't pregnant, because our kids are either at school or daycare and times like these call for tequila."

"Make mine a double." I refused to even pretend that I was okay. "And ice cold."

"Oh, I like the way you think!" Peyton's grin widened as she pointed at me and then went around the room, pointing at the other girlfriends and wives. "Come on Harp, give me a hand."

"Yeah. Okay." Anything to distract me.



“How are you holding up so far?”

“Terrible,” I admitted. “I’m not used to this, the waiting and the worrying. The fear. How do you do it?”

“Lots of tequila and being together. Usually when something like this goes down, we’re on lockdown here at the clubhouse so we’re all together. The strong ones help the less strong ones, the loud ones keep the quiet ones from getting too lost in their heads.”

“Yeah, okay. That makes sense actually.”

For the next few hours we sat around chatting and drinking, we even managed a few laughs while we waited.

Still, no matter how much we talked and laughed, the minute there was a moment of quiet my mind went back to Gio and Cole. I couldn’t stop the thought that something would go wrong, that one or the both of them would die on the battlefield.

It made me sick to my stomach.

Gio

We're ready. I'm ready.

I repeated those words over and over on the ride to the new meetup spot, and again when I got off my bike and checked my weapons. The truth was that I was ready for whatever these assholes had planned. We had a plan too.

Harper was safe, that's what mattered most. Now it was time to deal with the Blood Reapers once and for all.

Viper stepped out of the back door of the brothel with a smug expression on his face, which told me everything I needed to know. "Looking for someone?"

"Not at all," Diesel replied in an even tone. "Did you lose something?"

His nostrils flared but he tried hard to appear unaffected. "You got my product?"

Diesel scratched his chin as if he was deep in thought. "What product? Are you missing something that doesn't belong to you Viper?" He was teasing him, taunting him into overreacting.

"Don't fuck with me. I'm not in the mood. You got your girl back, now give me back what you took."

"That's the thing," Rocky began and shook his head. "We didn't take anything from you. Maybe you've got a thief in your ranks." It was just as possible as the truth.

“No!” Viper jogged down the steps and stopped just a few feet from Diesel, his men lined up all around him. “I know you took it, goddammit! Just give it back and this will all be over.”

“Over?” I shouted and all eyes swung to me. “You kidnapped my woman, and you think this is all over? Oh no motherfucker, this shit is just getting started.” I crossed my arms and dared him to try something. Try anything. I was ready.

He scoffed and glared at Diesel. “You let your boys make the decisions now, Diesel? Pathetic.”

“You took someone who matters to us and that won’t be forgotten easily. You have to pay.”

He laughed. “You can have the bitch who gave her up.”

“Don’t worry, she’ll be taken care of too.” Diesel folded his arms across his chest, a sign of disrespect that he didn’t see Viper as a real threat. “Are we done here?”

Viper raised his gun. “Not until I get my shit.”

“My shit you mean, don’t you?” Carlos Santangelo stepped from the darkness, barely over five feet in a black suit. With his hair slicked back and a throat covered in some kind of ancient Mayan tattoo, he didn’t look nearly as threatening as his reputation—which given his Sicilian grandfather had been head of a notorious mafia family, was formidable.

“Carlos,” Viper stammered out. “These are the assholes who took your product.”

“Yeah? Because I spoke to the Black Devils who have my product and claimed they paid you for it.” He walked forward slowly, two men flanking him as he came to a

stop between the Blood Reapers and the Steel Demons. “So either they are lying, or you are.”

“I would never lie to you. They set this up, all because of some dumb fucking bitch who wouldn’t just go away.”

“Pretty fucking dumb to do a deal in a hotel and casino in Vegas,” I offered with a grin. “More cameras than a fucking airport.”

Santangelo’s expression told me that deal had nothing to do with the cartel. “You risk my business for your own, Viper?” He shook his head, but his body was tight with anger.

“Our business isn’t exclusive because you didn’t want it to be,” he replied in a firm voice.

“True.” His easy acceptance was surprising but in the next second he pulled out his gun and shot two Blood Reapers a point-blank range. They fell to the ground unceremoniously.

“What the fuck?” Viper was shocked by the death of his two men, so affected that he still hadn’t realized he was the man responsible.

“I want my money Viper.”

Viper’s gaze narrowed in on me, filled with hate and the need for vengeance. “You motherfucker,” he snarled. “You set me up.”

“You set yourself up.” I shrugged, unbothered by the accusation and delighted that he was unraveling.

“Fuck you, Gio.” He raised his gun quickly, quicker than I anticipated and shot before I managed to pull mine out. The bullet went through my side, and I dropped to my knees as five shots sounded, and Viper was pushed back by the force of the bullets.

His eyes were wide and full of shock.

The pain seared through my gut and the warmth of the blood spilled over my hand. “Harper.” Her name is the only word on my lips, her face the image that filled my thoughts as the edges of my vision blurred.

“Gio, I got you brother.” Cole was at my side, his hand gripped mine as more bullets flew all around us.

“I’m good, just hurts like a son of a bitch.”

Cole grinned. “It’s just a flesh wound, I’m sure.”

“Dick,” I grunted, wincing through the pain. “Shouldn’t you be shooting?”

“Someone has to get you to Laura so she can stitch you up. Besides I’m not gonna let you die because Harper is your problem now.”

“Good problem to have,” I managed to push past the pain. “Let’s go.”

Cole helped me to my feet, but we stayed low while our MCs took aim at each other, determined to keep shooting until no one was left alive. “What a fucking shit show.”

“Amen, brother.” I nodded to where Viper attempted to get away. “Fucker is like a damn cockroach, he won’t die.”

“Not quickly,” Cole grunted. “But his days are numbered. If we don’t get to him, Santangelo will.”

That was good enough for me.

“Cole, get him the fuck outta here,” Rocky shouted as bullets continued to fly.

“Hang on,” I grunted and planted my feet into the grass. “Shooters in the windows.” I raised my gun and took aim, squeezing the trigger through the pain.

Cole didn’t argue, instead he helped me stay on my feet while he aimed at the upstairs windows. “Fuckers!”

I don’t know how many bullets we shot but one body fell to the ground and the other fell out of the window and onto the ground below. Satisfaction rushed through me, but the pain returned and brought me to my knees. “Cole,” I muttered as both hands hit the ground.

“I got you, brother. Let’s get the fuck outta here. The boys can take care of what’s left of the Blood Reapers.”

I nodded, unable to speak as the pain became unbearable. “Fuck.”

“Don’t worry Gio.”

“I’m not fucking worried,” I gasped out as the pain consumed me and my thoughts went back to Harper. Her big blue eyes filled my vision, and her smile was the only thing I focused on as my consciousness began to fade. “I’m fine.”

“You will be.” Cole’s voice was the last thing I heard as the darkness claimed me.

Harper

S hot. Gio was shot and bleeding and unconscious. “Is he going to be okay?” I couldn’t believe it when Ellie came to me, her voice calm and even as she told me that Gio had been shot. I’d run to the room where they’d taken him as soon as I heard he was back.

Laura’s gaze flicked up to me and her lips curled into a sympathetic smile. The plastic apron and gloves she was wearing were covered in blood—Gio’s blood—but her voice was calm, “Yes. It looks a lot worse than it is, actually. The bullet went straight through his side without hitting any major organs so he’s going to be in pain for a while but he’s not at risk. Or much risk because of course there are always complications with gunshot wounds.”

That helped but not as much as I wanted it to. “Why is he unconscious?”

“He’s not. I gave him a sedative so I could clean out the wound. His vitals are okay, but I’m guessing the meds mixed with the post adrenaline crash have zonked him out. He’ll be okay once it wears off, but in the meantime, it makes my job a lot easier.” She worked efficiently in a well-rehearsed dance of flushing out the wound, stitching it and then applying the dressing. I kept my focus on her hands as they moved instead of what they were doing because the reality of the situation threatened to pull me under.

Gio gave a groan, Laura stopped what she was doing to do a quick check of his vitals, then turned to face me. “He’s going to be fine. In pain but ultimately good, Harper.”

“Yeah, okay. Thanks.” I believed her but my brain couldn’t quite process the truth yet. I held his hand and brought it to my lips. “Don’t you even think about doing anything other than coming back to me, damn you.”

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It was around two full hours before Gio finally began to stir, wincing and grunting his pain and discomfort. “What the fuck happened.”

“You got shot,” I replied in a whisper-soft voice. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I got shot.”

Somehow, I managed a laugh. Gio was the only man I knew who could make me laugh even as tears streamed down my face. “Makes sense.”

“Come here.” He patted the empty space beside him, a slowly seductive grin curled his lips skyward. “Harper.”

“Gio.” His word slipped out on a watery cry as I buried my face into his neck. “I was so fucking scared.”

“Me too,” he admitted. “After I got shot the only thing I thought about was getting back to you. I told you,” he began with a satisfied grin. “I might be battered and bruised but I’d come back to you.”

I laughed again. “You didn’t say you’d be shot full of bullets.”

“Sorry babe but I don’t have one of those magic eight balls.” He attempted a shrug then winced in pain.



“Too bad because then none of this would be as scary as it is. Do you need any painkillers? Laura wanted to wait until you were fully awake before giving you anything else.”

“I’m okay, babe. Takes more than a fucking bullet to stop me. Nothing to be scared about. I’m here alive and all I want is for you to be with me as long as humanly possible.” His tone was serious.

“I’m not going anywhere, Gio. I promise.” Each time I spoke those words out loud, they became truer. Sure, a few weeks ago all I wanted was to finish planning these events and get back to my life in California but now the idea of leaving left me physically ill.

“Say it again.”

I smiled to myself. “I’m not going anywhere Gio. I promise.” He reached for my hand and brought it to his lips.

“I’m going to hold you to that.”

“I hope you do.” My heart was full to bursting at his words. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever believe that Gio would love me, that he would want me at his side and in his life.

“You want to be my nurse, Harp? Kiss my boo-boos and make me feel better?”

Another loud laugh burst free. “If that’s what you need to get better, I’ll think about it.” My mind raced with all the sexy, kinky possibilities.

“I know just the place to get a sexy white nurse’s uniform, but you can’t wear anything underneath it.”

Laura barked out a laugh and shook her head. “Every man’s fantasy, yet in reality we wear oversized scrubs. You’re looking good, Gio. Take it easy for a few weeks, finish the antibiotics, and you should be as good as new.”

He tried to sit up and a roar of pain echoed in the room. “Thanks Laura.”

“Of course. Just, you know, try not to get shot again.”

He laughed again. “I’ll do my best.”

Once Laura left the room, it was just me and Gio and our thoughts that remained unspoken. “Did you mean it?”

I blinked and raised my eyebrows. “Did I mean what?”

“Did you mean it when you said you loved me, or did you say it because you thought I was going to die?”

“I mean it. Don’t ever doubt that, Gio.”

“I won’t.” His words were soft and low. “I love you, Harper.”

In that moment, my heart really felt like it might burst from being too full. “That’s good to hear Gio because I love you too.” So damn much that it hurt sometimes. Enough that I knew there were some serious life and geographic changes in my future.

“Hearing that means the fucking world to me, Harp. You have no idea. A woman like you being able to see what’s inside my heart? Shit, I must be the luckiest bastard alive.” His words were short, and they came out slower with every syllable.

“We’ll talk about this later, Gio, when you’re feeling better.” His words hit someplace deep inside of me, that place that I never thought would feel whole again after my last couple relationships. But hearing Gio talk the way he did, like I was a prize, a woman he thought would never see him the way I always have? It only made my heart grow fuller and more in love.

“Okay,” he whispered as his eyes drifted shut. “Stay here with me?”

I smiled even though his eyes were already closed. “No place I’d rather be, Gio.”

The boy I’d crushed on for nearly half my life was now a fully grown man and even better than that, he was all mine.

What a difference a few weeks made in a girl’s life.

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:29 am*

Gio

Two Months Later

“I love having you here like this.” Harper was fucking beautiful first thing in the morning with her hair all mussed and her sleepy smile as she looked down from where she straddled my hips, slowly sinking down onto my cock.

“You like having me riding your dick first thing in the morning?” Her head fell back, and she pinched her nipples, knowing I loved it when she did that.

My cock expanded inside of her. “That’s fucking paradise,” I grunted. “But I love waking up with your hair in my face and your scent surrounding me.” She’d been in my bed every night since I was shot with the exception of one week in California, which we spent in her bed while we packed up her apartment and her life.

For good.

“Who knew you were such a romantic?” She rolled her hips and put her hands on my chest, taking my cock deeper into her wet heat.

“Who knew the right woman would make me so fucking mushy?”

Harper’s laugh sent a spear of heat straight through my body. The sound vibrated up my spine, but each laugh tightened her sweet pussy around my hard cock. “Gio,” she whispered.

“I know baby, I feel you.” I gripped her hips and flipped our positions, surprising her. “Yeah, I’m full of surprises.” The doctor had given me the all-clear a few days ago. The stitches were gone and other than a little bit of lingering soreness, I was as good as new. “I missed fucking you.”

“I missed it too,” she sighed. “But I love riding your cock.”

This woman of mine was going to be the death of me. My cock swelled and I sank deep, pulled out and sank even deeper. She was hot and wet and hungry for me. Her legs wrapped around my waist, silently begging me for more.

“Yes, Gio! Just like that.” Her head fell back, and she sank her teeth into her bottom lip. “Oh fuck, that spot!”

I knew the spot she was talking about, the one that made her squirt all over my dick. I grabbed her legs and threw them over my forearms, pounding deeper into her body until her limbs quivered and her nails scored down my spine. “You feel so fucking good, baby. So fucking perfect.”

She was right on the edge, and I knew exactly what she needed. My thumb and forefinger found her clit slick and swollen and when I rubbed it between my fingers, her hips shot up and her orgasm detonated. “Fucking yes, Gio! Yes! Oh, yes!” Her body shook and trembled while she squeezed my cock until I filled her with my orgasm. “Oh fuck, I love you!”

It never got old hearing her say those words to me. It wasn’t on my bingo card this year, falling in love, but it was the best fucking decision I ever made. Falling for Harper and letting her love me has been the most exciting, erotic and thrilling time of my life. “Love you more,” I growled in her ear and nipped the earlobe as the last of her aftershocks tore through her.

“I missed the way you fuck me like that, hard and rough and so needy. It’s...

perfect.”

“And I love hearing you say fuck .” I kissed her slowly and eventually she was wet again, and I was hard again, and we came together.

Again.

Life was good. No, fuck that, life was perfect. “Tell me you don’t have to work today.”

“I do,” she groaned. “But I’m meeting with the client at noon, and I’ll be here for most of the day. Why, do you want a lunchtime quickie?”

“I never want it quick with you. Okay that’s a lie, anytime I can have my cock inside you it’s a good damn time.”

Her alarm sounded and she grumbled her displeasure. “Shower and then the clubhouse. My car is still there.”

“All I heard was shower.”

She laughed but an hour later we were dressed and getting ready to head out, but there was something I needed to do first. “Are you okay Gio?”

“I’m fine babe, but I’d be a lot better if you said yes to becoming my wife.” It wasn’t the most romantic proposal, but it caught her off guard and the expression of shock and joy on her face was perfect.

“Gio, are you for real?”

I nodded and opened my fist to show her the ring I’d spent three days picking out with the help of Grace and Emma, who she seemed to be closest with. “I’m more than

for real, baby. I'm fucking serious. I want you to be my wife and I want us to start our life together. It's soon, I know that but I'm also sure that you are what I want. That a life with you would be perfect."

"Gio." She smacked both hands over her mouth and blinked back tears. "You want to marry me?"

"As soon as you say yes, I'll drag you to the courthouse. Or to Vegas. Or wherever else you want it. As long as you're, I don't care how it happens."

"Yes, Gio. Hell yeah, I'll marry you." She flung herself at me and dotted my face and neck with kisses. "Are you sure?"

"We can get married this morning if that'll make it more believable."

She laughed and kissed me again. "As long as our friends and family are there, I don't care either." She shook her head. "I can't believe it. I hate Viper and everything that happened but without it we wouldn't have found each other."

"I'm not thanking that asshole for anything, but I can't be sorry for all the things that brought us together."

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When we walked into the clubhouse later in the morning wearing big smiles that quickly faded when we caught sight of Sheriff Cross talking with Diesel.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"They found Cindy's body, carved all to hell by the Blood Reapers." Diesel's jaw was tight, but I knew he was thinking what we all were.

Good riddance. “Why are you here? Cindy was no longer associated with the Steel Demons.”

The sheriff shrugged. “Thought you’d want to know.”

Harper held on tight to me, her body shook with tension. “That’s horrible,” she whispered even though Cindy was responsible for her kidnapping.

“Viper has gone to ground since he was released from the hospital. Rumor has it he’s on the run.” Cross eyed each of us carefully. “Any of you know anything about that?”

I shrugged. “Heard he’s running from one of the cartels he screwed over.” I didn’t blink under his scrutinizing gaze.

Sheriff Cross had his suspicions that we might be responsible for his disappearance, but there was nothing he could prove. “Okay.” Reluctantly he left the clubhouse with nothing but his suspicions.

The room was quiet for a long moment before Rebel spoke. “It was only a matter of time before it happened. Too bad.”

“In better news,” I began and wrapped an arm around Harper’s waist. “Guess who’s getting married?”

Everyone erupted in cheers, and we were surrounded by everyone who mattered to us, and I couldn’t stop smiling. It didn’t matter how much shit we’d gone through or how much shit we’d face in the future, all that mattered was that we were together.

And soon enough she would have my name.

She would be my wife.



Mine forever.

THE END