



Golden Sinner (Golden Skulls M.C. #15)

Author: *Rebecca Joyce*

Category: Action&Adventure

Description: The criminal underworld is in chaos.

With the darkness closing in fast, one man will make the ultimate sacrifice to save those he loves the most and sets things in motion that will change the criminal underworld forever.

When Reaper and Montana learn the truth, they have no choice and must learn to work together before everything blows up in their faces. But when the table issues a kill order, it's a race against time to get answers and save those who mean the most to them.

The tension mounts as they delve deeper into the labyrinth of deceit and treachery. With each passing moment, the stakes grow higher, forcing Reaper and Montana to confront their own demons and make impossible choices. As the final showdown approaches, they must rely on their wits, strength, and each other to navigate the perilous path ahead.

Failure is not an option, for the consequences would be catastrophic, not just for them, but for the entire criminal underworld.

Total Pages (Source): 13

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Pippen

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

“Hello, Dante. Hello, Dani. I’m so happy to see you both,” the pretty therapist, Dr. Melissa Jefferson said, smiling at Danika.

The woman was tough and very clear on how we should proceed with Danika. She insisted we hide nothing from our little girl. That she needed to see us express everything we were thinking and feeling. It didn’t matter if we were happy, sad, or angry. Naming our emotions and even expressing them was an important step to our daughter’s development. Danika hadn’t learned how to express her emotions yet, and while experiencing them was natural, it would be more confusing for her to still not understand them at her age.

“Danny isn’t joining us today?”

“No, there was an emergency, and he had to go to New York.”

“How long will he be gone?” she asked.

I saw the look of disappointment in her eyes. I was upset too, but there was nothing I could do about it. Danny’s job demanded a lot from him, and sometimes, his job took him away. Danny didn’t like it any more than I did, but that was life. I knew that and accepted it and as much as I hated it for her, Danika would need to understand that, too.

“I’m not sure.”

“Alright, let’s get started. How is Dani adjusting to Dante being gone?”

“She cried all morning.” I frowned, holding my little girl tighter. It had been a terrible morning. The second she knew Danny was gone, I could see the hurt in her eyes. She missed him terribly and wasn’t happy to be alone with me. I understood what she felt and even tried talking to her about it, but nothing I said seemed to ease her melancholy. My little girl was just as smitten with Danny as I was. He was the center of our world and with him gone, we both felt adrift with no direction.

“Would you like to walk her to the play area and let her choose? Then we can talk about what you are going through.”

“I’d like to stay with her,” I whispered, holding her tighter. Somehow, I felt as long as she was with me, I wouldn’t miss Danny as much.

Stupid, I know, but it was how I felt.

“Dante, I’d like to talk to you. It would be best if Dani was given the option to play alone.”

I looked down at my daughter who looked longingly at the toys about the room. With a sigh, I set her down on her feet and she looked up at me. Reluctantly, I nodded, and she slowly made her way to the kitchen.

“I know this is hard, but that right there was a huge milestone.”

“How?” I asked, confused.

“Let’s sit.”

Walking together over to the couch, I sat down while Dr. Jefferson took the chair.

I never took my eyes off my daughter. I couldn't.

She was my responsibility.

Mine to protect.

“Dani has made so much progress it is incredible. Her connection to Danny is remarkable and the fact that she has accepted you to take up his role in her security, when he was called away, is a great response on her part.”

I smirked at that because I wasn't sure if it was because of lack of options or what. All I knew was my little girl wasn't happy right now.

“Children are resilient, but what she has been through or better yet not been through has shaped her in a way most people don't experience until they are much older. It makes it harder for them to even form attachments much less learn to love and trust. It is clear Dani trusts you very much. And for a child in her situation, trust is much more powerful than love. Love is easy for children. They tend to love anyone that is nice to them. Not truly understanding the difference between love and like. But trust is hard. For two years, Dani has only been able to trust that she would be fed and changed. Without having any answers to what her life was like for the first two years, it is hard to know if she had a schedule for her feedings or changings. We don't know if she cried in hunger or fear. All we know is that she was given the bare minimum of care to keep her alive.”

The tears rolled down my cheeks as she recounted the life my little girl lived before she was rescued. No child should ever have to endure that shit, and I vowed Danika never would again.

Dr. Jefferson stood from her chair, setting down the tablet she kept notes on and grabbing the box of tissues as she sat on the couch next to me. Handing me the tissues, she gently reminded me, “This wasn’t your fault. Your natural inclination is to blame yourself. But I want to remind you that you are not to blame. You had no way of knowing you were a father. And once you did, you immediately stepped up not only to rescue your daughter but to be her father. There are many people out there that would have walked away without a care.”

“Like my own parents,” I mumbled.

“Tell me about them,” she gently asked.

“I don’t know anything about them. Don’t know who they are, if they’re alive. If they ever cared anything about me. Maybe my father doesn’t know anything about me like I didn’t know about Dani. But my mother did. She would have to. She walked away.”

“Tell me about your childhood. Who raised you?”

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Have you ever heard of the Trick Pony, Doc?” I asked, never taking my eyes off my daughter. I didn’t need to see Dr. Jefferson to know she knew of the place. Her stiffening body told me that. Rumors of that horrible place flew even beyond the biker world. The Trick Pony was all over the news. There hadn’t been a day since the FBI raided the place where some reporter uncovered a disgustingly new story and splashed it across the five o’clock news for all to hear.

“I have.”

“I took my first breath there. Only, I didn’t suffer the depravity they did. You see, someone saved me shortly after I was born. I thought it was Silas, or maybe even

Sinclair, but it wasn't. Silas told me once that there were six of us who left that day, four boys and a girl who carried me in her arms to safety. I never knew the girl. She didn't stay long with us. Silas raised me and for a long time, I believed he was my brother."

"Is it possible one of the young men who pulled you from there could be your father?"

"No. I checked. When I was thirteen, I did one of those at home paternity tests. I knew none of us were related by blood."

"What about the girl?"

"I've never met her. I only know what Silas has told me about her. I was a baby when we left, so I don't have any memories of that time."

"Was there another time at the Trick Pony you have memories from?"

I nodded silently while I focused on Dani.

"Was Dani a product of the Trick Pony?"

I slowly nodded again.

"Dante, when I was in college I took a trip to New York. I attended a lecture by Dr. Gideon Scott. He spoke a little about the rumors surrounding the Trick Pony and how the experiences people had there shaped their lives. Consensual and nonconsensual experiences."

I stiffened when she mentioned Malice.

“The lecture he gave impacted my life in a way I never expected. It was why I chose a career working with children of sexual assault. Would you share with me your experience at the Trick Pony? There is no judgment here, Dante.”

“As I said, I was a baby when we left,” I began, my voice devoid of all emotion. “Nightmares couldn’t begin to describe what I’d heard of the place. Knowing I was born there only made me curious. I should have left it alone. They say curiosity killed the cat. It almost killed me. I had just finished my undergraduate program at Texas A&M and transferred to MIT to take part in a new program when it happened. I was so happy to be accepted into the study, I celebrated and partied like any young man with no care in the world. Thanks to my brother and the others, I lived a charmed life. I had everything I wanted. All the advantages life could afford. I didn’t realize how blessed I was until I woke up after a night of drinking to find myself in that horrible place.”

I stood and walked over to where Dani played quietly. I didn’t pick her up. I just sat by her and watched her play.

“I wasn’t there very long, but long enough to realize the world I once lived in was just a mirage of reality because the truth was, the world is a fucking horrible place.”

Looking down at my hands, I saw them shaking.

I smirked at that, then looked up at Dr. Jefferson as I got back to my feet. “Doc, the things I am about to tell you. They’re bad.”

Taking my seat next to her again, she calmly said, “You can share as much or as little as you feel you need to. Remember, there is no judgment here.”

“There was a woman there. She was in her fifties. She used pain to make me comply. The more I fought her, the more pain she inflicted. She knew I was gay, and she used

that to her advantage as she manipulated me into doing what she wanted. She was relentless, vicious, and sadistic. She never let up, and the pain she inflicted still gives me nightmares today, but what she made me do. What she forced me to do to Danika's mother is something I will never forgive myself for. The reason I am a father is because that bitch forced me to rape a young girl. She beat us both until we succumbed to her demands. I can still hear Danika's mother's screams as I tore into her innocence, and through it all that bitch laughed. She fucking laughed as she forced us over and over again until I passed out from my exertions."

Tears streamed down my face as I left nothing out.

"How can my daughter ever trust me, Doc? I raped her mother. Because of what I did, her mother is dead. My little girl will never know a mother's love. I'm just as sick as that bitch, like the rest of them."

Covering my face, I shook my head, unable to stop the sobs that wracked my body. I was a monster. The same vile monster that bitch was. I knew that now.

Dr. Jefferson was rocking me in her arms as I cried like a fucking baby. "I am so sorry, Dante. What you endured... You know Dr. Scott, don't you?" she asked hesitantly.

Sniffing, I looked up at her and said, "He was one of the boys who pulled me from that place as a baby."

"Does he know? About what happened to you?"

"I don't think so. The others do. They got me out again."

Shaking, Dr. Jefferson grabbed a blanket off the back of the couch and wrapped it around me as I continued my story. "They knew who took me. I don't know how, but

somehow, they figured it out and then one day Sinclair, Rowen, and Silas were there demanding my release. The bitch laughed at them but still played her sick game. She said they could take me home on one condition. If Silas spent twenty-four hours with her. That was all she wanted. Yet, Sinclair knew what she meant and flat out refused. For years, the three of them lived the hell I had only endured for days. I couldn't let her get her hands on Silas again. I begged him to leave me, but he didn't. Not even Sinclair could stop him. The second Silas agreed, I knew whatever I endured was going to be nothing compared to what that bitch had in store for Silas, and I was right. Because when she told him what she wanted, I saw the life drain from my brother's face."

"What did she want?"

Looking at Dr. Jefferson, I whispered. "She wanted him to fuck me, and to save me, he did."

"Dante, I have a friend who is a therapist. She works with adult sexual assault survivors. I think you would greatly benefit from speaking with her."

"You're a doctor," I reminded her.

"I am, but my training specializes in working with children. I will do what I can to help you work through your experience, but I am limited in my training. Just think about it. She does online therapy so you could meet with her while still living here."

"I'll think about it."

"Today has been a lot. I want you to know that nothing you have shared with me will ever be shared anywhere or with anyone. I take my oath seriously."

"Thank you. Danny didn't want me to share. He was worried about prosecution,

because Dani's mom was so young.”

“I am only mandated to report a crime you are thinking about committing or an ongoing crime that puts someone in danger. What happened to you was a crime. And I wish with everything in me that I could report that woman on your behalf. But what you did... Despite the pain that girl went through, you went through pain as well. Tomorrow, I would like to talk about how you found Dani. I want you to be prepared because it will be another emotional day.”

“Thank you, Dr. Jefferson.”

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Zach

Silver Shadows' clubhouse, Diamond Creek, Nebraska.

Sitting at my desk, the glow of the computer screen illuminated my tired face. I ignored the wary feeling as my fingers danced over the keyboard, searching for any lead that might bring me closer to finding out where the missing women were. My body ached from fatigue, and I paused to stretch, my muscles protesting with every movement. Rubbing my eyes, I fought off the drowsiness that threatened to overtake me. King wanted answers fast to who the woman was that Declan found. Bad enough he had me looking for the man who drugged Sam, but couple that with the three women who disappeared shortly after getting engaged to Jeremy St. Matthews and keeping watch on what was happening in the biker world, I was stretched thin.

My phone rang, the sharp sound cutting through the quiet of my room. As I reached for it, my heart pounded when I glanced at the caller ID.

My body went rigid.

The name displayed on the screen was one I had hoped to avoid.

Taking a deep breath, I steel myself for what was to come. With a steady hand, I answered the call, preparing for the worst as I brought the phone to my ear.

"Danny?" I said, my voice unwavering despite the turmoil that threatened to overtake me.

“Zach, I need you to do something for me.”

“Okay?” I tentatively whispered, my stomach coiled tight.

“I need you to pretend to be me.”

And just like that, everything I thought evaporated as I laughed.

“Good one, Danny.”

“I’m serious. I need you to pretend to be me for the foreseeable future.”

Chuckling, I leaned back in my chair and scoffed. “Think you need your eyes checked, man. We look nothing alike.”

“Not physically, asshole.”

Sighing, I moaned. I was too tired for mind games.

“I need you to pretend to be the hacker known as Sypher.”

Slowly sitting up, I said, “What exactly are you asking, Danny? There is only one Sypher. You. Not me. You. I can’t pretend to be someone I’m not.”

“Yes, you can. You are the only one who can pull it off because I know it was you who was in the Trick Pony servers deleting files while I was trying to download everything.”

Stiffening, I whispered, “That wasn’t me.”

“Bullshit. Don’t lie to me, Zach. I also know why. Does King know about your

connection to the Brotherhood of Bastards?”

Ignoring that comment, I sneered, “What the fuck do you want, Danny?”

“Like I said. I want you to be me.”

“And like I said, that’s impossible.”

“Open the laptop you let me borrow when I was there and type in Zachary Marshall son of Cerberus .”

“You son of a bitch,” I groaned, getting up from my seat and walked over to the shelf where I kept all my equipment and took the laptop Danny used while he was here. Placing it on my desk, I sat back down and opened it to find the screen blank. The cursor blinked in the upper left corner. Typing in what he told me, I cursed, “What the fuck did you do?”

“Nothing yet. It’s what you are going to do.”

“I still haven’t said I would help you.”

“You will. Now hit enter,” Danny growled.

Doing like he said, I watched as the laptop came alive and within seconds, I was looking at the inner workings of Sypher’s brain.

“Now you have access to everything I know and before you even think about deleting anything, you should know that I have an eidetic and photographic memory. I don’t need a computer to do half the shit I do. You help me and I will help you keep your identity a secret.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to activate FIRE.”

“Who?”

Groaning, Danny muttered, “Zach. This will go a lot faster if you just accept the fucking fact that I know everything. I know who you really are. I know where you grew up and why you are hiding, but more importantly, I know you are the contact for FIRE.”

FUCK!

He was right. Typing into the laptop, I pulled up the file he had on me. It was all there. Everything. From the moment I was born, to the moment I joined the Silver Shadows, all in a neat, detailed file.

Sitting back in my chair, I shook my head and sighed.

“What do you need me to do?”

“Type in the phrase, bring the fire .”

Doing what he asked, my eyes widened when I scoured a list of names. Most I knew, some I didn’t, while a few I knew personally. I clenched my fists tightly.

“That is the list I want FIRE to take care of. Can they take care of it by December 25th ?

Fuck yeah, they could.

“Yeah.” I grinned. “No problem.”

“In the meantime, I need you to personally take care of one of my clients.”

“Who?”

“Moira Kathleen Hartley.”

Frowning, I typed the name into the search bar and when the information popped up, my eyes widened.

“Holy shit!”

“Now do you understand?”

“Yeah. I do,” I muttered as my fingers flew across the keyboard and information popped up at me at a fast rate. Listening to Danny detail everything he needed me to do, I tried to absorb everything I was seeing. Danny wasn’t lying. He fucking knew everything. Knew all the players, and he’d gathered every bit of information he could, to ensure that when the time came, there would be no mistakes before their lives ended.

He gave me everything wrapped up in a pretty neat little bow, and now all I had to do was make damn sure that those responsible paid for their crimes.

“...and when I give myself up to Pandora, you will be my eyes and ears.”

Blinking, I looked at my phone.

“Uh, I’m sorry. I misunderstood that last part. Did you just say when you turn yourself over to Pandora?”

“Yeah.”

“Jesus fuck, Danny,” I gasped. “You can’t. That bitch won’t think twice before killing you.”

“Not before she gets everything out of my head.”

“And she will. The bitch has ways.”

“She won’t get a damn thing from me.”

“I don’t think you understand who that bitch is. She is the reason for everything. She is fucking psycho, Danny. Certifiable, insane asylum worthy, straitjacket fucking crazy!”

“And I’m the only one who can stop her.”

“No.” I shook my head. “Not doing shit if you are walking into a fucking trap. Think about Dante and Danika, man. They need you. Your club needs you. Your fucking family.”

“I am, Zach, and that’s why I need you to be me. I’m trusting you with everyone that means anything to me. I need you to protect them.”

“What if I can’t?”

“Then it won’t matter, because if you can’t protect them, we’re all dead. Even you.”

“Shit, Danny,” I cursed, knowing he was right. Taking a deep breath, I said, “Alright. I’ll do my best, but I’m going to need help. This is too big for me to handle. You got a fucking problem with that?”

“No. It doesn’t matter anymore. The lid is off the box. Tell everyone.”

“Alright, brother. I’ll do my part, but fuck, man, stay alive, okay?”

“Thanks, Zach,” Danny solemnly said before he disconnected the phone.

Rolling over to my computer, I brought up a new secure mainframe and reached out to the only person I knew I could trust.

Need your help.

Not a good time.

Secret is out in the open.

How long?

Days.

What do you need?

Quickly sending him what I could, I waited impatiently for him to respond. When he did, all he said was...

Consider it done.

Opening a new server, I typed the words: Contract accepted. FIRE activated.

Destiny, California.

When my phone pinged, I already knew who it was. It was only a matter of time

before I was called. So, when the text came, I just grabbed my bag and left without telling a soul.

My brothers wouldn't understand.

None of them would.

My past was a closely guarded secret, something I was reluctant to reveal or discuss with anyone. There would come a time when I would have to tell them, but until that day finally came, I resolved to remain quiet. All that mattered now was the mission, and when it was done, I would return home as if nothing had happened.

Just like every time before.

Traveling alone, the journey to the rendezvous point was a solitary experience, marked by quiet contemplation and introspection. As I rode along the quiet roads, the crisp night air filled my lungs, while my mind raced with a chaotic mix of cherished memories and gnawing fears. With every mile, the landscape blurred into the background while my current life receded into the distance, replaced by a growing sense of detachment. I could hear the echoes of my brothers' laughter and the sharp jabs of their arguments in my mind, a symphony of their bond—a bond I valued above all else.

Yet, I had to leave them behind, at least for now.

Reaching the designated location, I saw the faint flickering light of a streetlamp in the distance. My senses were heightened with anticipation, so I approached cautiously. Seeing the old phone booth, I dialed the lone number I knew by heart. Standing there in the darkness, I listened while the phone rang once before someone answered.

I said nothing as I waited.

“Lawton, Oklahoma. Key pickup in the men’s room of a Taco Bell on the corner of Gore and Sheridan. Second stall.”

And just like that, the call ended.

Hanging up the phone, I headed back to my bike. My targets were marked. Their execution was imminent. Whoever made the call wasn’t taking any chances. I didn’t just offer my services to anyone. So, it didn’t matter who the targets were.

They played the game and lost.

Now it was time to pay the piper.

This job was going to require precision, stealth, and above all, accuracy.

The stakes were high, and failure was not an option.

As I headed back to my bike, I couldn’t help but think about the circumstances that led me to this moment. The secrets I kept were not just my own. They were of a legacy, of a lineage steeped in blood and death. My father, like me and his before him, were born bastards. I never knew my mother. I assumed she was just some club whore. Like every bastard before me, I grew up never knowing who my real father was. All I knew was the club he belonged to.

The Brotherhood of Bastards.

Unlike most of my current brothers, I wasn’t raised with a family, in foster care or on the streets. Nope, I was a child of the Trick Pony. When I turned fourteen, I killed the sick fuck who had been abusing me my whole life. Instead of killing me, I was kicked to the curb with no education, no money and no idea where to go. That’s when Maggie found me. She was a nice older woman who, without a single thought, took

in a skinny, angry kid off the streets and never looked back. Thanks to Maggie I managed to cram eighteen years of education into my brain in four years and even snagged myself a full ride to Florida State. After college, I joined the military and never looked back. Not once did I ever think of who my actual father was, until a few years ago when I got a call from some hospital in Salem, Oregon telling me that my father was dying and requested to see me.

Call me curious, but I went to go see him, even if it was to tell him to fuck off. But I never got the chance. By the time I made it to the hospital, my old man was dead, and all he left me was an outrageous medical bill and a two worded note saying I'm sorry .

Athens, Texas.

I was different from my brothers in the club. I didn't share their thirst for adrenaline-fueled nights. I harbored a dark secret, a shameful truth that gnawed at my conscience, one I desperately wanted to keep hidden from the world. It was mine alone. While my brothers all came from different pasts, mine was something darker, more sinister. It cultivated me into the man I was today.

While my club brothers embraced their true selves with confidence and swagger, I hid behind a facade, pretending to be someone I wasn't. I remained hidden, only showing myself when absolutely necessary, the silence my constant shield.

I eventually found a home within the Gods of Mayhem Motorcycle Club. Bound by a sacred code of loyalty and brotherhood, the club transcended blood kinship. Their bond was deeper, stronger, forged in mutual respect and shared purpose. Every member brought with them their individual past, a distinct reason behind their decision to join, their hopes and dreams coloring their reasons. Some ran, desperate to escape the shadows of their past; others marched, driven by a need to find their place in the world. But none of them sensed the heavy, suffocating shadow that hung over

my life, a constant, silent threat.

The memories of my past felt like a labyrinth of pain and darkness, each corner echoing with the screams of my lost innocence. The horrors I witnessed as a child—the screams, the blood, the stark expressions of fear—were enough to break any grown man. All I knew was I was a bastard like my father and his father before him. Like me, my father also lived in a world of blood, fear, and violence until that life killed him. By the time I was a teenager, I had seen more bloodshed than most men see in a lifetime.

I didn't have a childhood. All I remembered was pain. The streets had been my brutal playground and survival was my only lesson.

That's when I stumbled upon the truth and met the others. Delving deeper into the shadows, I uncovered secrets that shook the very foundation of my beliefs and I found others that had ties to my past, threads of a tapestry I had been too blind to see. Each revelation was a blow, unmasking the lies and deceit that had shaped my existence.

I knew when I received the text telling me to head to New York City and that more information would follow, I couldn't ignore it.

None of us could.

Someone had opened the gates of Hell and now fire would reign down until nothing but death remained. Some called us the Four Horsemen, some called us the Grim Reapers, but most just called us FIRE. You couldn't get one of us without the others. Anyone calling for our help had to be either stupid or desperate, because when we showed up, nothing survived.

There were four of us. Brothers. Well, brothers in every way but blood. More so than

those in the clubhouse. Not that I would ever admit that to my club brothers. There were just some things in life that bonded men together more than blood and that was what happened in our case. No, we didn't share a drop of DNA, but what we experienced forged our commitment to each other in the fires of Hell and not even death would destroy that.

It was only by joining the Gods of Mayhem that I found some semblance of peace. The roar of the engine, the wind in my hair, the camaraderie of my brothers—it was the escape I needed. But I still wore a mask, pretending to be a carefree biker while hiding the darkness within.

Only my Prez suspected there was more to my story. He saw the way I fought, the ruthlessness in my eyes during confrontations. But he respected my silence, understanding that everyone had their own demons. I knew he would notice my absence come morning, but he wouldn't say a word. He never did.

The night was cold when I slipped from the clubhouse. The brothers were partying again, and the music was pumping. None of them spared me a glance when I disappeared into the shadows. Heading for my bike, I saw nothing around for miles as I threw my leg over my bike.

“Come back to us, brother.”

Looking into the darkness, Zeus appeared out of nowhere, and I said nothing when he walked past my bike, heading for the clubhouse. He didn't look back. I knew he wouldn't.

Starting my bike, I rode away from the family I claimed, to kill the family that destroyed mine.

Savannah, Georgia.

In the dimly lit restaurant, laughter filled the air while I watched the couple enjoy their dinner, completely unaware of the impending danger that loomed not far from where they sat. Their faces, illuminated by the soft glow of the candlelight, reflected joy and contentment as they leaned toward one another, whispering secrets and whatnots, oblivious to the outside world and its relentless rush.

From the shadows of a darkened corner, I observed them intently. My eyes, cold and calculating, never left the couple. Cloaked in anonymity, I blended seamlessly into the obscurity, my presence unperceived by the bustling diners and attentive waitstaff. The steady hum of conversation and clinking cutlery provided the perfect cover for my silent surveillance.

I watched as they toasted to some private victory, the clinking of their glasses barely audible above the din. Every gesture, every laugh, every shared glance was meticulously noted. The couple, wrapped in their bubble of contentment, remained blissfully ignorant of my sinister gaze fixed upon them.

Outside, the night deepened, the sky a canvas of inky black smeared with pinpricks of starlight. The restaurant's warmth was a stark contrast to the chill that crept through the cracks of the city's forgotten alleys. In the corner, my breath fogged slightly in the cooler air, a fleeting reminder of my presence.

My mind raced with thoughts, each one more foreboding than the last. What was my purpose? Was it revenge that brought me here, or something darker still? The couple, lost in their moment, had no inkling of the fate that loomed just beyond their line of sight.

The waiter approached their table, refilling their glasses and exchanging pleasantries. I tensed, every muscle coiled like a spring, waiting for the right moment. Time seemed to stretch, each second dripped like molasses through the sieve of fate.

The couple laughed again, oblivious to the danger lurking just out of sight, and my fingers grazed the edge of my coat pocket. What lay within was uncertain, but my intent was clear. The shadows seemed to tighten around me, as if the darkness itself conspired in my silent plot.

And so, the evening wore on, a delicate dance of light and shadow, joy and foreboding. The couple's laughter echoed through the restaurant, as the restaurant door swung open, the chill of the night air seeped into the warm interior when I felt my phone vibrate.

Reaching for it, I read the text.

FIRE ACTIVATED. Head to Saltillo, Mexico. More to follow.

Shaking my head, I looked once more at the couple and smirked.

They would never know how close they came to death tonight.

Slipping out of the shadows, my movements were swift and purposeful as I melted into the darkness outside, the city swallowing me whole. Each step I took was a step closer to my salvation. A desire I had harbored for as long as I could remember. Looking back at the couple once more, I watched while they continued their evening, oblivious to who had been watching them and the silent storm that had just departed. Their laughter rang out, a moment of pure, untainted joy in a world fraught with unseen dangers. The night, however, was far from over, as I vanished into the labyrinth of the city, a sense of impending doom lingered in the air. I smiled knowing that someone just unleashed the fires of Hell.

Purgatory, California.

Sitting quietly in a chair, I watched her sleep. The pale light of the moon filtered

through the curtains and cast a soft glow over her restless form. She was having a nightmare again. Her brows furrowed and faint murmurs escaped her lips, a testament to the turmoil that plagued her dreams. I wanted so much to ease her pain, to reach out and chase away the shadows that haunted her. But until she opened up and talked to me, all I could do was be here for her.

Minutes felt like hours as I kept my silent vigil. The clock ticked away, a relentless reminder of my helplessness. Seeing her like this made me feel useless when all I wanted was to matter. The weight of her unspoken suffering pressed heavily on my heart, a burden I bore willingly yet painfully. I longed for the day when she would trust me enough to share her fears, to let me in and allow me to help her heal.

In those quiet moments, I resolved to be patient, to be a steady presence in her life, no matter how long it took. Because sometimes, love meant standing by someone's side in silence, holding space for them until they were ready to speak. And so, I sat and watched over her, hoping that one day, my unwavering support would be enough to break through the barriers that kept her pain locked away.

From the moment I realized she lived, I made her a vow that nothing or no one would ever hurt her again, and so far, I had kept my promise. It was an oath forged in the crucible of desperation and fear, but also one tempered by love and unwavering resolve.

My life was anything but peaceful as a storm silently brewed on the horizon, and when it broke, I feared my past would whisk her away. For years, I stayed hidden in the shadows. Unknowingly becoming the man she would someday need me to be. When the truth of my existence became known, I knew they would use her to get to me.

Throughout my life, I never allowed myself to get attached, refusing to allow my past to destroy another life. But like most things in life, fate had other plans, and when I

learned she survived, I felt an irrevocable shift in the course of my destiny.

She was mine.

Mine to protect.

She came into my life like a whisper in the wind, a fragile creature who had faced more hardships than anyone her age should ever endure. Her eyes, wide and innocent, held a story of resilience and strength that belied her tender years. In that moment, I knew my purpose had changed. My life was no longer about my own pursuits and ambitions.

My life was now irrevocably intertwined with hers, and in that moment, I made a vow, not just a promise, a solemn declaration that resonated deep within my soul. I swore to be her champion, her protector, and her shield against the harsh realities of the world. The words came naturally, as if they had been etched into my very being long before I ever spoke them out loud.

From that day forward, my every action was guided by my unbreakable commitment. I became more vigilant, more aware of the dangers that lurked around every corner. I scrutinized every situation, assessed every risk, and calculated every move with the precision of a seasoned strategist. My sole objective was her safety and well-being.

My new path would not be an easy one. There were moments of doubt, of fear, and of overwhelming responsibility. The weight of my promise sometimes felt like an unyielding burden, pressing down on my shoulders with relentless force. But each time I looked into her eyes and saw her trust reflected back at me, my resolve strengthened.

Sitting here, I never took my eyes off her, when I felt my phone vibrate. Reaching for it, I read the incoming text as a burning fire I tried so desperately to contain

threatened to consume me, its searing heat made me sweat as my fist balled tightly.

FIRE ACTIVATED.

Head to Miami, Florida. More to follow.

A feral grin stretched across my face, a slow, animalistic smile that mirrored the fire within me. The fire I had been desperately trying to suppress, finally consumed me in its burning fury. With a purposeful movement, I stood and walked over to where she lay sleeping. Leaning over her, I gently kissed her forehead and whispered, “Gotta go kill some monsters, baby.”

Taking one last look at her, I turned and headed for the door as the gates of Hell burst open with a deafening roar, unleashing a fiery inferno that would consume everyone in its wake. May God have mercy on everyone’s soul.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Montana

Soulless Sinners' clubhouse, New York.

“He couldn’t just disappear into thin fucking air!” Ace shouted while he paced the room full of men and women, who all sat around trying to figure out what the hell the kid was up to. It had been three motherfucking days since the kid disappeared.

And no one knew shit.

As for me, well, I was another story, because I barely uttered a fucking word. I mean absolutely fucking nothing. I might as well have stuck my thumb up my ass for all the help I was giving at the moment, and not one of my fucking so-called brothers thought to ask if I was okay.

Fucking bastards.

Okay, I got it. Right now wasn’t technically about me. We needed to find Sypher, but holy fuck, I needed a fucking minute first. I was in some kind of fucking shock or something. Wasn’t every damn day I learned not only did I have a fucking daughter, but I was a grandpa as well.

A grandpa!

Me, at my age!

Yeah. Mind blown!

But hey, at least I didn't fucking kill the messenger, and I was keeping a tight rein on my temper. So that had to count for something... right?

The second Reaper spilled the proverbial beans about Bella, I think my mind went into shutdown or something, because everything the annoying fuck said afterward was a fucking blur. I barely remembered the flight home and I sure as hell didn't remember how the fuck we got to the clubhouse. What I did clearly remember was the asshole saying that my fucking cousin Josh knew and had been babysitting my daughter for the last several years.

Glaring at the motherfucker as he stood near the bar next to Fury, arms crossed over his chest while he looked everywhere but at me. My soon-to-be-dead cousin hadn't offered a single word.

Not one fucking syllable. Which in itself spoke volumes because the son of a bitch always had something to say, particularly where I was concerned.

Fucker never shut up.

"Someone must know something," Trout, Sypher and Ace's brother said, looking about the room. "It's not like Danny to abandon his family."

"Because he wouldn't," Chipper, the other Franks brother groaned.

What bugged the shit out of me was what else I didn't know. I knew there was more. There had to be. According to Reaper, my family's closet doors were wide open now. All the secrets were spilling out. Which begged the question, what else didn't I know? I couldn't help with shit unless I fucking knew everything and who all the fucking players were. Looking at the men in the room, I wondered what other bombshells they were about to drop.

Getting to my feet, Mercy stiffened as I started pacing the room. I knew he was ready to lock me down in case I lost my shit. I wasn't fucking stupid. I was the fucking wildcard. Always had been. No one really knew what I would do until I did it. I generally did whatever best suited me, but not this time. This time I had to think before I acted. Not a novel experience for me, just something I generally didn't like doing.

I wasn't an analytical thinker like Reaper.

I didn't plot or plan. I didn't sit around on my ass and think up scenarios of shit that could possibly happen and plot out my revenge. No. I acted on impulse. If someone fucked me over, I fucked them right back even harder. I never stopped and thought of the repercussions of my actions. I was the president of the largest motorcycle club in the world, repercussions never bothered me because I didn't give a fuck. Still didn't give a fuck, but now everything was different.

Generally, I took what I knew and acted in my club's best interest. Typically, that meant whatever best suited me, but this time was different. Yes, I could walk away and let the Golden Skulls find Sypher all on their own, basically washing my hands of the fucking annoying club. On the flip side, my club was now forever blood linked to the Golden Skulls thanks to my granddaughter Emma, Reaper's daughter.

The way I looked at it, I was damned if I did and damned if I didn't.

There was no fucking way I came out of this clusterfuck on top.

So that meant only one thing.

If I was going down, I was damn sure taking everyone with me.

Misery loved company, right?

It would not be easy working with a man I considered unstable, but even I fucking knew I couldn't do this shit by myself.

The second Reaper and I landed in the city, we started putting out feelers for Sypher. After the first twenty-four hours, we knew we needed more help.

So we called everyone.

Even with all our contacts in the world, we had nothing.

It was as if the kid literally went POOF and fucking vanished.

No one knew where he was.

“What about our intern, Pippen?” Payne asked the room. “Have we located him?”

We were all grasping at straws. We were racing against the clock. The longer Sypher was missing, the more antsy the table would become. We knew it was only a matter of time before the table issued the kill order and then it wouldn't matter. We were running out of time, fast.

“Not calling Pippen,” Reaper groaned, sitting next to Mercy and added, “Gave Sypher my word he would be safe.”

“But if Dante knows anything, we have to at least ask him, Reaper,” Ace stated, as Trout and Chipper nodded. “Dante would want to help.”

“I said no,” Reaper growled at Ace. “The kid is untouchable.”

“Sypher works for everyone in the underworld,” Matthew Law spoke up, trying to ease the tension between Ace and Reaper. “Anyone could be helping him.”

“Then I say we go knocking on some fucking doors,” Malice growled, crossing his arms over his chest.

“You said he was last seen leaving Sinclair’s house,” Fury stated, looking at Malice. “You know Sinclair the best, Malice. Why would Sypher go see him?”

Malice growled. “Because he asked for a meeting with us.”

I snarled, glaring at my enforcer. “Us?”

Malice groaned, shaking his head. “It’s not what you fucking think, asshole. Kid wanted me to make him forget.”

“Forget what?” I asked, looking at the man.

Malice looked directly at me and said, “Everything.”

“Tell me you didn’t, Gideon.” Torment sighed.

“I told him no,” Malice admitted. “Words were said and he fucking left angry. Haven’t seen him since.”

“Hold up.” Trout stepped forward. “Why would Danny want to forget everything?”

“To protect my secret,” said a beautiful blonde-haired woman. Dressed in black leather, with superb ink covering both her arms, she stood glaring about the room, along with one of my fucking Retirement Rejects, Popeye. The woman reminded me of a female Viking warrior and my gut was telling me she could definitely handle herself. The second her sky-blue eyes landed on mine, I stiffened as long forgotten memories of my childhood rushed forward while a familiar face I hadn’t seen since I was a teenager stood before me, and that’s when the mystery I had been trying to

solve for years fell into place.

Malice gasped. “Thena?”

“Hello, Gideon.”

“YOU ARE THENA?!” I yelled while Reaper rolled his eyes.

Rounding on me, Reaper shouted loudly, “I am standing right next to you, asshole!”

Ignoring the fucker, I narrowed my eyes and glared at the lying conniving bitch when Reaper asked, “Val, do you know where Sypher is?”

So, this was Valhalla, the president of the Nyght Nymphs. The elusive all-female motorcycle club that preferred to stay off the radar and keep to themselves. Too bad for her, I fucking knew who she really was. Had I met her sooner, I probably would have figured this shit out quicker, but hey, better late than never, right?

“Where is the fucking kid?” I sneered.

“Why should I tell you?” Valhalla challenged. “From the very beginning, you’ve done everything in your power to fuel this fucking war. All Sypher wanted to do was end it.”

“Please,” Chipper spoke up, walking over to her. “I know you don’t know me. Danny’s my little brother. I don’t give a damn about anything else. Where is he?”

Val sighed. “I don’t know. That’s why I’m here. When he didn’t come back after the meeting with Sinclair and the others, we got worried. Popeye and I have been looking all over the city for him and came up with nothing.”

“Did he tell you his plan?” Reaper asked.

“Yes, but you’re not going to like it. He planned on using himself as bait to lure Pandora out into the open. Sypher believed if he could get close enough to Pandora, he could plant a tracker on her.”

“How the fuck is that going to help shit if that bitch kills him?” Ace yelled.

Sitting back down, Reaper whispered, “That sneaky son of a bitch.”

“Wanna let us in on what you figured out?” I snarked, tired of all this fucking cloak-and-dagger shit. Why couldn’t anyone just speak plainly and say what the fuck they mean? I did it all the fucking time. Didn’t want any misinterpretations before I fucking killed a motherfucker.

Looking up at me, Reaper simply said, “He’s sacrificing himself to save all of us.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I snarked. “I don’t need him to save me.”

“Sypher fucking knew the only way to stop this fucking war was to force us to work together and systematically get rid of everyone connected to that cunt, before the table learned the truth.”

“What truth?” Mercy asked.

“But that didn’t work, did it? We still don’t know who’s all involved or where the fuck that bitch is at,” I groaned, then I finally caught on to what Reaper was saying. “Holy fuck. You know what that means, right? The first fucking thing the table will do is issue his kill order.”

“Exactly.” Reaper grinned. “Which will go out to everyone in the underworld.

Including us.”

“And whoever takes the contract will reveal themselves.”

“YO! Thelma and Louise,” Ace shouted loudly. “You two bitches wanna let us all in on what the fuck is going on in those warped fucking heads of yours?”

“Sypher’s known all along who the guilty were. He’s been compiling a list since he got into the Trick Pony’s servers. By giving himself up, he’s forcing the guilty out into the open,” Reaper explained.

Picking up where Reaper left off, I added, “The kid knew by giving himself up, the table would order his death. Those guilty of colluding with the bitch would want him dead, because they would want to silence him before he revealed all their secrets.”

Looking at me, Reaper grinned. “It’s actually fucking brilliant when you think about it. Sypher has been a major player in the underworld since he was sixteen. He contracts for the table and damn near most of the Biker Federation. There isn’t a single fucking soul connected to the underworld that Sypher hasn’t investigated. The kid is a veritable encyclopedia of who’s who in the criminal underworld.”

“Add in his stellar fucking brain and sense of morality, it only makes sense he would do something stupid. I can’t believe we didn’t figure it out sooner. His dad was the same fucking way. Always did the right fucking thing.”

“And just like his father, Sypher will do anything to protect his family,” Reaper finished, turning to Val, who hadn’t moved an inch.

Walking over to the woman, he sighed. “Val, it’s time. You’ve been running your entire life. I know Sypher’s been helping you keep your secret, but we can’t save him if we don’t know everything. Why would Danny risk his own life for you?”

“He’s not,” I said as I stepped toward Val, who visibly paled and took a step back. “He’s doing it for my intern, isn’t he? I’m so fucking stupid. How could I miss it? I saw him every motherfucking day and never put two and two together. He’s the spitting image of him. Tell me I’m wrong?”

“Montana, don’t,” Val whispered, her eyes laced with fear.

“Who is Pippen’s father? And don’t you fucking tell me it’s Dakota, because I know it’s not him. My fucking idiot of a brother may be a sadistic sociopath, but he’s fucking sterile.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Reaper asked, looking at me. “We already know your dick of a brother raped Thena and works for that fucking cunt.”

“He’s right, Montana,” Fury added. “Carly said as much when she dug into his past. You know this.”

Shaking my head, I never took my eyes off the woman. Had mad respect for Valhalla and her club, but she fucking knew I was telling the truth. I may not know everything, but I was quickly catching on to all these games. It was too fucking easy. Whoever was holding the strings wanted us to believe that Dakota was the father. So that meant he wasn’t. Thena Hartley, Valhalla or whatever fucking name she used, knew this too.

Shaking her head, she whispered, “I won’t tell you.”

Refusing to let up, I pressed on. “I know you weren’t raised at the Trick Pony.”

“What the fuck are you talking about, Montana?” Malice sneered. “She was with us when we escaped!”

“That may be true, but she wasn’t born there. Tell them the truth, Meredith?”

All eyes turned to Valhalla when she gasped, and Popeye stepped up behind her protectively.

Yeah, I wasn’t as stupid as everyone thought. There was a lot I remembered and still shit I didn’t, but that didn’t negate the fact that I fucking knew the woman standing before me. It always bugged me how she and her club avoided anything biker related yet registered their club with the Federation. Now it all made sense. She needed to keep an eye on all of us. My club specifically. Or should I say one particular brother?

“Don’t do this, Montana,” she whispered.

“Why not?” I sneered. “You are the reason for this whole fucked-up mess. The time for secrets is over. Your club prides itself on protecting the innocent. Well, now is your chance. If you know something that can help us save Sypher, start talking. Because either you tell them, or I will. It makes no difference to me. But when this shit is over, you and I will have a fucking in-depth discussion woman. Got me?”

“What the hell is going on here?” Reaper snarled.

Scoffing, I shook my head and went to sit down. “Ask her.”

“You are still a fucking dick, you know that, Montana?” Val sneered.

Leaning back in my chair, I grinned. “Should have stayed hidden if you didn’t want anyone to know. Speaking of which, does he fucking know? Or have you been keeping secrets from him, too?”

“Someone want to tell me what the fuck is going on here and how it pertains to my fucking brother?” Ace snarked.

Popeye whispered, “It’s time, Val. Tell them.”

I watched the woman’s shoulders slump like an immense burden weighed heavily on her as she walked over to a table and sat. Leaning forward in the chair, she took a deep breath and began. “You’ve heard of the saying bad blood? Well, Edward Goldman took that shit to a whole new level. In the beginning, there were five of them. Brian Doherty, Frances Lombardo, White Wolf, Gregory Stone, and Edward Goldman. All from different backgrounds, but with one thing in common—they were all some of the first prisoners in Nebraska State Penitentiary.”

“Hold up,” Fury interrupted. “Carly found no evidence of prison time.”

“Because Sypher erased it.”

“Why?” Ace asked.

“To protect the innocent,” Val said, looking at Reaper who stiffened. “Like I was saying, each man was doing time for various petty crimes, except for Edward Goldman, who, at the time, was the youngest prisoner to be incarcerated. He was fifteen and sentenced to death for murdering his family and several accounts of rape. The man was seriously mentally ill, but back then there was no place to put him but in a prison. Because of his age, the four other men kind of protected him, especially Brian Doherty. In the early 1920s, the prison scheduled Edward to be the first person executed for his crimes when he started a riot, killing two guards and raping the warden’s wife. During the riot, Brian and the others escaped, taking Edward with them. For a few short years, they stayed under the radar, doing nefarious things for cash, but hit it big when prohibition hit the scene. The five men ran moonshine and other vices, like tobacco and drugs. But everything came to a fucking halt when Edward assaulted Brian’s youngest sister, Frances and left her for dead. However, when Frances died giving birth, he vowed to find Edward and kill him.”

“So it’s true then,” Fury muttered. “Carly was right. It was Edward who raped Frances.”

Valhalla nodded. “Yes. When I started medical school, I studied sociopathic and psychopathic tendencies extensively, concentrating on the genetic markers that showed predisposition.”

“Val,” Torment interjected, taking a seat. “Sociopathy and psychopathy are not genetic. That’s been disproven.”

Shaking his head, Malice spoke up, “That’s not necessarily true, brother. There was a study done in 2011 that stated 60-70% of psychopathy is genetic. The research examined identical twins with criminal biological fathers and showed they were prone to higher psychopathic personality traits, especially within males.”

“Yes, but if raised in a loving home, then those traits are non-existent.”

“Enough,” I groaned, rubbing my forehead. “You two can discuss the genetics of bat-shit crazy later. I’m waiting for her to get to the part where she tells you how my fucking intern is Bane’s son.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

“What the fuck are you talking about, fucknuts?”

My head was about to explode if someone didn't start fucking spewing the truth soon. I was at my limit with all the who fucked who. As far as I was concerned, when this shit was over with, everyone was getting a fucking vasectomy, even if I had to cut their balls off myself!

Ignoring me, Montana glared at Val.

“Tell him I'm wrong. I dare you.”

“You're a fucking dick.” Valhalla shot up from her seat. “You know that?”

“But a truthful dick.”

“ENOUGH!” I roared, reaching for my blades, slamming them down on the table. Taking a deep breath and as calmly as I could, I said, “I swear to fucking God. One of you better start making sense fast before I gut the lot of you.”

“Now you did it, Mere.” Montana chuckled, crossing his arms over his chest. “You just pissed off the deadliest man in this fucking room.”

Reaching for her chair, Valhalla plopped her ass back down. Slumping forward, she placed her arms on her thighs and hung her head while she spoke. “I had a good life, loving parents and friends. Then one day I didn't.”

“What happened?” Ace asked, taking a seat as everyone soon found a comfortable

place, knowing that Valhalla was about to tell her story.

“We all grew up in the same neighborhood. I grew up two houses down from August and that fucking idiot lived across the street from me.” She smirked, thumbing her finger toward Montana. “Because of who our parents were, we had every advantage life could afford us, and we knew it. Back then, our parents pretty much left us alone. That’s probably why Montana grew into the pompous dick he is today.”

A few of the brothers chuckled, while Montana flipped Valhalla the one finger bird as she smirked and continued.

“I knew from the first time August kissed me I would spend the rest of my life with him. I think on some level he knew, too. We didn’t hide how we felt for each other, even though his parents wanted him to keep his options open. I could understand that, but what I couldn’t comprehend was why Montana’s father was against the match. It made no sense, but when my parents changed their tune a few months later, I knew George Stone said something to them. At first, I thought it was something I did, but then I found my adoption paperwork. My parents were not my biological parents.”

“How the fuck could my dad know you were adopted?” Montana asked.

“Because he facilitated my fucking adoption, you dickwad.” Val glared at the fucker. “Your fucking piece of shit dad has been playing the long game since before any of us were born. Only all of us were too fucking young to see it. When I learned I was adopted, I told August, and he helped me research my actual parents. He made a game out of it. He even researched his family, too. What we learned changed everything we thought we knew about the Soulless Sinners, the Golden Skulls, everyone. Then, the night my parents died, George found me with August. He fucking lost it. The next thing I knew, I woke up at the Trick Pony and I never saw August again.”

Leaning forward, Montana asked, “Are you fucking telling me Bane knew all along that my dad was a sick, twisted son of a bitch?”

“Yes.” She nodded, while Montana lost his shit. Jumping from his seat, he picked up the chair and threw it across the room as he yelled. Mercy got to his feet and watched the volatile fucker as Val ignored him and continued, “When I realized where I was, I knew I wasn’t leaving the place alive. George ensured that when he ordered Devlin Scott to kill me. The only thing that saved me was Scott found out that I was pregnant. August and I had only been together a few times, and we weren’t exactly careful. So, for the next seven and a half months, Devlin Scott kept me hidden within the walls of the Trick Pony and ordered a woman named Veronica Meeks to watch over me.”

Malice cursed, got up, and stormed out of the room.

“Veronica was a striking woman. Blonde hair and the bluest eyes that could enthrall anyone she was around. To the blind eye, she looked sweet and kind, almost angel like, but like most things, looks could be deceiving. The fact was that bitch was pure fucking evil and just as sadistic as Devlin Scott, maybe worse. She made my life a living fucking hell, but she never touched me. She knew Scott would kill her if she did, so instead, she liked to torment me with her plans after I delivered my baby. The woman seriously had a screw loose. In the end, she never got a chance, because I went into labor early. When I woke up from my emergency C-section, I wasn’t well. I contracted an infection that left me bed-ridden for weeks. I didn’t know what happened to my daughter, but when I was able to stand, I went to look for her. That’s when Sinclair showed up and dragged me away.”

“Hang on.” I sighed, rubbing the back of my neck. “You left something out. Something big. What is it?”

Val looked up at Popeye, who nodded. “Tell them, sweetheart.”

Taking a deep breath, she added, “I gave birth to twins. A boy and girl. Only I didn’t know it until Sypher told me before I came here. I didn’t know when I left the Trick Pony the first time that I had left with my son. Like I said, after I gave birth, I was weak. I could barely stand, but I was determined to find my baby. Somehow, I stumbled into the nursery. There were five babies in there. Four girls and one little boy. He was crying so loudly, I couldn’t stand hearing him cry, so I picked him up. He was so tiny, so small. He looked like a doll. I was soothing him when the alarms started going off. The next thing I knew, Sinclair was there, dragging me from the club.”

“When George learned Meredith escaped, he lost his shit,” Popeye added, taking a seat. Reaching for Val’s hand, he continued, “George was in deep with Devlin Scott and the Society . Both of them were conspiring to get rid of the Craven sisters. George fucking hated Sienna Mitchell and the hold she had on everyone. George wanted that power for himself. But Devlin Scott had it worse, because he had to fucking deal with Jane. Now, that bitch is fucking scary as hell. She was the sadistic mastermind behind all the blood mixing. Fucking cunt believed that if she mixed enough blood, everyone would just kill each other. She almost succeeded, too.”

“Bullshit,” Montana sneered. “Dad wouldn’t care about that shit. If it made the Soulless Sinners stronger, he’d make a fucking deal with the Devil himself.”

“You’re wrong, Montana.” Popeye sighed. “Your dad fucking flat out refused to have Golden blood in his club. Back then, he hated the Golden Skulls. Wanted them wiped off the fucking map, but could never get close enough to eradicate them. But when Sienna tasked me to find Meredith and return her to the Trick Pony, your dad had another plan. He wanted me to find Meredith because he was going to force you to marry her. He figured the only way to get rid of the Golden Skulls was to send in his own fucking blood. But it was too late.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Montana muttered, shaking his head.

“What do you mean, it was too late?” I asked, sitting forward.

“When George learned Montana had gotten Bella pregnant, he knew the Society would use his own blood against him to bring him to heel. So he whisked Bella and her parents away, and when she delivered, he insisted Bella sign away her rights. When the girl refused, George killed her parents. Bella signed the papers, and I never knew what he did with the baby.”

“Bullshit,” Montana sneered. “You always knew what Dad was up to. Don’t start fucking lying to me now, Popeye.”

“I’m not,” the older man groaned. “I really don’t know how your daughter ended up in the hands of the Society .”

“Yes, you do,” I seethed, looking at the man. “You know exactly how.”

Montana looked at me then at Popeye before closing his eyes. “Motherfucker gave them my daughter. He fucking got rid of her like a discarded piece of trash.”

Growling, Ace sneered, “Not gonna ask again. What does all that shit have to do with my brother?”

“Everything,” I groaned, rubbing my hands down my face. “Sypher knew it all. He’s always known. From the moment Moonshine and I asked him to search Ravage’s past, the kid has known all the players. Since then, he’s been watching, gathering information on everyone. Watching to see what they will do and who they will align themselves with.”

“Still doesn’t explain why my brother is willing to risk everything for Dante. I get he loves Dante, but I need more than that. Because from where I’m standing, all of you can get fucked. All I care about is my baby brother.”

“August Brian Lansing is the son of Albert William Lansing and Julia Diana Craven, the daughter of Fredrick Craven and Abigail

Baudelaire.”

The second she said the name, everyone stiffened, and I looked at Montana, who stared blankly at Valhalla.

“You wanted to know why Sypher is willing to die to protect my son. There is your answer. My son is the great-grandson of the Baudelaire Family. He’s also the great-grandson of the very family who is trying to take down the Biker Federation, and when the world learns he exists, everyone will want him dead.”

This wasn’t happening.

There was no fucking way I had two descendants of that fucking family in my club. Not that I gave a shit, but protecting one was hard enough. There was no fucking way I could protect the two of them without Sypher.

Looking over at Montana, the fucker hadn’t said shit since Valhalla revealed her secret. As secrets went, the woman won hands down because nothing else mattered now. There was no fucking way I was throwing Ravage or Dante under the bus, not while Sypher was willing to die to protect them.

“We have to call him.”

“The fuck we do!”

“Montana, it’s the only way.”

“There is a reason the Biker Federation avoids them. They don’t give a fuck about

anything or anyone. They do what they want, Reaper. They make our clubs look like a fucking daycare. I wouldn't trust a single fucking one of them with a toothpick, let alone this information. No. We are not calling him."

"I don't think you are comprehending the severity of what is going on. The Brotherhood of Bastards is not the fucking club you want to cross. You know that and so do I. There is a reason the Biker Federation gives that club a wide berth. They will not think twice before coming after us if anything happens to Dante. Especially Morpheus."

"Kid is just an intern. As soon as this shit is over, I'm kicking him to the curb. You can deal with him. And I'm ripping Bane's brand off his back with my bare hands. No fucking way is that drunk motherfucker staying in my house."

Valhalla chuckled, shaking her head. "You are a fucking pussy, you know that, Montana? You talk a good game, but when your back is against the wall, you still fucking grab your dick and run. Just like your fucking father."

"Fuck you, Mere," Montana scoffed. "None of this shit would have happened if you had kept your fucking legs closed."

"Watch it, boy," Popeye growled.

Jumping to his feet, Montana snarled, "Fuck you, Popeye. You went along with this shit. You did nothing to stop it. None of you did. Now look what I have to clean up. You and fucking Snoopy are out, too."

"Montana," Mercy groaned, shaking his head.

"Shut it, Mercy. I don't want to hear shit out of you unless it's a way out of this mess."

“There is only one way out and you fucking know it,” I calmly said. “You want this shit contained, then we need to find Sypher. He is the only one who can make this shit disappear. But let me be very fucking crystal clear here, asshole. If you so much as harm one hair on Dante’s head, the Golden Skulls will retaliate in force. Sypher claimed him. That makes him ours. So get your fucking head out of your ass and stop making shit worse.”

Sitting back down, Montana muttered, “Intern’s still out. He’s your problem now.”

“Whatever,” I groaned, rubbing the back of my neck. Turning to Ace, I asked, “Is there any way you can track Sypher? I know he bought Harbor Security and helped you get into that military facility. There has to be a way, Ace.”

“No,” Ace sighed, shaking his head, when Shane West piped up, “What about the camera?”

“What?” Matthew Law asked.

Shane West frowned. “Before Danny went into the facility. Remember, Ace. It’s how we got the pictures of inside the facility. The camera Danny created.”

“Shit!” Ace gasped, reaching for his computer. “If he still has it in, then we would see everything he was seeing.”

“English, asshole?” Trout growled, glaring at his older brother.

“Before Danny and the others were arrested, Danny and I were working on a new tech. A contact lens camera, that wouldn’t be detected. Danny was wearing the lens when the FEDs arrested him. It allowed us to see inside the facility.”

“And you think the kid is still wearing the contact?” Payne asked.

“If he is, then we can locate him,” Ace muttered, typing into his computer. Getting up, I walked over to where Ace was sitting and Montana walked over to stand next to me.

“Holy mother of God,” Ace whispered. “He’s still wearing it. There are days of information stored before the camera turned off.”

“Skip to the end, Ace,” Chipper ordered.

There on the screen, we all watched as Sypher left a house.

“That’s Sinclair’s house,” Malice informed as the camera went dark.

“Hang on,” Ace muttered. “I just need to download the data then I should be able to boot up the camera again.

As Ace did his thing, I looked at Montana and whispered, “You really going to kick your best friend from the club?”

“Fuck no.”

Shaking my head, I smirked. “You really are all talk, aren’t you?”

“Shut up, asshole.”

I chuckled as Ace spoke up, pointing at the computer screen, “There.”

Several bodies leaned forward when Montana asked, “Where the fuck is that?”

“The Harbor Security Building,” Matthew Law growled, reaching for his gun, as did all the rest of the Alpha team members when I felt my phone vibrating.

“That fucking bitch breached our building!” Jonathan Savage roared.

Reaching into my cut, I removed my phone and looked at the caller ID.

“Montana.”

“What?”

When I said nothing, the man looked down at my hand and whistled loudly, halting everyone and silencing the room. Hitting the connect button, I placed the call on speaker so everyone could hear.

“Good evening, everyone,” the bitch said sweetly as her voice resonated through the speaker. “I will assume that you all remembered the camera and can see me now. Is that right, Mr. Franks?”

Looking at Ace’s computer screen, we all watched as the woman smiled, waving her hand in front of Sypher’s face.

“I’ll take your silence as conformation. Now, gentlemen. I know you want him back and I am more than happy to oblige. The young man has been unwilling to acquiesce to my demands, and I am sorry to say that Mr. Greer did get a little carried away. Now, before you all get your panties in a wad, I am willing to exchange him for Jackson.”

Montana was about to utter something when I sneered at him to shut the fuck up. Placing the speaker of my phone close to my mouth, I clearly said, “I’m gonna fucking gut you from fuck hole to pie hole, bitch.”

She sighed. “I figured you would say that, Mr. Doherty. You have three minutes, gentlemen, and then the kid will go boom. I believe that needs no explanation. Oh,

please tell my dearest Jackson, I look forward to seeing him soon.”

Not even a second later, I received an incoming text message. Opening it, I dropped my phone and ran from the clubhouse.

The air was thick with tension as I ran like my life depended on it and in a way it did, because if anything happened to that kid, we were fucking screwed.

I knew it and so did Montana.

Never in this fucked-up mess did I ever think Sypher would be so fucking stupid as to use himself as bait. It was bad enough that I involved him in this crazy fucking scheme, but if anything happened to him, the repercussions would be severe and deadly. And that was just what the table would do. I really didn't want to think what his brothers would do.

Quickly looking at my watch, I noted the time as very second felt like a thunderous beat in my ears while I raced toward the Harbor on 5th building. Bathed in the unsettling glow of the setting sun, the structure stood like a menacing silhouette against the darkening sky, concealing within its walls the one man whose life hung precariously in the balance.

It had been mere moments ago when that fucking cunt called, laughing as she demanded Jackson before sending a picture of Sypher chained to a pipe, beaten black and blue. The bitch had tortured him, and I vowed to gut that bitch like a fucking fish when I got my hands on her. Her parting words were ominous, but I would worry about that later.

She gave us three minutes.

Three motherfucking minutes to save Sypher or he would go boom. I didn't need a

magic eight-ball to fucking tell me what she meant by that. All I cared about was getting that kid out of that fucking building before it blew.

I never hesitated. The second I saw his face, I ran as if the hounds of Hell nipped at my feet. There was no other option. I had to get him out before she killed him. She fucking knew with Sypher dead, no one would be able to stop her, and she was right.

Every second wasted was a step closer to an unimaginable tragedy.

With adrenaline coursing through my veins, I rushed from the clubhouse and sprinted toward the looming building, not more than a city block away from the pier. My heart pounded heavily in my chest, my breaths urgent, pressing hard against my chest as I ignored the burn in my lungs. The weight of the situation weighed heavily on my shoulders.

I had to save him.

Failure was no longer an option.

The ground beneath my feet seemed to tremble with the impending doom, each footfall echoed like a death knell when I heard emergency service sirens blaring off in the distance.

Fuck!

The cunt called the police and first responders.

The entrance to the building was in sight. I had to get inside that building before the police showed up and quickly blockaded off the entire area.

Still, I pressed on, my determination unwavering when I heard the roar of the

motorcycle engines echoing from behind me as a horde of bikers raced against time, shooting past me. I could see the adrenaline pulse through their veins, driven by the singular goal of saving the young boy trapped inside the building. The fading sunlight glinted off their helmets, reflecting the intensity of their mission.

When I approached the building, its facade loomed ominously, the air thick with an unspoken tension as brothers didn't waste time and laid down their bikes, running for the building. With every step toward the entrance, my heart pounded louder, my breaths coming in short, urgent gasps.

"Sypher!" Their voices broke through the chaos, their pleas mingled with the futility of the situation. I was close, so very close. With every passing second, I prayed for just a little more time, just a few more moments to bridge the gap between hope and despair.

But as fate would have it, time was not on my side.

I don't know what made me stop, but when I did, I looked up to find Danny staring down at me from the seventh floor. A look of peace on his face right before a deafening blast shattered the air. A fiery explosion engulfed the building, sending debris and flames spiraling into the sky. The sheer force of the blast flung the club brothers into the air and me off my feet, throwing me backward with a violent intensity.

The world spun in a cacophony of sound and blinding light. I felt the ground rush up to meet me. The impact jarring every bone in my body. The acrid smell of smoke filled my nostrils as I struggled to regain my bearings, my ears ringing.

I absently rolled onto my side, coughing as I wiped my nose with the back of my hand, seeing blood smeared along my skin. Shaking the fog from my brain, I slowly turned to see the Harbor on 5th, gone. Only a pile of rubble where an eight-story

building once stood. Staggering to my feet, I walked forward, when someone tried to stop me. Yanking my arm free, I continued forward, determined to find him. He was in there, somewhere under the rubble. I knew he was. I had to find him.

Someone stepped in front of me. I couldn't hear what they were saying. All I cared about was getting to Sypher. Trying to get away from the man, I walked around him and took another step to find Montana in my path. The grim look on his face told me what I already knew, but I refused to believe it.

He wasn't dead.

He was alive and I was going to prove it.

I just needed to find him.

"Reaper," I vaguely heard through the ringing in my ears as Montana gripped my arms tight.

"Shit! I don't think he can hear. He's bleeding from his ears."

"The cops will be here shortly. Your call, Montana. What do you want to do?"

"No way I can cover this shit up. We stay and help dig. If he's alive, then we need to know."

"Your heard him!" Mercy roared. "Start fucking digging!"

Brothers rushed past me while Montana held me firm, refusing to let me take another step.

Shaking me, he got my attention. I tried to focus on him, but my eyes kept darting

back to the pile of rubble. Snapping his fingers in front of my face, Montana shouted, “MAXWELL!”

Blinking, I looked back at him, my eyes stinging with unshed tears as I stared into his eyes, unable to swallow the gut-wrenching guttural sob that finally broke free from deep within my soul as I screamed, “DANNY!”

Montana gathered me in his arms, holding me tight as my world crumbled down around me.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Pippen

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

I woke from a dead sleep, my heart pounding in my chest. I knew something was wrong. I could feel it. Reaching for my phone, I checked to make sure he didn't call. Seeing nothing, I got up and walked into the living room, unable to get the feeling of dread to ease.

The apartment was eerily quiet, the shadows cast by the moonlight created ghostly silhouettes on the walls. The stillness of the night was unsettling and amplified the anxiety that gnawed at me. I glanced at the clock, seeing it was just past three in the morning. The witching hour, as they called it. A time when the world felt suspended between dreams and reality and when the mind was most susceptible to its darkest fears.

I sat down on the couch, trying to calm my frantic heartbeat. "It's just a feeling," I told myself. "There's no reason to believe something is wrong." But the rational part of my mind couldn't silence the growing sense of foreboding. I picked up my phone again, scrolling through the messages, hoping for some reassurance.

Nothing.

Not a single notification.

I decided to make myself a cup of tea, hoping the warm drink would soothe my nerves. As the kettle boiled, I stared out the window, the street outside deserted and

silent. The trees swayed gently with the night breeze, their branches whispering secrets to the night. I wished I could understand those whispers. Maybe they held the answers to my unease.

The tea did little to calm me. I needed to understand what was happening. I walked back to the couch, my mind racing with possibilities. Had something happened to him? Why hadn't he called or messaged? Was he in trouble? My thoughts spiraled, each one feeding the growing panic within me.

I tried calling him, the ringing of the phone sounding unbearably loud in the quiet room. It went straight to voicemail. My heart sank. I left a message, my voice trembling as I tried to sound calm. "Hey, it's me. Just checking in. Call me when you get this." I hung up and stared at the phone, willing it to ring.

It didn't.

Minutes felt like hours as I sat there, waiting. I couldn't shake the feeling that something terrible had happened. I tried to distract myself, flipping through channels on the TV, but nothing could hold my attention. Every sound, every shadow, seemed to be a harbinger of bad news.

"You're up early?" Shadow muttered sleepily when he walked past me into the kitchen.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Me either," he replied. "Don't sleep well without Joan. You want to talk about it?"

"No," I said, getting to my feet. "I'm gonna go for a walk."

I hoped the fresh air would clear my head. I grabbed my jacket and stepped outside;

the cool night air wrapped around me like a shroud. The city was asleep, the streets empty and silent. I walked aimlessly, my mind still racing with thoughts of him.

I found myself at the park, a place we discovered shortly after renting the apartment. Danika loved it. So did Danny. It was peaceful, the silence almost comforting. I sat on a bench as memories of happier times flooded my mind. I remembered the laughter, the joy, the moments of pure contentment. But tonight, those memories were overshadowed by the fear of the unknown.

I checked my phone again.

Nothing. The feeling of dread was overwhelming now, suffocating me.

I needed to hear his voice.

To know that he was safe.

Montana

St. John's Presbyterian Hospital, New York.

It took a few hours, but the first responders found him.

Somehow, that lucky son of a bitch survived a seven-story building falling on him. He was barely hanging on, but he was alive. Now it was up to Valhalla to make sure he stayed that way. With Bane off doing God knows what, Valhalla was the only doctor we could technically trust.

If that bitch knew what was good for her, she'd better fucking make sure the kid survived.

“Mercy,” I muttered, looking about the room. “Send out an alert to all the chapters. Clubs are on lockdown.”

“Already did, brother,” Mercy whispered. “But the only one who has responded is the Alabama Chapter. Something is going on, boss, and I don’t like it. What about the Golden Skulls?”

“They won’t listen to me.”

“Until Reaper hears Sypher’s fate, he won’t think clearly, and you know it. You need to call Ghost and let him know so he can lock down the clubhouse.”

He was right.

Right now, Reaper was sitting next to Ace, Chipper, and Trout. All four men looked worse for wear, but the solemn looks in their eyes told me all I needed to know. They only cared about Sypher.

This was a massive clusterfuck.

With Reaper out until Sypher’s fate was known, that left me to handle what would come next and it didn’t take a fucking genius to figure that shit out.

Standing up straighter, I squared my shoulders and said, “Listen up, everyone. I figure we have less than an hour before this shit hits the airwaves. Until we know what Sypher’s fate is, we have to think preemptively. I’m locking down the clubhouse. Reaper, I need your permission to call Ghost so he can do the same.”

Reaper nodded, rubbing his hands down his face. “Have him contact the Tennessee Chapter too.”

“Mercy, make the fucking call,” I ordered as my VP already had his phone to his ear. “The rest of you, I want this floor secured. Only hospital personnel working to save Sypher is allowed on this floor. Fury, go find the hospital administrator and pave the way. Give him whatever he fucking wants.”

But before Fury could move an inch, Maxim Fedorov walked into the waiting room and sneered, “It’s all over the news. The table got an anonymous call. They know Sypher was in the building. They issued the order. Ten million for the first person to kill Sypher.”

“Fuck,” I sighed as Reaper grinned.

“So, war it is.”

Looking at the Golden Skulls’ president, I nodded. “They want a fucking war, then let’s give them one.”

Over the next few hours, Reaper and I started making calls, issuing orders and formulating a plan, when Valhalla walked into the waiting room looking like total dog shit.

“He’s alive.”

“Can he be moved?” I interrupted, not needing to hear anything else. Alive was alive in my book and that’s all that mattered.

“No, he can’t be fucking moved, you inconsiderate ass. I had a fucking drill in his head not even an hour ago to relieve the pressure on his brain. That’s not mentioning all the other shit we had to do to keep him alive!”

“Is he stable?” I sneered.

“For now, but he’s in critical condition.”

“Then we are moving him.”

“No, you are not.” Ace glared, slowly looking up at me. “He’s my brother and as Bailey, Charlie and I are the only blood family Danny has here, we decide what happens with our brother. Not you or Reaper.”

“STOP!” Val shouted, getting all of our attention. “Maybe I didn’t make myself clear. If you move Sypher, he will die. This isn’t a fucking game. I removed a piece of the kid’s skull. His brain is exposed. Under no circumstance is he allowed to be moved. So all of you better figure out another way to protect him.”

With that, the woman did an about-face and left the waiting room.

Looking at Reaper, I shook my head and quipped, “Custer’s last stand?”

“I was thinking shootout at the OK Corral?”

“Works for me.” I nodded. “Trout and Payne, if shit goes sideways, I don’t care what Val says. Get that kid out of here. As for the rest of you, go find a motherfucker and kill him.”

Looking at Reaper, he asked, reaching for his guns, checking the clips, “You ready for this, fucknuts?”

Reaching for mine, I muttered, “Just stay out of my way. I wouldn’t want to accidentally shoot you in the crossfire.”

“Anything happens to my brother, I will kill you both,” Ace snarked before he left the room with the rest of Harbor Security, ready for war.

“He’s a moody bastard, isn’t he?” Fury quipped.

“You have no idea,” Bailey groaned, walking past the man.

Moving slowly down the long hallway, the silence was deafening. St. John’s Presbyterian had just become ground zero for the start of a fucking war the table would not win. Not if I had anything to do with it. Bad enough those fucks thought they could handcuff the Biker Federation by taking the seat away from me, but when they issued a kill order on a fucking kid who spent his fucking life providing them with security, well that was something I wouldn’t allow. Contrary to popular belief, I didn’t hold with using kids to bring people to heel, and though Sypher was technically a patched brother in the Golden Skulls, most of the Biker Federation still saw him as a kid.

Myself included.

Call the Biker Federation what you want, but the fucking table was in for a rude awakening if anyone harmed one fucking hair on that kid’s head. Even I fucking knew the Biker Federation outnumbered the underworld six to one.

The odds were in our favor.

The dim fluorescent lights flickered intermittently, casting long shadows along the sterile, white walls of the hospital hallway as Reaper and I moved at a deliberately slow pace, our boots echoing softly against the linoleum floor. Each step we took was measured, each breath controlled, as we scanned the mostly deserted corridor for any sign of the men sent to kill Sypher.

My heart pounded in my chest; a rhythm matched by the steady thrum of tension that coursed through my veins. After the last few months of revelations, I was so ready to release some of the pent-up hostile energy I had bubbling under my skin. Even I

knew a man could only take so much before he broke, and I was at my limit.

The stillness of the hospital unnerved me. It was a stark contrast to the chaotic whirlwind that had brought me here. My mind replayed the events of the night before, the tense buildup of worry, the fucking phone call that told us what we already suspected, and then the race against time to stop the inevitable. It was all too much even for the strongest of men. Now, the grim reality of retributive justice marred these hallowed halls of healing. For soon, these white walls would run red with blood.

Every room I passed seemed to hold its breath, the silence broken only by the occasional beep of a distant monitor or the hushed whispers of nurses tending to their patients. My hand hovered near the concealed holster at my hip, fingers itching for the familiar grip of my weapon. I knew that violence had no place in this sanctuary, but the threat against the kid left me no choice.

No one was touching that kid.

Ever.

Turning a corner, my eyes narrowed when I spotted a figure in the distance. The man was dressed inconspicuously, as he blended into the environment with practiced ease. But I knew better. I recognized the son of a bitch's predatory stance, the cold determination in the man's eyes.

Shaking my head, I smirked.

This was who the fucking table sent? This was the assassin, the harbinger of death sent to sever the thread of Sypher's life.

Summoning every ounce of resolve, I advanced slowly, my muscles coiled like a

spring ready to unleash. I could almost hear the ticking of an unseen clock, counting down the precious moments before confrontation. As I closed in, the assassin turned, and our gazes locked in a silent acknowledgment of the inevitable clash.

In that suspended instant, time seemed to stretch. The world narrowed into the thin strip of hallway between us. My thoughts were a maelstrom of loyalty, anger, and the unyielding promise of protection. I had come too far, sacrificed too much, to let Sypher fall prey to this merciless hunter. So, when Death creeped up behind the fucker and grabbed his head in a tight lock, he stiffened and I smiled. “Mr. Blue, I would like you to meet Reaper.”

His eyes widened and I watched as Death claimed his first victim.

After helping Reaper stuff Mr. Blue into a storage closet, we headed back down the hallway.

“They fucking sent the Primary Brothers.”

“The what?” Reaper questioned.

“The Primary Brothers,” I groaned, shaking my head. “There are three of them. Well, now two. Blue, Red and Yellow.”

Stopping dead in his tracks, Reaper scoffed, looking at me like I was the stupidest person on the fucking planet. “You’re fucking with me. That cannot be their names.”

Chuckling, I nodded. “Not very inventive, but proficient. The table uses them often. They are good, but apparently not that damn good.”

“I feel insulted,” Reaper snarked, looking back at the storage closet. “My son could have killed that fucker in his sleep and he’s five.”

Smirking, I added, “York’s got a nasty temper. Boy would have toyed with the fucker just for shits and giggles.”

“So that’s the reach of the table, then? A box of crayons.”

“I wish,” I groaned. “The Primary Brothers are one of five groups the table contracts with. We need to find the other two Primary Brothers fast, because when they learn their brother is dead, they will notify the table and then the kill order will go wide.”

“What do you mean, wide?”

“Worldwide.”

“Fuck this shit,” Reaper said, reaching for his phone. “We don’t have time to play the table’s stupid game. I want this shit over with now. The table can get fucked. I’m not going to lose that kid because some fucking assholes want to keep the power they have.”

“What are you doing?”

“Killing two birds with one stone. I’m ending this shit show now.”

“How?”

“The table likes playing games. Let’s see how they fare against the Brotherhood.”

Yanking the phone out of his hand, I snarled, “You cannot call them. Those fuckers are only loyal to themselves. For all we know they could be working for the table.”

Reaper smiled menacingly at me as a trickle of unease had the hair standing up on the back of my neck and that’s when I realized Reaper knew more than he was letting on.

Looking right at me, Reaper grinned. “You want to know why the table stays the fuck away from my club? It’s not because they are afraid of me. It’s because they know I hold the keys to the fires of Hell.”

“Reaper, you do this and it’s game over. The underworld will retaliate. The table is the only thing holding the underworld together. With no law and order, chaos will ensue. It will be a free-for-all.”

“Good,” the asshole snarked. “Maybe a little death and destruction is what this fucking world needs.”

“We can do this,” I growled. “Together. No more games. No more secrets. It’s what you’ve wanted from day one. Well, I’m bending the fucking knee. But don’t make that fucking call.”

Lowering his phone, the asshole took a good long look at me, then said, “We do this my way.”

Swallowing loudly, I growled and handed him back his phone. “Fine. You are in charge.”

Smiling, Reaper chuckled. “Bet that hurt, didn’t it?”

Turning away from him, I sneered, “I fucking hate you.”

Ellery

Silver Shadows’ clubhouse, Diamond Creek, Nebraska.

Two weeks had passed since Danny and Dante departed from Diamond Creek, embarking on a journey to Oklahoma City with Danika in order to seek medical

attention from Dr. Melissa Jefferson. When Nav suggested her, I immediately looked her up online, curious to see what she was like. I was keen to understand the qualities and characteristics that set her apart from others and made her so unique. With a therapist already in Diamond Creek, I wanted my friends to stay close by in case they needed me.

I missed them.

Upon reviewing her impressive qualifications and experience, I fully grasped their decision to secure the most exceptional care for their daughter, following the trauma she had endured. Dr. Jefferson, a specialist in pediatric trauma, dealt daily with children whose eyes held the weight of unspeakable experiences. It wasn't easy raising a child who didn't speak. The constant worry gnawed at me, and I envied the readily available help little Danika would receive.

The day Ryder and I wed, amidst the celebratory bustle and fragrance of flowers, Tabby uttered her first word in two years—a tender ‘Mama.’ Hearing her little voice nearly shattered my heart to pieces but in the best way possible.

Since then, she had added more words, but only to Ryder and me.

She was more animated around the clubhouse now. Communicating in her own way with all the brothers. They never pushed her for words, all taking the time to learn her tells.

Sitting in the main room, I looked around at the women here.

My girlfriends. The best girlfriends I had ever had, other than Jessie. Three of us, all old ladies, having babies we would raise together. I even considered the club girls friends.

I never thought I would find happiness like this. But then to have Danny and Dante show up out of the blue... I sighed, thinking about everything. I didn't realize how much I missed them until I saw them here. It was almost like time evaporated and everything was perfect in my world.

I just wished they could stay.

The brothers were all in church tonight. The officers had church weekly, but the patched brothers attended only once a month. So, the women sat out here in the main room with the prospects.

And Bane.

Dr. August Lansing.

He was a bit intimidating. King invited him into church, but he declined. He explained he was taking a sabbatical from all club bullshit, not just his own.

I couldn't help but feel guilty.

I was the reason he was here. My parents had forged his name on some medical forms in hopes of having me found mentally ill.

"Excuse me, ladies, I need to change the channel," Bane said, switching the cartoons the girls were watching to the news.

"Live in New York City, this is Maya Saunders, reporting from where the Harbor Security Building on fifth just exploded. Details are still coming in, but preliminary reports tell us there was one victim. We are unsure if the victim is still alive or if they are deceased. Stay with us for minute-by-minute reporting at WNYC-10. Back to you, Jeff."

The scene on the television was one I wasn't unfamiliar with, growing up in Manhattan. I just prayed whoever was injured wasn't someone I knew.

"Who was it?"

I looked up and saw Bane with his phone to his ear. His club, the Soulless Sinners, was based in New York City. I was sure he was worried about his friends.

"What the fuck was he doing there?"

We could only hear one side of the conversation but all of us were on the edge of our seats waiting for information.

"They're in church. They should be out soon. Has anyone found Pippen?"

That had me shooting up out of my seat and rushing to Bane.

"Who was it?" I asked, pulling on his arm, no longer intimidated by the grouchy older man. "What about Dante?"

Holding his hand over the phone, he scowled down at me. "Pippen is fine. He wasn't even in New York. No one knows where he is."

Except I knew.

"What about Danny?" When he gave me a confused look, I remembered to use his club name. "Sypher. What about Sypher?"

Bane frowned and stated in an unemotional tone, "Sypher was the victim that was injured. He's in the hospital."

“Oh God. No.”

I couldn't stop the tears that immediately spilled from my eyes. My nose burned with the realization that my best friend was in a building when it exploded.

His words to me before he left rushed forward in my mind.

“If anything should happen to me. I need you to give this to King and tell him I said, time's up. He will know what that means.”

Running over to my bag, I dug for my wallet and pulled out the small Microdrive Danny gave me. Fisting my hand around the drive, I looked at the church doors.

I was about to do something that I was told never to do. Ryder explained that I was never allowed to interrupt church unless someone was dying. And Danny could be dying.

“Ellie?” I barely heard my name being called.

I knew my friends would be worried about me. They saw me with Danny. They understood how close we were.

Taking a deep breath, I tried to calm my raging heart and walked toward the church doors. I had no intention of knocking or being denied. Danny had trusted me with this. I knew it was important.

Pulling the church doors open, I walked in. If growing up in New York had taught me anything, it was to never show weakness when I barged into a room I didn't belong in. I walked into that room like I had every right to be there. Despite the tears running down my face.

“Ellie, what are you doing?” I vaguely heard my husband ask, but I ignored him and walked straight over to King.

“Ellie, honey, what’s wrong?”

“There was an explosion.” I closed my eyes, trying so hard to get the words out quickly. “Danny,” I choked out.

Ryder came up behind me and wrapped his arms around me. Someone moved, I didn’t know who, the only person I could see was King, as Ryder sat in the chair and pulled me into his lap.

King knelt on the floor in front of us. “What happened to Danny?”

“The Harbor Security Building on 5th exploded. Sypher was in it. He’s in the hospital,” Bane explained for me. He had followed me into the room and stood in the doorway.

“Fuck. I told him whatever he was gonna do wouldn’t work.”

I looked at my husband. “You knew?” I sneered.

“I didn’t know anything, baby. I just knew he was planning something. He didn’t tell me what.”

“Fuck.” King bowed his head.

“He asked me to give you something, King.”

King’s head snapped up and he locked eyes with mine. I reached out, taking his hand in mine as I slipped the drive into his hand and curled his fingers around it.

“He said to tell you, time’s up.”

“Fuck!” King cursed, jumping to his feet as he tightened his hand around the drive and yelled, “AMBER!”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Montana

St. John's Presbyterian Hospital, New York.

"We can't stay here forever. We're sitting ducks," I said, looking out the window down at the city I grew up in. This was my home. Always had been, always would be. I loved everything about this city, the good and the bad. I just never thought that the city I loved would be the city that kept me captive.

"We don't have a choice. Until Sypher is stable enough to be moved, we're stuck here," Reaper stated as he took a seat at the table in the conference room on the private floor.

This wasn't the first time I'd been on this floor. The last time was when Largo went into labor with Sophia. Mercy wasn't taking any chances and paid handsomely for his wife to have all her needs met. If Tessa hadn't done her runner, my son would have been born here as well.

"The place is secure," Mercy said from the doorway. "Got brothers on the stairwells and elevator. No one is getting on this floor without a fight, and Malice took care of the remaining two Primary Brothers. We're good for now."

Reaper said nothing as he reached for a bottle of Hell's Breath, pouring himself a drink. How that asshole snagged himself a bottle of whiskey I would never know. Shaking my head, I grabbed the bottle from him and poured myself a drink as well. I didn't know what he was planning but I guessed it was bad, like no survivors bad.

Had to admit, though, he had a point, and it would solve a lot of my problems

There was only one problem I couldn't get around.

"I don't understand."

"What?" he said, downing the glass of whiskey before pouring himself another glass.

"Why my dad kept my daughter alive," I said, staring at Reaper and watching him flinch. "That makes no sense. Mere said he killed Bella's parents. Why not just kill Bella and my daughter?"

"You sure you're ready to learn the truth, 'cause it's not fucking pretty?"

"Just tell me the truth."

"Power is a funny thing, fucknuts. Everyone wants it, but only a few have the balls to take it. Your dad tried and failed, just like his pops before him, but I have faith that you will be different."

I stood at the window, gazing down at the cityscape that had been my home for my entire life. A profound sense of uncertainty washed over me, leaving me to question if I had ever truly understood anything at all. Ever since Reaper first suggested that there was deception within our own organizations, a sense of unease took root, a feeling that he might actually be correct in his assessment.

Fucker had been right about everything from the beginning. Why would he lie now? The moment my world intersected with that of the Golden Skulls, I was forced to confront a harsh truth: my understanding of the world was fundamentally flawed and what I believed to be true paled in comparison to the actual circumstances of my life.

The fact was, Reaper seemed to be the only person who understood the gravity of what lay ahead of him, yet instead of washing his hands of me and the others, he waited and watched as we all made moves and countermoves in our thirst for dominance. That in itself spoke volumes to his patience and understanding of the situation. He didn't try to persuade us. He allowed us to discover the reality of our situations in our own time while offering assistance when he could. And what did I go and do?

I fucking laughed in his face and told him to get fucked.

What the hell did that say about me?

Hanging my head, I sighed, closing my eyes.

"I'm so fucking stupid."

"Admitting that tells me you're not."

"How am I going to help you protect Sypher if I can't trust my own brothers?"

"You already know who's loyal, Montana. You don't need me to tell you that."

Turning, I looked at him and smirked. "I think I prefer fucknuts."

Reaper grinned. "Well, fucknuts, what are you going to do now?"

"What would you do?"

Reaper threw his head back and laughed. "Oh, you really don't want to ask me that."

"Why not?"

“Because you already know what I would do.”

“Kill them all.”

“Now you’re thinking like a real biker president. Keep your family close and fuck everyone else, brother. In the end, all that really matters is the brother at your back. So pick wisely.”

Mercy walked into the room, his face pale as he looked at Reaper.

“What?”

“It’s bad, boss.”

“Just tell me.”

“As soon as the table issued the order, most of our clubs aligned with Happy. The only one loyal to us is the Alabama Chapter. They are heading to the Golden Skulls Tennessee Chapter for aid.”

“Grudge?” Reaper asked, taking a step toward my VP. I knew why too, because Grudge was a blood brother to Matrix, a brother in the Golden Skulls.

“Alive,” Mercy quickly stated. “But they took heavy casualties.”

“Reaper, will you grant my brothers sanctuary?”

“Consider it done,” the man stated, reaching for his phone.

Nodding, I looked at Mercy and asked, “Where is Happy now?”

When my VP stayed silent, then looked at Reaper, I took a step forward and sneered, “What else happened?”

Mercy gulped. “Our Southern California Chapter attacked Disturbed.”

Stumbling back, I shook my head as my back hit the wall hard.

“My daughter?” Reaper growled, rounding on my VP.

“Safe,” Mercy stated firmly. “Disturbed was ready for them and they killed the whole chapter, Montana. They’re gone.”

“FUCK!” I roared, turning fast to punch a hole in the new drywall.

“Listen, fucknuts,” Reaper barked. “It’s about as bad as it can get. You knew when the table issued the order, all hell would break loose. Well, it has. The clubs are pitting themselves against each other. The only way to fix this fucking mess is to prove that Sypher is still alive.”

“It’s going to be a bloodbath.”

“I know.” Reaper nodded. “I know your first instinct is to leave, but brother, you can’t. You need to trust that Luc and his club will protect Emma, because they can. Those fuckers are highly trained former special forces. Their first concern will be her safety. Trust them to do their jobs.”

Shaking my head, I seethed, “She’s your daughter. Do you trust them that much?”

“Yes. Don’t forget that Luc is also Sandman’s father and Ivy is Malice’s sister. Trust me. Disturbed knows the score.”

“She’s my granddaughter, Max.”

“I know, brother,” he firmly said. “But you are no good to her there. As long as the threat exists, she will always be in danger. What you need to do is let everything you are feeling right now take hold. Breathe it in, let it soak into your veins and let it take root in your soul, for it will be the only thing that gets you through what you need to do next.”

“Tell me you have a plan?” I growled, looking at the man.

“I do, but I need to know that you can do what comes next. If not, say the word and I will go it alone.”

Pushing off the wall, I squared my shoulders and hardened my stance as I vowed, “This ends now.”

“Then let’s go shed some blood.”

“There is something else,” Mercy reluctantly admitted. “I don’t know what to make of it, but you need to see this.

Turning his phone around so we could see it read.

Sypher: Warned Disturbed. You’re welcome.

“WHAT THE FUCK?!”

Valhalla

St. John’s Presbyterian Hospital, New York.

The current Electroencephalogram (EEG) results for Sypher were not promising. The necessity for a contrast MRI was evident, as the swelling had decreased, but the EEG presented concerning data. Despite my proficiency and reputation as one of the foremost neurosurgeons, I acknowledged my limitations. I was adept at my profession, but I was not omnipotent.

In my interactions with the relatives of my patients, I favored straightforwardness. Clear communication minimized misunderstandings and fostered realistic expectations. Sypher had sustained a significant brain injury and there was a limit to what medical intervention could achieve. The trajectory of his recovery and the quality of his future life were uncertain and hinged on time and his body's response to treatment.

Ordinary families typically grasped this reality, yet the Golden Skulls Motorcycle Club and Sypher's family harbored different expectations. They demanded a miraculous recovery, an outcome that defied medical probabilities. This pressure from his family added a layer of complexity to an already challenging situation.

Sypher's family was unlikely to be content with the current prognosis and if I failed to devise a solution, their discontent would be directed towards me. The burden of their expectations weighed heavily and the necessity for a miracle seemed more a demand than a hope.

I already blamed myself for Sypher's situation. What the young man did was admirable. He only wanted to save those he loved. Any person would, but to put himself in harm's way to end a war that was bigger than him was a battle he lost and now he was paying the price. We all were.

My mind wandered to the moments leading up to Sypher's injury. His bravery was undeniable, but the consequences of his actions were now etched in every scan and every test result. The weight of his sacrifice pressed heavily on my shoulders. The

Golden Skulls expected me to pull off a miracle, but the reality was stark and unyielding. As much as I wanted to rise to their expectations, I knew that sometimes, even the best efforts could not alter the course of fate.

“Dr. Robinette?”

Turning to the nurse beside me and closing Sypher’s chart, I instructed, “He needs a contrast MRI. Come find me when it’s set up. I want to be there when the results come in.”

“Yes, Doctor.”

I needed a moment to collect my thoughts. There was no way I would ever be able to stand before my son and tell him I couldn’t save Sypher. So many lives had already been destroyed by that evil woman Jane Craven and her lackeys, I refused to let her claim another victim.

I had to find a way to save this young man. The challenge was immense, but surrender was not an option. Sypher’s fate was now intertwined with my own and the shadow of Jane Craven loomed over us both. The pressure to succeed was intense, but it also fueled my determination.

From the moment I woke up at the Trick Pony, I knew my life would never be the same and it wasn’t. The day I escaped that horrible place, I started planning. Had I known back then that the baby I held in my arms was my son, I would have done things differently. I couldn’t change the past, but I could alter the future if I could find a way to save Sypher.

Now, as I stood in the sterile confines of the hospital, the weight of that resolve bore down on me. My thoughts drifted back to the chaotic scenes at the Trick Pony, my desperate flight for freedom and the relentless pursuit that followed. Each memory

was a testament to the strength and resilience that had brought me to this moment. Saving Sypher was more than a professional obligation. It was a personal crusade, a chance to redeem the past and secure a future for my son.

The stakes were higher than ever. Sypher's battle was my battle, and every decision I made would reverberate through the lives intertwined with his. As the nurse set up the contrast MRI, I steeled myself for the challenges ahead. The path to recovery was fraught with obstacles, but surrender was not an option. The shadow of Jane Craven and her malevolence had loomed long enough. It was time to confront it head-on, for Sypher, for my son, and for all those who had suffered under her tyranny.

I would find a way to save this young man. The road ahead was daunting, but with determination and unwavering resolve, I would navigate it. The future depended on it.

I didn't lie to Montana and the others when I told them of my past.

I lived a charmed life until I didn't. Even after I escaped the Trick Pony, I wanted so much to return to the life I once lived but I knew that was impossible.

Not with George Stone still alive.

So instead, I ran. I ran back to the Trick Pony to save my daughter. I may not remember giving birth to my son, but I was coherent enough to hear my daughter cry as someone said, it was a girl. Yet, when I returned for her, she wasn't there, and my real nightmare truly began.

For the next few years, I suffered at the hands of Jane. The woman was relentless, despicable and evil in her pursuits to punish me, to break me. She almost succeeded too if it weren't for him.

The one who saved me.

I never knew his name, only that one day he was there and all my pain had disappeared.

In the dim light of my prison, I learned to welcome the pain. It seeped into my bones until nothing else mattered. I embraced it, wrapped it around me like a cloak. Because even I knew pain meant I was still alive. Each throb, each pang was a testament to my existence, a reminder that my heart still beat, my lungs still drew breath. The shadows whispered tales of despair, but I clung to the raw sensation of pain as my anchor.

In the early days of my captivity, I had fought against it. I had railed against the agony, the bruises and the cuts. My screams had echoed off the cold, unforgiving walls, but there was no one to hear, no one to answer. Despair threatened to drown me, but slowly, insidiously, the pain became my ally. It was the only thing I could count on, the only constant in my dark and lonely world.

I would survive this, I knew. And when I did, my real test would begin. Because when I escaped this place, I would remember every moment, every slight, every cruelty. I would channel my pain into something powerful, something unstoppable. Revenge would be mine, not out of spite, but out of necessity. I didn't know when or how, but I was patient. The pain had taught me that. Hours turned into days, days into weeks, but I remained steadfast, holding onto the promise of retribution.

She wanted to break me. All she did was make me stronger, forging my spirit in the crucible of suffering. Her attempts to diminish me only served to build my resolve. Every time she came to taunt, to inflict more torment, I met her gaze with unwavering defiance. She would see, someday soon, how truly strong I was. The glint of hatred in her eyes, the sneer on her lips, only fueled my determination.

Jane was a vile woman. She cared for nothing. She was constructed of pure hate and

depravity. She was the monster under the bed, the darkness that lurked in the shadows. The undeniable pain that everyone feared. Yet, in her attempts to break me, she had only fortified my spirit. My resolve was a fortress, built brick by brick from the very torment she sought to use against me.

Her malevolent gaze, filled with disdain, no longer held the power to crush me. Instead, it became a mirror reflecting her own emptiness, her own desolation. I saw through her facade, past the cruelty and sadism, to the hollow void that lay within. She was a prisoner of her own darkness, trapped in a cycle of hatred and misery.

As I lay in the cold, damp cell, I envisioned the day of my liberation. It was a beacon of hope that pierced through the gloom, illuminating the path to my vengeance. I would rise from these ashes, stronger and more resolute than ever. And when that day came, she would realize that the true power of pain is not in its ability to destroy, but in its capacity to transform.

I heard shouts. Knew something was wrong when I heard the metal grind as someone opened the door to my cell. My heart pounded in my chest, a wild drumbeat of anticipation and fear. The dim light outside my cell flickered while shadows danced across the walls, hinting at chaos beyond the door.

My muscles tensed, ready to spring into action if the opportunity presented itself. For so long, I had dreamed of this moment, the chance to escape, to turn the tables on my captor. The door creaked open and a figure stood silhouetted against the corridor's dim illumination.

It wasn't Jane. Instead, a tall stranger stood before me, cloaked in uncertainty and urgency. "We have to go," he whispered, his voice a gravelly blend of anger and determination. "Now."

Hesitation gripped me for a brief second. Could this be a trick, another cruel game

orchestrated by Jane? But the turmoil outside, the clanging of metal and the distant cries, suggested otherwise. The stranger stepped closer, revealing a face etched with concern and resolve.

“Who are you?” I demanded, my voice hoarse from disuse.

“No time to explain,” he responded, giving me no choice as he effortlessly picked me up. “Trust me, if you want to live, we have to move.”

I took a deep breath and nodded, steeling myself for what lay ahead. With one last glance at the cell that had been both my prison and my forge, I clutched the stranger’s neck as he ushered me out of the cell. The corridor was a labyrinth of shadows, each turn fraught with potential danger. My senses were heightened, every sound and movement amplified as he navigated the narrow passageways. The stranger led with confidence, his familiarity with the layout evident.

I didn’t know the man who carried me, but as he strode down the darkened hall, I felt his power radiate around him. He was not someone to challenge. For some reason, he was determined to get me out of this place and I was going to let him. The urgency in his actions and the intensity in his eyes spoke volumes. My survival hinged on his resolve, and I had no choice but to trust him.

When we emerged from the cell, I saw several men, all just as determined as my rescuer to save as many as they could. Each moved with a purposeful stride, their faces set in grim resolve. The surrounding chaos was a symphony of urgency, with every note striking a chord in my heart. The walls seemed to pulse with the collective effort of liberation and for the first time in a long while, I felt the stirrings of hope.

I wish I could say that hope lasted, but it didn’t because the second we were far enough away from the Trick Pony, the stranger handed me a couple hundred bucks, wished me luck and walked away, leaving me to decide what to do next. That was the

last time I ever saw him.

“Val!” Montana shouted loudly, ripping me from my past. Turning to see the man storming toward me, along with Reaper and Mercy, I steeled myself for whatever asinine fit the son of a bitch was in.

Sighing, I rubbed my neck and groaned. “What happened now?”

“Why didn’t you tell us that Sypher was awake?”

Blinking, I looked at the gruff asshole and sneered, “He’s not. He’s still in a coma.”

“Bullshit,” Mercy stated. “Then how in the hell did he just send me a text?”

Showing me his phone, I looked at it and frowned. “That’s impossible.”

Pushing past them, I hurriedly walked down the long hall toward Sypher’s room. Upon entering, I found it completely empty, and the nurse from earlier walked over and explained, “The MRI techs need another hour.”

Absently, I muttered, “Did you move him?”

“No, ma’am. You told me to schedule the MRI first.”

Rounding on the woman, I yelled, “Then where is he?”

Montana, Reaper, and Mercy both rushed into the room and started shouting.

This was not fucking good.

Sypher was gone.

Reaper

I was going to kill someone fast if they didn't start talking.

I always knew when the shit hit the fan that I would have to be the one to clean up the mess. For years, I watched those in power struggle to maintain their hold on what was technically never theirs to begin with. My father included.

Greed was a nasty thing, but the illusion of power was blinding. Montana learned that lesson the hard way. I tried to warn him several times, but the fucker wasn't ready to hear the truth.

After searching the entire private floor and finding nothing, we knew that someone betrayed us. Someone on this fucking floor was working against us and when I figured out which motherfucker it was, I was going to kill them with my bare hands.

As I looked around the room, I glared. "Let me be very fucking clear. Either someone admits they fucked up right fucking now or I will reign down hell on everyone in this fucking room. Someone has to know something. Now I know it wasn't fucknuts 'cause the bastard's been glued to my ass since shit went down, but all of you better start explaining."

"You can't think I did something," Trout spoke up first, looking at the men around him then at me. "Danny's my brother. I would never do anything to hurt him. I want him fixed. Not dead!"

"What about you, Ace?" Montana sneered threateningly as he stood beside me, arms crossed over his chest. "You've been pretty fucking vocal about his care since the surgery."

"Fuck you, Montana!" Ace roared, jumping to his feet. "It wasn't me."

“Fucknuts has a point, Ace,” I seethed, backing him up. “You fucking hate the club life and tried your damndest to keep Sypher away from his family. You’ve got the means and power to pull something like this off.”

Ace snarled as Matthew Law threw out his arm to stop Ace. “It wasn’t Harbor Security. Danny owns the company now. Anything happens to him, we’re dead too. Why not ask one of your brothers, like Fury? Ask him where he was?”

Fury’s head snapped up. “What?”

“Where were you, Fury?” Montana snarled.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” the man shouted. “It wasn’t me!”

“Not gonna ask you again.”

“I went to check on Carly, okay!” Fury fumed. “My wife is still in a coma in this fucking hospital. I went to sit with her and talk to her doctors. If you don’t believe me, then check the fucking cameras!”

“Oh, we will,” I growled, glaring at Chipper. “What about you?”

Chipper shook his head and stated, “I was down in the cafeteria.”

“Where’s Malice?” Valhalla spoke up, as my head snapped quickly about the room. Montana stiffened, as he too turned around, looking for the Soulless Sinner enforcer.

“Find the dead son of a bitch!”

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Reaper

Soulless Sinners' clubhouse, New York City.

Danny was nowhere to be found. It was as if he vanished into thin air. No matter what door we knocked on, what stone we kicked over, the kid was just gone, and as much as I hated to admit it, he was not in New York City, which only meant he could be fucking anywhere.

Whoever took him had the power and means to make the most dangerous person on the planet disappear.

The problem I couldn't figure out was who had that kind of clout?

We scoured all of Danny's familiar haunts and the places he frequented, his favorite coffee shop that bore no trace of him, the school he once attended, only to come up empty-handed. Each passing hour felt like an eternity as we retraced his steps, hoping for any sign, any clue that would reveal who could have possibly taken him.

Montana and I called in every favor we could think of. No one knew anything. The city that had never slept had turned into a labyrinth of dead ends and fruitless searches.

In the hours that followed, the city lights blurred with exhaustion as we continued our relentless search. Montana, with his sharp instincts and unwavering resolve, became my anchor in the storm of uncertainty as he refused to give up. It was strange because generally I was the one who never gave up. Retreat wasn't in my vocabulary, yet all I

could think about was Danny's well-being. I didn't know if he was alive or dead and that scared the crap out of me. The kid wasn't just a club brother to me. He was more than that; I knew that now.

I loved Danny as if he were my blood son.

To make things more confusing, Mercy was getting constant updates from the Biker Federation who, according to them, were receiving texts from Danny.

Only that made no sense.

I knew it, Montana knew it, and so did everyone else who knew the truth. Someone out there was pretending to be Danny and I wanted to fucking know why.

"You sure you want me to do this?" Matrix asked one more time as everyone looked at the screen on the wall.

I clenched my fist tightly. "Just find the fucker so I can kill the motherfucker with my bare hands."

Matrix gulped as Player stiffened next to him.

"What should we ask? We don't want to spook this fucker," Mercy asked.

"Does it fucking matter?" Montana sneered. "The fucker is dead either way. Whoever it is fucking knows where the kid is and has been playing with us. Just do your thing, Matrix."

Sitting back in my chair, I watched the screen as we all could see what Matrix was typing.

Matrix: Hey, kid. Got a minute? Need help with something.

“Why are you asking that?” Chipper piped up. “Why not just ask who he is? We already know he’s not Danny?”

“Because we don’t want to spook the fucker,” Player said, typing away on his computer.

Sypher: Sure. What do you need?

“Fuckers took the bait.” Rage smiled, sitting up straighter in his chair.

Matrix: Running a diagnostic on the club’s security system and something isn’t right.

Sypher: Give me a sec.

“The second this fucker enters the system, the trace will start. I just need thirty seconds to locate him, Reaper,” Player stated.

“He’s in!” Matrix shouted. “Run the trace!”

Not even a second or two later, the screen went black and up popped a face shrouded in darkness.

“Nice try, everyone, but you will never find me.”

Sitting up, I barked, “Who the fuck are you?”

“A friend.”

“Bullshit,” Montana snarled.

“Contrary to your belief, Montana, I am not the enemy.”

“Do you have Danny?” Chipper spoke up.

“No, but I am searching for him. I saw what happened at the hospital.”

“Who are you?” Mercy asked.

“Wrong question.”

“Do you know who took him?” I asked.

“Not yet, but I will soon enough.”

“Are you helping him?” Fury piped up.

“Yes. Sypher tasked me with navigating everyone, including all of you.”

“What can you tell us?” Mercy asked.

“That there is a new player on the scene. Someone that even Sypher didn’t know about. Whoever this person is has a death wish because they are pretending to be the table.”

My head snapped to Montana, who slowly sat up and snarled, “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“The kill order was a distraction to get Sypher on the private floor of the hospital.”

“And we played right into his hands,” I seethed.

“So there is no kill order for my brother?” Chipper asked.

“No. As far as the table is concerned, Sypher is alive and well.”

“Because of what you are doing?” I snarked.

“Yes.”

“This works in our favor, Reaper,” Montana reasoned, looking at me. “Think about it. With that fucker pretending to be the kid, it gives us more time to find who took the kid and finish this shit before it gets out of hand.”

“It’s already out of hand!” I roared, getting to my feet. “None of us know where he is. You heard Valhalla. Danny is in danger of infections, permanent brain damage, even death. I don’t fucking care what anyone says. All I care about is finding him fast, and if I have to burn this fucking city down to the ground to do it, then so be it!”

“What can you tell us about the kid’s disappearance from the hospital?” Mercy cautiously asked.

“The cameras picked up a shadowy presence that lingered in the background. The feed was grainy as hell and the description is vague, but you are looking for a man, roughly six and a half feet tall. Athletic, muscular build. He was wearing a black suit, but here is the weird part. The camera couldn’t pick up his face, but I could clearly see the watch he was wearing, a Patek Philippe Nautilus Moon Phase rose gold watch valued at over two hundred grand.”

“Well, that just omitted the Biker Federation.” Mercy chuckled.

“What do you mean?” Chipper asked.

Montana grinned, sitting up in his chair. “No biker would spend over two-hundred grand on a fucking watch. Hell, I don’t even own one.”

“You can omit the IRA and Irish Mob too,” Fury added. “They would rather spend their money on family and whiskey.”

“So that only leaves everyone else, then.” Mercy sighed.

“It’s not the Bratva,” the voice said. “I checked. Fedorov’s organization is clear.”

“So it’s someone in the Mafia.” Montana sighed, then added, “Reaper, you are close to Giovanni. Can you call him and see if he’s heard anything?”

“It’s not the Mafia,” I muttered, shaking my head.

“How do you know?” Montana asked.

Turning to face him, I admitted, “Because Cesar pledged his allegiance to me.”

Getting to his feet, Montana seethed, “What the fuck are you talking about? The Italian Council doesn’t pledge allegiance. Cesar is a sitting, voting member of the table.”

“Yeah well,” I scoffed. “That was before we became BFFs. How was I to know you were a half decent fucker?”

“Everyone, get the fuck out!” Montana roared as the room cleared quickly. Taking his seat, he rubbed his hands down his face and took a deep breath. “What the fuck did you do?”

“Gonna have to be more specific than that, fucknuts. I’ve done a lot of things in my

time on this earth.”

“Max, don’t fucking play me. I’m trying real fucking hard not to lose my shit. Just fucking tell me what I need to know.”

Sighing, I said, “When the table was considering removing you from your seat, Cesar came to see me. He gave me some information that Giovanni had been sitting on. Information that concerned Crispin Sinclair.”

Montana narrowed his eyes. “Let me guess. That fucker didn’t escape the Trick Pony, did he?”

Shaking my head, I smirked. “Nope. The bitch let him go.”

“Why?”

“Because she needed him to locate someone.”

Montana groaned, rubbing his temples. “Hold up. I’m confused. I thought he was looking for Thena?”

“He was, because Thena stole the only evidence he had to find the kid.”

“What kid?”

Shrugging, I added, “Some kid born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1992.”

“Did the file say who the kid was?”

I slowly nodded.

“Are you going to tell me, or do I have to continue playing twenty fucking questions with you?”

“Not sure.” I grinned. “Depends on your mood.”

Montana narrowed his eyes. “Why?”

“Because I don’t want you killing the messenger.”

“Just fucking tell me.”

“Remember when I offered my help when you were having issues with your pretty bartender?”

Fucknuts stiffened, then growled.

“You should have taken me up on my offer.”

Zach

Silver Shadows’ clubhouse, Diamond Creek, Nebraska.

My God, King was right. Bikers were nothing more than overgrown children with too much fucking time on their hands. I now had a newfound respect for what my Prez dealt with on a daily basis. While I knew my club was nothing like the Soulless Sinners, or the Golden Skulls for that matter, we did have a few boneheads. Jackass quickly came to mind as I remembered the shit he put the club through to lockdown Sam and I wasn’t even going to mention the shit Blade pulled with Beck. He was fucking lucky King didn’t kick his ass.

Yet, it still boggled my mind how Sypher stayed freaking sane. He dealt with several

clubs on the daily, while also working with other underworld organizations. The man was a freaking saint. He deserved an award or something.

I had only been in his shoes for a week and I was about to let the whole fucking world destroy itself.

This shit was nuts!

But these two fucking morons took the cake.

When they weren't screaming at each other, they actually worked well together, but that was short-lived because both men refused to clear the air. The fact was, they had more in common than either realized and if they ever stopped comparing their dick sizes, they might actually end up surviving this fucking mess.

I got that Montana sat at the table and Reaper did whatever the hell he wanted, but something had to give soon. At the rate they were going, they would surely end up killing each other.

The number of secrets between them was enough to drive anyone insane, and while those secrets were coming to light, neither one stopped to consider the ramifications.

They were connected by blood.

A blood link between two sitting presidents was something most clubs avoided at all costs. There was a reason biker clubs rarely aligned themselves with another, because no club truly trusted the other. So mixing blood was never done. Yet, these two idiots were too busy sniping at each other to see the bigger picture. Thanks to their fucking fathers, both clubs had a bullseye on their backs and at the center was a young, innocent girl, and if they weren't careful, she would become the next victim to their folly.

“You should have told me!”

“Why are you yelling at me?”

“I had a right to know!”

“You said you didn’t want my help.”

“Since when do you listen to anything I say?”

“I listen.” Reaper chuckled. “When you have something important to say.”

“I fucking hate you.”

“Feeling’s mutual.”

“Asshole.”

“Fucknuts.”

Rolling my eyes, I leaned back in my chair and groaned as I wiped my hands down my face. There was a fucking reason I stayed hidden in my office because I didn’t want to have to deal with other people’s shit. Bad enough I had crap to do for my club, but babysitting two of the crankiest, most stubborn presidents in the biker world was plain annoying.

Whatever Sypher was charging, it wasn’t nearly enough.

“ENOUGH!” I roared, then watched as both men stopped and turned toward the screen. “If you two are fucking done, it’s my turn to speak.”

Montana narrowed his eyes.

Reaper grinned.

Neither made me feel confident in what I was about to say.

“Will you listen to that asshole? Fucker thinks he’s in charge.”

“Yeah, he does.” Reaper glared at me through the screen, sending a wave of fear that soaked into my bones. Jesus Christ, that man could make anyone piss their pants with one look. “And when I find him, I’m gonna show him who’s really in charge.”

And just like that, they were on the same page again.

Groaning, I sat up and said, “Look, you don’t have time to play around. You two need to stop bitching and start working together because rumors have already started to spread about your blood link.”

“Who fucking cares?” Montana scoffed, leaning back in his chair. “It’s our business and no one else’s.”

“I don’t think you quite grasp the situation, Montana.” I sighed, adding, “You sit at the table. You are the head of the largest motorcycle club in the world. Reaper, you are the President of the Golden Skulls. You have... for lack of a better phrase, a bloody reputation for getting shit done. Alone, you are imposing, but together you two are a monumental threat.”

Montana grinned. “We are badasses, aren’t we?”

“Sure are, fucknuts.” Reaper smiled as both men fist-bumped each other.

“And when the entire biker world learns about your blood link, you will also be the most hated men on the planet.”

Frowning, Montana looked at Reaper and asked, “Do you know what the fuck he’s talking about?”

“Think our shadowy friend has spent too much time in the dark.”

“My God, how can you both be so fucking stupid?” I snarked. “Sypher fucking figured it out months ago and set up safeguards, but you two can’t see past the end of your goddamn noses. This shit with Sypher isn’t just about finishing what you two numbnuts couldn’t, it’s also about protecting the innocent.”

“Make sense before I lose my shit,” Reaper groaned, looking at Montana who shrugged but said nothing.

“EMMA!” I yelled. “He’s protecting Emma! Why do you think there was an attack on Disturbed? It wasn’t to gain territory. They were trying to kill Emma!”

Pippen

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Sitting on the couch watching while Danika played with Kansas, I couldn’t stop thinking about Danny. My daughter’s giggles filled the air, a symphony of innocence and contentment. Yet, amidst the scene of familial bliss, my heart weighed heavily with worry.

Danny was an integral part of my life from the moment I met him. He was not just my friend. He was my lover, my better half, the love of my life and his absence felt like an inexplicable void. It had been days since I last heard from him and the silence

had become deafening.

I tried calling him multiple times, sent numerous texts, but received no response. Initially, I thought he might be busy or caught up in something important, but as time passed, my concern grew into an overwhelming sense of dread. Danny was not the type to ignore messages, especially when he knew how much I worried.

Everyone around me kept assuring me he was fine. “He’s probably just busy,” they said. “Don’t worry, he’ll reach out when he has time.” Their words were meant to be comforting, but they only served to heighten my anxiety.

It was as if they knew something I didn’t and they were purposely keeping it from me.

My mind raced with possibilities. Was he in some kind of accident? Was he in some kind of trouble? Or was he simply overwhelmed and needed space? It was the not knowing that was the hardest part. I wanted to believe that he was okay, that he would walk through the door any minute now, with that familiar smile and a story to tell. But the nagging feeling in my gut told me otherwise.

I tried to distract myself by focusing on my daughter. She was oblivious to my inner turmoil, her world filled with simple pleasures and carefree moments. I envied her in a way. Her life was untouched by the complexities and uncertainties that plague adulthood.

As I watched Kansas tickle Danika, I was reminded of Danny’s playful spirit. He had always been the one to lighten the mood, to bring a sense of adventure and fun into my life. His laughter was contagious, and his absence was a stark reminder of how much he meant to me.

I decided to take a walk, hoping the fresh air would clear my mind.

I bundled up Danika and we stepped outside into the crisp winter air. The leaves crunched beneath my feet as the chilly breeze carried the scent of snow in the air.

It was a beautiful day, but my thoughts remained clouded with worry.

We walked to the park, a place that Danny and I found shortly after we moved here. The memories of our brief times here together flooded my mind. I remembered his infectious laughter as he tried to teach Danika to swing, his patience when she struggled, and his cheers when she finally succeeded. The park was filled with the echoes of our recent past, a testament to the bond we shared.

I sat on a bench and watched my daughter play on the swings as Kansas hovered nearby. I pulled out my phone and checked for any messages or missed calls from Danny. Nothing. The emptiness of the screen mirrored the emptiness I felt inside.

I sent him another text, a simple “Are you okay?” hoping this time, he would respond.

The minutes passed slowly, and we eventually made our way back home, where I went through the motions of our evening routine. Dinner, bath time, bedtime stories. Danika’s mood shifted, seeing my moments of solace as my mind constantly wandered back to Danny.

Night fell and I tucked my daughter into bed. She looked up at me with her innocent eyes then pointed to a picture of her and Danny. She wanted her papa. So did I. I smiled and told her he was busy with work and would be home soon.

It was the only answer I could give her, even though I wasn’t sure it was the truth.

I returned to the living room, where Kansas sat on the couch, his eyes focused on his phone as he read something. The apartment was quiet. The only sound was the

ticking of the clock, a reminder of the passing of time.

My thoughts returned to the conversations I had with Kansas and Storm. The way they had brushed off my concerns, their reassurances that Danny was fine. But I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. It was as if their words were hiding a deeper truth, one they didn't want to share.

I thought back to the last time I saw Danny. He seemed tense, almost reserved. I tried to talk to him about plans I made for the weekend, but he never engaged. His mind was elsewhere, but now, his silence spoke volumes.

Reaching for my phone, I called Reaper, hoping to get some information. When I heard the automated voice telling me the number I dialed had been disconnected and was no longer in service, I knew something was definitely wrong, especially when Storm rushed into the apartment and said, "Kansas, we need to talk."

F.I.R.E.

Miami, Florida.

The room was cloaked in an eerie silence, the only sound being the whispered muffles of their cries behind the duct tape I secured around their mouths. Sitting on the bed, I watched them intently as they desperately tried to plead and beg for their lives. Their faces morphed into a mask of fear as soon as their reality sunk deep, letting them know that these were their final moments.

I hated them. I hated what they were, what they believed in, what they participated in. Their greed overshadowed everything in their lives. Their want for more led them down a path of destruction and now it was time to pay the piper. My anger had been simmering for far too long, fueled by their insatiable desire for power and control. They had trampled over anyone who stood in their way, blinded by their own

ambitions and deaf to the cries of those they hurt.

Their actions were unforgivable and the consequences inevitable. It was with a sense of grim satisfaction that I watched them squirm, knowing that justice was about to be served. They had thought themselves invincible, untouchable, but in this room, their illusions were shattered. The reality of their fate was inescapable.

As I sat there, a silent observer to their pleas, I felt a strange calm wash over me. It was a calm born of inevitability, the knowledge that their reckoning was finally at hand. Their cries grew fainter, their struggles weaker and I knew that the moment of truth was drawing near.

The game they had played was a dangerous one and, in the end, they had lost. It was a game of deceit, betrayal, and misplaced trust. They had scorned those who cared, ignored the warnings and walked the perilous path, believing they would emerge unscathed.

The price for their sins was steep. They had danced with shadows, whispered with darkness and now, the darkness had come to claim its due. I felt no pity, just a cold resolve. They had made their choices and now they would pay the ultimate price.

Time seemed to stretch infinitely while I sat there, a silent observer to their fate. The moonlight cast ghostly patterns through the window, illuminating the room with a pale, ethereal glow. It was a picture of tranquility, yet the air crackled with anticipation of what was to come.

As the minutes ticked by, my thoughts wandered to the events that had led to this moment. The lies they had told, the lives they had shattered, and the countless children they sold. Every action had a consequence and theirs had culminated in this nocturnal reckoning.

A deep breath filled my lungs as I steeled myself for what lay ahead. The calm before the storm was about to break and there would be no turning back. Their peace was an illusion, a fragile veneer that would soon crumble. The game was over, and the final move was mine to make.

I stepped forward, the shadows moving with me like silent companions. The weight of inevitability hung heavy in the air. They had played a good game, but ultimately, they had lost.

Now, it was time for them to pay for their sins.

In this room, under the watchful eye of the moon, justice would be served. The shadows had come to collect and their debt would be paid in full.

Walking over to the dresser, I picked up my machete, testing the weight of it in my hands as I turned to look at them.

Their eyes widened in fear as I approached, knowing this was it. Their time was up. Death had come to claim them. The room seemed to shrink, the walls pressed in with the weight of their impending doom. Whispers of their past victims echoed in the corners, a haunting reminder of the choices that had led them to this moment in time.

Tonight, their victims would rejoice in celebration, knowing that their nightmares would be no more. The echoes of their suffering would be silenced, replaced by the harmony of justice. A new dawn was breaking and with it, a promise of peace for those who had been wronged, because tonight the Devil was taking his due.

Contract completed. Benson Graves and Iris Hughes are dead.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Pippen

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

“And how does that make you feel?”

Pacing the office, I rubbed the back of my neck in frustration. I didn’t know what she wanted me to say, let alone how I felt. I was fucking pissed. Angry that he hadn’t responded to any of my texts. That for the last few weeks, he’d fucking ignored me and our daughter. That whatever was happening back in New York was more important than his fucking family.

“I can see you warring with your words, Dante. Bottling them up won’t help. Just say whatever comes to your mind.”

“I’m pissed, okay!”

“And why are you pissed?”

“Because he won’t fucking pick up the phone!”

“Has Danny ever gone silent on you like this before?”

“No,” I groaned, rounding on the woman. “That’s why I’m hesitant to say anything. If anything, I’m the silent one. Danny loves to talk. He’s got no problem voicing or showing how he feels. Me, I keep everything bottled up, so this silence is confusing for me.”

“Let’s take a step back for a second. Why don’t you tell me how Danika’s been handling Danny’s absence?”

Plopping my ass on the sofa, I looked at my daughter, who was sitting on the floor flipping through a sensory book and I smiled. “She seems to be okay. I mean, I think she’s accepted that I’m not going anywhere. Maybe that’s because I take her everywhere with me. She’s never out of my sight. But she still points to Danny’s picture when I put her to bed at night. I think she feels I’m lying to her.”

Dr. Jefferson laughed. “I don’t think so. If anything, she’s asking for your reassurance that nothing’s changed. Kids feel the turmoil and tension around them. Like right now, you are agitated, and Dani can sense that. It’s why she’s sitting quietly with a sensory book while you and I talk. Kids are smarter than adults give them credit for. They hear and see everything. Trust me, Dante. Danika knows you are telling her the truth. Like you, she misses him and her pointing at Danny’s picture is her way of telling you she misses him too.”

Leaning forward, I grabbed my head and groaned. “God, I’m messing this all up.”

“No, you’re not. What you are feeling is perfectly valid. There is no wrong emotion here, Dante. Right now, both of you are learning to navigate life without a significant piece of your family. It’s understandable that you feel frustrated, angry even. We never discussed how you met Danny. Why don’t you tell me?”

Grinning, I leaned back on the sofa. “I just knew. From the first moment I saw him. It was like getting hit by lightning, Doc. I know it sounds stupid, but it’s the truth. My world shifted, turned upside down and flew sideways until all that mattered was Danny.”

“Was it the same for him?”

Now, I laughed.

Shaking my head, I sobered and said, “No. If anything, Danny didn’t know what to make of me at first. You see, he grew up in the mountains of Tennessee, with three brothers and lots of male cousins. No girls in the Franks family. Only boys and he was the youngest. When I first met Danny, he was like every other young male in college, and he had no problems moving through the female population on campus.”

“So, what changed?”

Shrugging, I looked at Danika. “I don’t know. When we first met, we just hit it off and became instant friends. I never hid who I was from Danny. Even when he messed around with every skanky bitch on campus and I voiced my displeasure, he just accepted me for who I was.”

“How did it make you feel to see him with the opposite sex?”

“Jealous. Enraged. Vindictive. I hated it and he knew it, but I never stopped him. You gotta understand something, Doc. Danny is smart. Like wicked smart, and everyone in school knew it. Everyone wanted to be his friend. Teachers envied what Danny could do and some even tried to manipulate him into furthering their own careers, but I wouldn’t let them.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Looking at the woman, I simply said, “I stopped them. Danny lived in his binary world, oblivious to everything and everyone around him. Unless they were composed of some undiscovered binary code, Danny really didn’t care. That’s where I came in. I became the buffer between Danny and the real world. While everyone wanted a piece of him, I kept him safe. But no matter what I did, I couldn’t get Danny to read the damn code in front of him.”

“That you were in love with him.”

I nodded. “I knew Danny was comfortable around me. He never shied away from my touches, looks, anything. He just accepted me. Hell, Doc, do you know how many times I sat on the toilet and watched him shower? Nothing fazed him and that’s when I realized he didn’t know his own nature. After that, I kind of relaxed around him, let my guard down and just accepted that in time, Danny would figure it out.”

“But you didn’t wait, did you?”

Smirking, I looked at the Doc and whispered, “Nope. I seduced him. It was easy too. I started with simple things, like a hug or a gentle touch. If he were anyone else, he would have punched me in the face, but not Danny. He absorbed any attention I gave him. Soaked it up, almost as if he were starved for it. One night in particular, he was up late studying for a test. I knew he hadn’t eaten, so I brought him food. The second I showed up, I could see the frustration in his eyes. Closing his laptop, I took his hands and made him stand in front of me. The second he did, he hugged me. It was the first time he touched me first. That night, I held him for the first time all night as we forgot about the outside world and watched movies. He fell asleep in my arms and actually slept.”

“How did that make you feel?”

“Like the fucking king of the world. Danny was my world. Everything to me. I never wanted anyone more until Danika. Sometimes, I still can’t believe he’s with me.”

Frowning, Dr. Jefferson asked, “Why would you think that?”

Before I could respond, Danika walked over and climbed into my lap and yawned.

As I held my girl close, Dr. Jefferson smiled. “I think that’s enough for today. Same

time tomorrow?”

I nodded.

F.I.R.E.

New York City, New York.

There was a chill in the air as I wrapped my coat tighter around me and walked out the front door of the large mansion. A slow smile formed when I looked up at the night sky. I thought it was poignant, as tonight was the night for celebration. All around the world, families would gather and enjoy each other's company in peace.

For tonight, a plague upon humanity would be no more.

Making my way down the driveway, I looked like any harmless young man out for a bit of fresh air. With my headphones on my head, I listened to the sounds of Beethoven as the sonata reached its pinnacle.

The streetlights cast long shadows across the snow-covered pavement, an interplay of light and dark that echoed the music in my ears. The crisp fresh snow crunched underfoot, each step a reminder of the fleeting nature of the season. I paused for a moment, breathing in the cool air that seemed to carry a hint of rejuvenation and the promise of spring to come.

As I continued my journey, I couldn't help but marvel at the serene beauty of the night. The large houses around me, normally bustling with activity, stood silent and dignified, their facades bathed in the gentle glow of the moon. Every window seemed to hold a story, every door a secret waiting to be discovered.

Beethoven's melodies transported me to another world—a world where emotions

were laid bare, where every note spoke of triumph and despair, of hope and longing. The intensity of the music mirrored the emotions I felt within, a symphony of thoughts and dreams intertwined with the nightly solitude.

Passing by the houses, I noticed the silhouettes of trees swaying gently in the breeze, their branches whispering ancient tales to the stars above. The rhythmic rise and fall of the sonata's crescendo seemed to guide my steps, each beat aligning with the pulse of the neighborhood.

Lost in the music and the moment, I found myself standing on the corner, mesmerized by the tranquility that seemed to envelop me while I waited for the final ending.

As the music built, so did the anticipation when the ground shook. Turning, I smiled when the beautiful house exploded into the night, raining down its fiery remains. The sudden eruption of flames and debris was starkly juxtaposed with the gentle melodies in my ears. I stood frozen, my heart pounding in sync with the chaotic scene unfolding before me.

For a moment, time seemed to stand still. The blazing inferno illuminated the night sky, casting an eerie glow that danced with the shadows of the trees. The once serene neighborhood was now a scene of chaos and destruction. Shouts and sirens pierced the air, shattering the tranquility that had enveloped me just moments before.

The sonata's final notes faded into the night, leaving behind a profound silence that was both comforting and contemplative. In that perfect moment, I realized how rare it was to find such peace in the midst of everyday chaos. The world, with all its noise and commotion, seemed to pause for just a moment, allowing me to connect with the essence of life itself. As I turned and continued on, I carried with me a sense of renewal—a reminder that beauty could be found in destructive moments, if only I took the time to look. I knew that this night would remain etched in my memory—a

beautiful symphony of light, shadow, and the absence of fear as I just killed the last remaining members of the Romano Family.

Reaching for my phone, I texted.

Contract completed. The last of the Romano Family is dead.

Ace

Soulless Sinners' clubhouse, New York City.

"If you don't get some sleep, you won't be any use to anyone," Matthew said, sitting in a chair next to me. "Got that you want to find the kid. We all do, but, brother, you haven't slept for shit in days. You're running on fumes."

"I'll sleep when I find him," I muttered as I glanced to my left to find Charlie snoring away, his head thrown back and mouth open. Any other time and I wouldn't think twice about fucking with him, but not now. I couldn't lose concentration and so I remained focused as I typed away on my computer, searching for any leads that might lead us to who took Danny and where he was at.

I couldn't give up. I would never give up.

I remembered when Danny was born. Like everyone else in the clubhouse at the time, we all anxiously awaited the news of a baby girl. Mom was sure this time she was gonna have that little girl she always dreamed about. Poor Mom was overrun with young rambunctious boys and club brothers. She just wanted one little girl to call her own and God help me, though I refused to admit it, I wanted a little sister too. But that never happened because when Dad walked out holding another blue bundle, I groaned. My disappointment must have been palpable, but Dad's pride was unwavering as he presented my new brother like a precious gift to everyone around.

"Not another one," I huffed.

“Your mom named him Danny,” Dad said proudly as he knelt down, showing me my littlest brother.

“He looks like a drowned rat.” I frowned, not impressed.

“He’s gonna need you, Ace. With all these boys around, Danny’s gonna need someone to protect him.”

“He’s got Bailey and Charlie.”

“No, son,” my dad said, placing Danny in my arms. I didn’t want to hold him. I wanted a sister. I already had two brothers. “Bailey and Charlie barely survive as it is. Danny needs you.”

I just stood there, staring at my newest brother and didn’t know what to really make of him. He looked fragile, all bundled up in his blue blanket. He couldn’t even hold his head up. He was too small, but when he opened his eyes and looked at me, I knew I would always protect Danny.

As Danny grew, the bond between us only strengthened. I knew from the start that Danny was different from the others. He was quiet and preferred books, unlike Bailey or Charlie, who were always getting into trouble. So, I took on the role of my brother’s guardian with fervor, always ensuring Danny was safe and happy. Dad and I taught Danny to ride a bike, helped him with his homework and I cheered the loudest at every damn science fair. Danny, in return, idolized me and tried to emulate everything I did. Our relationship became a cornerstone in both our lives, characterized by unwavering support and love, and then I did the unthinkable and left to join the military, breaking my brother’s heart.

I didn’t have a choice and instead of talking to Danny about it, I just disappeared, leaving my parents to explain my absence. I always hated how shit went down

between me and Dad that day and now it was too late to fix it. To make matters worse, my relationship with Danny was never the same after. I didn't know how to explain to Danny that I couldn't be what Dad wanted me to be. That I needed something more than what the club could offer me.

Years passed and the distance between Danny and me only seemed to grow. I would send letters and occasionally call home, but it was never enough to bridge the gap that my departure had created. I managed to get emergency leave when Dad died, but when I showed for the funeral, Danny wouldn't even acknowledge me. Then when Mom died, well, that was the last straw. I was out of the country and unable to make it back. That was something I knew Danny would never forgive. Now, Danny was no longer the little boy who looked up to me with admiration. He had become a young man with his own dreams and struggles.

I tried to rekindle our strained relationship as it weighed heavily on my heart, but Danny had built walls around himself, walls that I had unknowingly contributed to. I tried to reconnect, but the easy camaraderie we once shared was elusive. Danny was polite but distant, his responses curt and guarded. The pain of our fractured relationship was a constant ache, a reminder of the things left unsaid and the wounds left unhealed. Knowing he didn't need me anymore, I left again, hoping that one day I would get the chance to make things right.

It seemed no matter what I did, I kept messing up everything. Even with the shit currently going on, I blamed myself because it was me who offered to help him. There wasn't anything I wouldn't do for Danny or my other two brothers, for that matter. But I couldn't do shit until I found him.

Valhalla

Soulless Sinners' clubhouse, New York City.

Walking out of Bane's office, I passed Montana's office to find the asshole sitting alone, looking at his phone. Leaning against the door, I stared at the man who was once a good friend of mine and felt nothing. Not even a twinge of compassion for the man. Logically, I knew he wasn't to blame for what happened to me, but I couldn't get past the fact that it was his father who destroyed my life.

"You just gonna stand there and stew, or are we going to settle this shit?"

"Not really sure what you want me to say to you."

"You can start with why you didn't reach out after I took the chair?"

"You already know why I didn't."

Looking up at me, Montana placed his phone down and frowned. "No, I don't, Merc. We were all close growing up. You, me, Auggie, and Bella did everything together. We kept nothing from each other. Then one day everything changed. You disappeared, August refused to talk to me, and then Bella up and moved."

"What happened to Bella?"

"What do you think happened?" My former childhood friend scoffed. "My dad happened. It seems every bad thing that's happened in my life has been because of him and two of my closest friends knew and couldn't be bothered to give me a fucking heads-up."

Shaking my head, I walked over and took a seat. "In my defense, I was dealing with my own shit. You know, being orphaned after my parents died, being kidnapped, then learning I was knocked up, so forgive me if I didn't have time to pass you a quick note of warning."

Montana growled. “You fucking know what I meant.”

Nodding, I leaned back in the chair and sighed. “Yeah, I do, and for that, I am sorry. Your dad screwed us all over, Montana, and we can’t change that. All we can do is pick up the pieces and move forward.”

“Can we?”

Shrugging, I muttered, “I don’t know. So much has changed.”

“He never forgot about you, Mere. I think in some way he’s been searching for you since you disappeared.”

“It doesn’t matter.” I sighed, looking down at my hands. “I’m not that little girl anymore.”

“He’s a doctor too.”

“I know.”

“He never married.”

“I know that too.”

“I’ve been sitting here trying to jog any memory loose, anything to help me make sense of all this shit. August was my best friend. He still is, even if he doesn’t care anymore, but what I can’t figure out is why he would accept the brand and work with Dad, knowing who he was and what he did? Why would he do that, Mere? Why wouldn’t August warn me?”

“Can’t answer that, Montana, ‘cause I don’t know. Gonna have to ask him. All I can

tell you is that August wasn't surprised when we uncovered the truth about your dad. It was almost as if he somehow suspected, which is fucking crazy because we were still kids, and no way could we make that shit up."

"You think Auggie somehow knew already?"

"If he did, he was damn good at keeping it a secret."

Montana huffed. "That's one thing that fucker is still good at. Keeping secrets. When he's not drunk or working at the hospital, he spends his fucking time in his office doing God knows what."

"Drunk?" I muttered, frowning. "August doesn't drink, Montana. He's allergic to alcohol."

"The fuck he is. Bastard's been drunk since college."

Shaking my head, I sat up. "No. There is no way August can drink. Remember when he got deathly sick after that night we snuck into your dad's liquor cabinet? He almost died. That's when some specialist diagnosed him with acute alcohol intolerance. It's like an allergy and very fucking rare. If August drinks, he would have difficulty breathing, break out in hives or, in a severe case, go into anaphylactic shock."

"Mere," Montana firmly said. "I've seen that fucker down a bottle of scotch."

"Don't know what to tell you, but I'd bet every fucking penny I own it wasn't scotch he was drinking."

"SILVER!" Montana shouted for the club's bartender. "Fuck this shit. I know my best friend. That motherfucker is an alcoholic and has been for over twenty fucking

years.”

“What?” the pretty bartender snarked, walking into Montana’s office.

“Go bring me a bottle of Bane’s whiskey.”

“His special blend?”

“Yes.”

Saying nothing more, we sat glaring at each other as Silver went to do as Montana requested.

“You know you’re gonna look like a fucking idiot when she comes back, right?”

“I know nothing of the sort, but I know my best friend.”

Smiling, I just shook my head and sighed. “You’re still a fucking idiot.”

Silver returned with an unopened bottle of Hell’s Breath and two tumblers. Placing the glasses and the bottle on the desk, she cocked her hip and glared at the man.

“You want me to drink it too?”

“Just fucking pour us a glass.”

Rolling her eyes, I watched while she broke the seal then poured two drinks. Handing them to us, she asked, “Anything else?”

Montana sniffed the amber liquid and muttered, “What the hell?”

Laughing out loud, I downed my drink and placed it back on the desk. “I fucking told you.”

Following my lead, Montana threw back the drink, then quickly spit it across the room. “FUCK! I hate sweet tea!”

“Yeah.” I nodded. “August always had a sweet tooth.”

Reaching for the bottle, Montana stared at the label. “This makes no sense. The label is legit, but the bottle is full of sweet tea.”

“That’s because when I order a case of Hell’s Breath, Bane has me place a special order with Frank.”

“Are you telling me that the fucking chemist for the Sons of Hell distillery whips up a few gallons of sweet tea just for Bane and slaps a fucking Hell’s Breath label on it?”

Silver smirked, grabbing the bottle and the tumblers. “Yep, and you pay full price, too.”

“Those fucking crates cost five grand!”

Laughing, I gasped. “Oh God, that’s priceless. Five grand for sweet tea!”

F.I.R.E

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The city lights twinkled like stars scattered across the urban sky as I watched the oblivious couple stroll down the bustling streets. They laughed and whispered sweet nothings, their hands intertwined, unaware of the dark figure lurking in the shadows.

It was a night of celebration, of joy and love and they had no idea that the shadows held a chilling presence.

I watched them from a distance, my gaze unwavering, my steps methodical and silent. I had been trailing them for hours, blending into the night, my patience unwavering. I knew the couple well. I had studied their routines, their habits and their sins. The life I lived was the result of their actions and tonight, I was determined to exact justice.

Dressed in dark clothing, I melded seamlessly with the night, my eyes fixed on the couple. They had ruined me, taken everything I held dear and now, they would pay. Revenge was a dish best served cold, and I had waited long enough.

The couple entered a shop, their laughter mingling with the music and chatter of the other patrons. I stayed outside, my presence unnoticed, and found a shadow where I could observe without being seen. As the couple looked around, I plotted, my mind racing with thoughts of retribution.

I took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the night pressing down on me. The air was thick with anticipation and my heart pounded in my chest like a war drum. I wanted every detail of this night etched into my memory, a testament to my resolve and the justice I sought.

The couple, blissfully unaware of the storm brewing around them, continued to peruse the shop's offerings. I watched every movement, every smile, every touch, committing it all to memory. This was the night that everything would change—the night when the scales of justice would finally tip in my favor.

I wanted to savor this night. To remember everything in great detail. To remember this was the night justice prevailed.

Following the couple as they left the shop, their arms full of bags, their laughter ringing out into the night, I followed, never losing sight of them. Their joyous expressions stood in stark contrast to the darkness that enveloped my soul. The streets were alive with the hum of city life, yet I remained invisible, a ghost among the living.

They walked leisurely, basking in their happiness, completely unaware of the shadow trailing them. Streetlights cast long shadows and their path twisted and turned through narrow alleyways and bustling squares. Every step they took brought me closer to the moment I had been waiting for.

When they reached a quieter part of the city, where the streets were less crowded and the noise of nightlife faded into the background, I quickened my pace. The time was drawing near. My mind replayed the myriad injustices they had inflicted upon me, fueling the fire of my determination.

They paused at a small park, the dim glow of the lamps casting a romantic aura around them. The couple found a secluded bench and settled down, their laughter now soft murmurs. I lingered in the shadows, my breath steady, my resolve unwavering.

This was the moment of reckoning. The night air was cool, a gentle breeze rustling the leaves of the trees. The couple's voices were mere whispers, but to me, they were the echoes of my past suffering. I stepped forward, the night my ally and closed the distance between us.

Every second felt like an eternity, but I knew that soon, justice would be served. The couple's fate was sealed and as I approached, the weight of my actions bore down upon me. Tonight, the scales of justice would finally balance and the darkness that had consumed me would be lifted.

The couple, lost in their world, didn't notice my approach. Their smiles, their whispers—all of it fueled the fire within me. My hand trembled slightly as I neared them, but my resolve was steadfast. This was the moment I had been waiting for.

Reaching inside my jacket, I pulled my weapon and pointed it at the man. I didn't think as I fired, the soft muted echo of the silencer concealed my actions. I watched while his head tilted forward, like he was looking at something on his jacket. The woman was unaware as she continued on with what she was saying. Moving closer, I placed the barrel of my gun at the back of her head and she stiffened.

I didn't believe in small talk and wasted no time when I pulled the trigger, quickly ending her life. Like the man beside her, she was now dead. No longer would a child suffer at their hands.

Justice had been served.

Moving her slowly, I laid her head on his shoulder. To anyone walking by, they would look like a couple enjoying the night.

Reaching into my jacket, I quickly sent off a text.

Contract completed. Virginia Stone and Michael 'Happy' Hamilton are dead.

Walking away, I looked up into the night sky and smiled for the first time in my life and whispered, "Merry Christmas to me."

Malice

Destiny, California.

Sitting on my bike, I watched as she strode out of the darkness like she didn't have a fucking care in the world. I knew she didn't give a damn because I didn't fucking care either. It didn't matter if we didn't like each other. This motherfucker needed to die and we were the only ones who could do it.

When I called her and told her what I needed, I should have known her crazy side would rule because mine did as well. There was a reason we were the way we were. We were the puppets of evil, created and cultivated within the depths of Hell by the Devil himself.

All of us were, and only we could kill one of our own.

“Where the fuck is he?” she asked, looking bored as she surveyed the area.

“Second floor.”

“Let me guess, last fucking door on the right.”

I nodded, knowing her mind went to the room our father tortured her in before a brother in the Disturbed MC put a bullet in his heart, killing him and almost killing her. I said nothing as I watched her hand move toward her chest, where the small scar over her right breast marred her skin.

“What do you need me to do?”

Looking at my sister, I simply said, “I need your crazy.”

She slowly turned to look at me and I watched her face, so much like our father’s, turn malevolent while her eyes darkened. “Don’t you know, brother, I’m always fucking crazy.”

Together, we walked into Hell.

The weight of Amelia’s death hung heavily on my shoulders, driving my every action. In the aftermath of her passing, I had reached out to Sinclair, the only person I believed would understand and aid me in my pursuit of vengeance.

For me, the world shifted dramatically the day I discovered the truth about my birth mother. Her tragic demise was not an accident, but a deliberate act of malice. Determined to ensure that my twin brother, Gray Greer, paid for the heinous crime, I had asked Sinclair for assistance, knowing that his network and resources were unparalleled. I could have reached out to the kid, but I didn’t want him warning the others.

This was a fucking family matter.

Club be damned.

Every moment I spent with her was a revelation, as she slowly peeled back the layers of deceit to uncover the bonds of something greater than myself that had been missing in my life. Her loss was like a piercing wound, one that stuck me deep and fueled my relentless drive for justice. I was just getting used to having Amelia around when that sick fuck took her from me.

I promised she would be safe and protected.

Now she was dead because of me.

When I rushed into her apartment that night and saw her sitting on her couch, dead, something snapped within me. Something I never knew existed. I only knew my birth mother a short time, but in that span of time, she had left her mark. She was innocent and I was supposed to protect her. A victim of her upbringing, Amelia never got the chance to live life on her terms. From the moment she was conceived, my mother was nothing but a pawn, used for our father's sick, twisted games.

The sight of her lifeless body in the silent room, the crimson stain of her life's blood marring the couch she sat on, a stark reminder of the evil that had taken her from me. My resolve hardened. Every object in her apartment seemed to whisper her name, telling me tales of the life she would never complete, but hearing his fucking laughter told me that the path to retribution would not be straightforward. It would require cunning, patience, and unyielding determination.

Sinclair understood the depth of my pain and vowed to help me. He took his motherfucking time, but what he uncovered solidified my resolve. Nothing and no one would stop me until my mother received the justice she deserved, and if I had to die to give her that fucking justice, then so be it. I was ready to die.

Entering the warehouse, we both looked around as the hair on my neck stood.

Something was off. I felt it more than anything, and when my sister slowly reached for her knife, I knew she felt it too. There was darkness in this place. A sinister depravity we were both familiar with, almost reminiscent of the place we were created in.

Making our way up the stairs, neither one of us said a word. Our senses heightened

for anything that lay within the darkness ahead of us. I remembered the moments of quiet with my birth mother, her gentle touch and her soft-spoken words. Her stories of a past I never knew, of dreams and hopes that were cruelly shattered by those who sought to control her. Her memory was my guiding light, pushing me forward even when the path seemed insurmountable.

As we closed in on Gray, the tension mounted. The stakes were higher than ever, and the final confrontation loomed on the horizon like a storm gathering strength. I knew we had to be prepared for anything. Gray was clever and ruthless, traits we all shared, but our resolve was fueled by something he would never understand—love and loss.

I thought it odd that after the life I lived, I could feel such emotions.

Love was something that always eluded me. I never understood. Now I did and while I would rather die than admit shit to anyone, I knew love and felt love. And because of that one fucking emotion, I also felt pain, the heartache of loss. I didn't know what angered me most, that I succumbed to love or the loss of love. Either way, it didn't matter because the only emotion I felt now was revenge.

Moving deeper into the darkness, every sound amplified the distinct threat that lay ahead. We moved with precision, almost like we were the same person and maybe we were. Our determination for vengeance, to end the cycle of pain foremost in our minds never wavered when we approached the door at the end of the hall and I felt a surge of adrenaline.

This was it. The moment I had been waiting for was within my reach as I kicked open the door and walked in.

Inside, the air was thick with tension. Gray stood in the center of the room, a smirk playing on his lips as he continued on like we weren't even there. Around him, I saw tables laden down with beakers and test tubes. He placed a glass tube into a frozen

cryogenic unit before closing the lid and a man rolled the unit away.

I was not expecting this and turned to my sister.

“What the hell is this place?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered as she scanned the makeshift laboratory.

“Welcome,” Gray said confidently while he poured liquid into another vial and swirled it around. “Let me show you Father’s legacy.”

That stopped me short as I stared at my twin in disbelief.

“I must say, I wasn’t expecting you both until much later. But since you are both here, the least I can do is tell you Father’s plan before you kill me. That’s why you are here, isn’t it? To kill me.”

“Gideon, something isn’t right here,” Ivy whispered cautiously.

Gray chuckled. “You can go, sister, I have no use for you. You are nothing but a useless vessel incapable of life. Shame too, because father had such high hopes for your offspring.”

“Go,” I growled, standing my ground, never taking my eyes off the motherfucker. “No matter what happens here, you find our missing sister. Give me your word, Ivy.”

“I’m not fucking leaving you.”

Growling, I refused to take my eyes off my brother. He was too confident, but I could see a flicker of doubt in his eyes. Gray knew I was different. I was no longer the young boy Devlin Scott could manipulate and control. If it was the last thing I ever

did, tonight I would purge this offspring from this world, ensuring that Father's legacy never continued.

"I must admit you continue to surprise me, brother."

"What the fuck is this place?"

"Father's future."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Ivy snarked, slowly shifting her position.

"This," Gray said, holding up a glass vial. "This tube contains the embryo of a young woman. Someone you know well, Gideon. Tell me, brother, did you feel anything when Arianwen lost your child?"

I growled low and stepped forward just as Ivy stopped me, her hand on my arm.

"He's baiting you. Don't let him."

"Sister is right, little brother. But don't worry. Soon Arianwen will have the child she lost and because I know you won't accept anything less, her child will have your face or should I say, my face." Gideon chuckled and that was all it took as I charged the fucker, hurling myself over the table, tackling him to the ground. He thought he could escape me. He thought I would forget. He thought I was weak. He shared my face and played the game. Now he wanted what was mine. Gray's arrogance would be his downfall. He underestimated the bond I had with Arianwen and the motherfucker just lit the fire within me.

Throwing back my arm, I punched the fucker in the face, over and over, while he laughed at me. No matter how hard I hit him, his laughter rang out, almost like I was playing with him.

I frowned, slowly shaking my head as I stared down at the man who shared my face when his laughter stopped and the life drained out of his eyes. It was at that moment I knew I stared into the eyes of the Devil himself.

Scrambling back, Ivy rushed over to me as Gray slowly got to his feet, spitting blood on the floor as he sneered. “Now you understand, brother. I may share your fucking face, but we are nothing alike. I am stronger. There is nothing you can do to me that hasn’t already been done. You think you suffered, then let me enlighten you.”

Ripping his shirt off, I stared up at the mutilated, mangled and scarred body of my brother. There wasn’t a single spot on him that wasn’t void of torment. Gray Greer was the monster our father cultivated him into and for the second time in my life, I actually felt fear.

“The two of you know nothing of pain. The pain I endured at Father’s hands,” he seethed, his voice trailing off. I knew he was remembering what Devlin Scott did to him. “You two would never survive the real Devlin Scott, that sick, twisted son of a bitch that created us. And when I say created, I mean just that. His twisted mind only fed his depraved appetite and that bitch Jane, she encouraged him. Gave him the tools he needed to ensure his legacy. As for me, I never had a chance. He must have seen something inside me at birth, because that’s when he put his plan into action.”

“What plan?” Ivy asked as she moved closer to me.

Gray looked at her and smiled. “His plan for his future children.”

“What the fuck are you talking about? There are only five of us. Four after I kill you,” I stated, getting to my feet.

Gray shook his head and pulled out a syringe.

“That’s where you are wrong. There is one other. One just like him in every way, only darker, more devious and more cunning. You will never figure out who it is until it’s too late,” he said as he plunged the syringe into his arm.

Rushing to Gray, Ivy yanked the syringe out of his hands as I grabbed him, stopping his body from hitting the floor. Kneeling beside him, I asked, “Confess your sins, brother. Who is out there?”

Gray closed his eyes and smiled. “You’ll see soon enough.”

Reaper

Golden Skulls' clubhouse, Purgatory, California.

Kids ran around happily, laughing while they played with the new toys Santa brought them. My son, Jesse, sat next to Colin as they compared the new bikes they had received. My wife, Remi, her belly slightly swollen with our unborn child, looked radiant as I watched her throw her head back in laughter at something Ink said to her.

It was like life never stopped.

The world kept turning and people kept living.

Yet the only ones who seemed to feel as if anything was off were me and Montana.

All around me, brothers, wives, and children celebrated the season, yet we couldn't bring ourselves to join them. We kept the circle close. Only those we trusted the most knew the score. If Montana and I didn't need to be here, we'd still be in the city looking for the kid. I knew he was out there somewhere, and when I learned who took him from the hospital, I was going to gut the motherfucker until all that remained was bits and pieces of shark bait.

"You're snarling."

Looking beside me, I smiled as Remi sat down next to me.

Leaning her head on my shoulder, she sighed. "You will find him. I know it."

“I don’t know how to pretend.”

“Then don’t. Montana is barely hanging on. Tessa is doing everything she can think of to take his mind off what is happening with Danny. The world believes Sypher is still alive, and the table does too. That gives you the advantage. Just play your part and know that whoever took him will eventually make a mistake.”

Wrapping my arm around her, I leaned over and kissed the top of her head. “I never wanted this, babe. That kid is out there, hurt and in pain, and I feel useless. We all do.”

“Sypher knew the score. He knew what could happen. Give him the credit he deserves, Max. He’s strong and smart. If anyone can navigate this situation, it’s him.”

“I just want to know why he changed the plan without telling me. Why would he do that?”

My wife shrugged, getting to her feet. “Gonna have to ask him that when you find him. Until then, you have a part to play, so start playing it.”

My woman was right.

This game wasn’t over, and I needed to keep my head clear. Danny was out there somewhere, counting on me and the others to find him. and when we did, all hell would break loose because if there was one motherfucking hair out of place, I would kill every fucker who dared harm him.

Seeing the time, I stood and nodded to Montana.

It was time for me to go see Emma and for Montana to meet his granddaughter.

It was a beautiful scenic ride from Purgatory to Destiny, California with a view of the Pacific Ocean off to my right on the back of my motorcycle.

The sun began its descent, casting a golden hue over the waves that danced in rhythm with the breeze. The salty air filled my lungs, invigorating my spirit while I navigated the winding coastal roads. Every twist and turn brought new vistas, each more breathtaking than the last. It was moments like these that made me appreciate the freedom and exhilaration of the open road.

As I rode on, the landscape transformed from rugged cliffs to serene sandy beaches. The occasional cry of a seagull punctuated the soothing sound of the ocean's roar, creating a symphony of nature that was both calming and exhilarating. Passing through quaint coastal towns, I observed the simple beauty of life by the sea, where time seemed to slow down and every moment was savored.

I originally wanted Emma home for Christmas, but the stubborn teenager flat out refused. She was still angry at me and Remi for keeping secrets from her. While I tried to understand that she had a right to her feelings, I couldn't help but feel that I somehow facilitated her change in attitude. A big part of me still believed she hadn't forgiven me for everything I put her, Remi, and Jesse through in the past and until she could talk to me without screaming in my face, I had to trust that Logic would somehow work his magic.

About an hour later, I rode my bike into the compound of Disturbed MC and parked it next to the door. Shutting off my engine, I looked at the door where the large black brother, Hannibal, stood, glaring at me.

Yeah, it didn't take a genius to know that large fucker didn't like me.

"New friend?" Montana chuckled.

“Shut up, fucknuts.”

Montana threw his head back and laughed when he got off his bike.

Heading for the door, Hannibal refused to move.

Looking up at the beefy fucker, I sighed.

“You gonna move?”

The big guy growled. “You here to take that brat home?”

Sighing, I dropped my head and muttered, “What the fuck did she do now?”

Hannibal scoffed.

“Emma is all of five-foot nothing, Hannibal. Are you telling me you can’t handle my teenage daughter?”

“She’s mean.”

“Yeah well, so am I,” I sneered.

The big guy growled and moved to the side, allowing us to enter the clubhouse.

The second I stepped into the clubhouse, my eyes immediately spotted Emma, who stiffened. I watched while she got up from where she was sitting, flipped me the one finger bird and stormed out of the room like her ass was on fire. The man next to her scooted back his chair and groaned as he got to his feet and followed her.

“Well, that went well,” Montana muttered, his eyes glued to the place Emma

disappeared into.

“Where the fuck is she going?” I asked, walking over to where Frost was sitting.

“Probably to wreak havoc somewhere.” Luc, the president of the Disturbed, walked over, carrying his newly adopted son Gage in his arms. “Kid’s a piece of work, Reaper. Logic’s got his work cut out with that one.”

“I still say we whip her ass into submission,” Ivy, Luc’s woman muttered, plopping her ass down at the table.

“Shut it, woman, or I will whip your ass.”

The dangerous woman smiled up at the man. “Promise?”

Looking around the clubhouse, I asked, “Has she been that bad?”

Luc chuckled, placing Gage on the floor only for the young boy to run over to the bar where Trash, one of the club’s enforcers, was petting an orange cat.

“She’s a bitch,” Ivy piped up, then quickly shut her mouth as Luc grabbed her and placed her in his lap.

“Emma’s a typical teenage girl. Well, that’s what Logic keeps telling us, that and something about boundaries. What do I know?”

Taking a seat, I groaned. “Maybe I should just take her home.”

“No,” Logic firmly said, walking back into the main room with Emma, his hand clasped around her arm as he shoved her forward. “Emma has something to say. Don’t you, Emma?”

Looking at my daughter, who stood not a few feet from me, her head hanging low as she sniffed. “I’m sorry.”

“What else?” Logic growled.

“Merry Christmas.”

He took a step toward her and she quickly added, “Thank you for coming. It means a lot to me that you rode all this way just to see me. I am happy to see you and I can’t wait to meet my grandpa.”

I snickered as Montana groaned. “Can we please not use that name?”

Luc chuckled. “What’s wrong with grandpa? I love it when Soleil calls me that.”

“That’s because you are old as dirt.”

“I’m a fucking younger than you, asshole.”

“By three days!”

Getting to my feet, I stepped closer to Emma, and she flinched, taking a step back.

“I miss you.”

“I know you do.”

“I want you to come home.”

Emma shook her head. “I can’t. My head is all messed up. I can’t look at you and not see what you did to my mother. I’m sorry. I know it’s not what you want to hear, but

it's the truth. I know you had no choice, but I can't get the pictures Angelica showed me out of my head."

"Remi misses you."

"No, she doesn't. She has Jessie and the new baby." Emma looked up at me, her eyes hardening into slits. "You hoping for a girl?"

"Emma," I groaned, sitting back down while Montana walked over to my daughter.

"You look just like Bella," Montana whispered, then added, "She is your grandmother."

"I look like my mother."

Montana nodded. "I haven't met my daughter yet, so I will take your word for it."

"I never got to know my mother thanks to your fucking father."

Montana flinched as if she slapped him.

"And that's all for today, folks." Logic moved fast, grabbing Emma's arm before hauling her out of the room. The second Emma was out of the room, I turned to Luc.

"She's getting fucking worse!"

"It's going to take time, Reaper. You need to trust that Logic knows what's best. This was just a bad day."

"Bad day!" I yelled. "She was fucking mean on purpose. That was not the daughter I know. What the fuck is going on?"

“What did she mean by the pictures Angelica showed her? Is she talking about Angelica Morales? The therapist I sent to help Remi?” Montana asked.

I nodded. “Yeah, only that bitch did more than help. She showed my daughter pictures of me raping Sarah and ones of Petrovitch and Baranov raping Remi. Emma thinks Remi is nothing more than a Russian whore and I am the vilest person on the planet. She blames me for what happened to her mother.”

“Doesn’t she know that the both of you were drugged? That neither of you had a fucking choice?”

“Yeah,” I sighed, running my hands down my face. “I’ve told her, Remi’s told her, Logic’s told her. Hell, everyone’s told her the same damn thing, but she only believes what that bitch showed her.”

“It wasn’t just the pictures,” Logic said, walking back into the room minus Emma. “There was a video. According to Emma, Angelica had a video and insisted Emma watch it.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Montana cursed, getting up from his seat and paced the room.

“And just so you know, Montana, apparently Angelica also had a video of George killing her great grandparents and taking her mother away from Bella. Gentlemen, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but all of your darkest secrets are out and Emma knows them all.”

“Fuck.”

Pippen

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Sitting on the couch with Danika in my lap, we both stared at the Christmas tree. The presents I bought her still lay under the tree, unopened. Some Christmas cartoon played low on the television, though neither one of us were interested in watching it. I didn't even bother starting dinner because I knew neither one of us would eat it. Instead, I figured if we got hungry, I'd just make us some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches instead.

This was supposed to be our first Christmas together as a family, but neither one of us felt like celebrating anything. The merriment I dreamed of, wished for, was gone, and until he returned, I knew both of us would live in some kind of limbo.

It wasn't a way to live.

I knew that, but I was tired of pretending to be happy when I wasn't.

Danika's small fingers clung to my shirt as she nestled closer, seeking warmth and comfort. Her bright eyes, typically filled with joy and curiosity, now looked dull and lost. I could feel her tiny heartbeat against my chest, a rhythm that echoed my own sorrow.

The silence in the room was palpable, broken only by the occasional crackle of the fireplace. I glanced at the photographs on the mantelpiece, memories of happier times that seemed distant and unreachable. Each image was a stark reminder of what we were missing, of the piece of our lives that felt so achingly absent.

We needed him back. His laughter, his strength, his love. He was the glue that held us together and without him, we were fragments of a family, drifting in uncertainty. I kissed Danika's forehead, a silent promise that we would get through this together, no matter how long it took.

As the hours passed, the glow of the Christmas lights blurred and the room darkened,

but hope lingered like a flickering candle in the night. We would not give up. We would wait for him and when he returned, our hearts would find their way back to joy once more.

King

Silver Shadows' clubhouse, Diamond Creek, Nebraska.

It was late in the afternoon when I pulled the girls aside to give them each one more present. I hauled Tabby up on my lap and Chrissy and Charlie sat on the couch next to me.

I handed each little girl a gift and watched as they opened them.

"A puppy!" Charlie cried. She hugged the soft, stuffed black and white dog to her chest. "Thank you, Papa King."

I held back my groan at the ridiculous name.

"A kitty! Look, Charlie, our stuffies can be best friends like us," Chrissy said, throwing her arm around Charlie. "Let's go."

The two little girls took off to play with their new toys. They set the stuffed animals on the floor next to them, quickly forgotten.

I wasn't offended, though.

The truth was, I bought them for the girls because I didn't want to draw attention to the present I bought for little Tabby. I held the box while she unwrapped it. Inside was a light brown stuffed teddy bear.

Tabby lifted the bear out of the box carefully. She pulled it tight to her chest and then looked up at me with a big smile.

“Sweetheart, I need you to take extra special care of this teddy bear. Can you do that?”

Tabby looked at her bear and then at me.

She nodded.

“This teddy is special, like you. He carries secrets that no one else can know about. Do you think you can keep him safe?”

She looked at me solemnly and I knew that if Ryder ever found out what I had given his little girl, he might actually kill me. I was taking a chance, but no one other than me would ever know what I hid inside the stuffing of this bear, so Tabby wasn't in any danger.

“You can't leave him alone, Tabby. He'll get scared if he isn't with you. It's your job to protect him and keep him safe. Like Mama and Daddy keep you safe.”

I was a fucking asshole, manipulating this little girl and playing on her emotions. She was only three fucking years old, but I knew she wouldn't tell a soul.

Tabby pulled the bear tight against her chest again and nodded, telling me she would guard the furry toy without question. She wrapped her little arms around my neck and kissed my cheek and I felt about two inches tall.

I told myself I didn't have a choice. The information Sypher trusted me with needed to be hidden somewhere it would never be found. And God forgive me, but I knew not one single person would ever think to look inside a little girl's stuffed teddy bear.

It was common as fuck for little kids to have a security blanket or toy. No one would think anything of her carrying around the bear everywhere she went. Especially given the trauma that kept her from talking out loud.

She climbed off my lap and ran to her mother, who tried to hold the bear to look at it, but Tabby hugged it tight and shook her head. When her mother picked her up and set the little girl on her lap, Tabby looked over at me and I winked at her. She rewarded me with a proud smile, letting me know she understood how serious our talk was.

Despite the possible consequences when her father found out what I had done, I knew it was the right thing to do.

“What was all that?”

I looked up at Grace and my heart broke at how fucking beautiful she was.

“What?” I asked innocently.

Grace sat down next to me, and I looked around the room to see if anyone had noticed us sitting together. The guys gave me shit about Grace constantly, but they didn’t understand the repercussions I would face by making her mine.

“You would think you gave that little girl the world with the way she just smiled at you.”

“She’s a sweet little girl that was happy to get a gift.” I shrugged, refusing to look in her direction.

“What are you up to?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I turned to face her and immediately knew

it was a mistake. I fisted my hands, hoping to prevent myself from reaching out and hauling her onto my lap.

“Are you coming over later?” she asked quietly, her gaze pinned to the tree. I heard the hope in her voice combined with the fear I would say no.

“It’s not a good idea.”

“That’s never stopped you before.”

“It’s becoming impossible to keep my hands off you.”

“Then don’t,” she pleaded.

Her words cut through me, and I closed my eyes. It didn’t help. I could go blind tomorrow and I would still see the vision of Grace in my mind. She haunted my dreams as well as every fucking waking thought I had.

“Why do you do this every fucking time?” I growled low, trying to keep myself in check. Everyone in the clubhouse had seen us fight with each other. They did not know that the sexual tension fueled the anger between us.

Hell, maybe they did.

Grace stood.

She looked down at me, her eyes glassy.

“If you knock on my door tonight, I won’t answer.” She turned and walked away. Grabbing her purse from the bar, she walked out the front door and I knew just as much as she did that what she said was a fucking lie.

She knew I would knock on her door, just like I knew she would answer. We would argue like we did every time. Then, I would hold her like I never wanted to let her go.

When I first started showing up at Grace's in the middle of the night, I slept on her couch. I just needed to be near her. Needed to know she was safe. Now I slept in her bed, holding her through the night.

It tortured us both. And I knew it made me an asshole, but I didn't fucking care. The tenuous hold I had on my control was fading and if I didn't do something about it soon, I would say fuck it and take what I wanted.

Consequences be damned.

Montana

Golden Skulls' clubhouse, Purgatory, California.

The sun was setting on the horizon, casting long shadows that seemed to mirror the turmoil in my head and heart. Each step seemed heavier than the last, as I felt weighed down, burdened by the heaviness of unspoken words and unresolved conflicts. Reaper's silence was a sharp contrast to the cacophony of thoughts racing through my mind. I longed for answers, for a sense of direction in the maze of uncertainty that lay ahead. But for now, all I could do was follow and hope that wherever he was taking me, however convoluted, it would lead to some semblance of clarity.

"Where the fuck are we going?" I groaned, following him as he stormed out the back door of the clubhouse. I had to admit that I wasn't good company either. Meeting my granddaughter and learning that she knew every fucked-up detail about our involvement in this life left a very sour taste in my mouth. She was only a teenager and thanks to me and my fucked-up brilliance, I inadvertently put her in the enemy's

path and that bitch used every opportunity to fuck with the mind of a child. For that alone, I wanted to kill the bitch all over again.

This life wasn't easy and there were rules in the biker world and one of those rules was that kids were off-fucking-limits. While most of the clubs within the Federation upheld that rule, a few didn't, and the fucking underground sure as hell didn't, which caused a lot of problems when the Biker Federation had a dispute with another organization. God, the fucking politics of it all was enough to give me a fucking migraine. I still didn't know why I cared what the table said. I never did what they wanted, anyway.

Maybe that was it.

Maybe the table was more like a guideline, a way for the underworld to stay informed without getting involved. Which was fucking bullshit and the pussy way out.

Stopping dead in my tracks, I said, "I quit. The seat is yours."

Reaper stumbled and turned to look at me. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I don't want the seat. Take it."

Frustrated, the asshole shouted, "Well, I don't want the fucking thing!"

"One of us has to take it."

"Then get comfortable and sit your ass down," Reaper snarked before continuing on to wherever the hell he was taking me.

"I mean it, Reaper. I'm out. No one listens to anyone. Everyone does what the fuck they want, and no matter what's going on, everyone's got an opinion. I can't deal

with the table and take care of what needs to be done. It's impossible."

"Then why the fuck would I want the job?"

"Maybe they will listen to you."

Reaper stopped dead in his tracks and looked at me. "Have you even fucking met me? I am the last person you want at the table."

I looked around the area and sighed. "I'm too old for this shit, Max. I don't want to do it anymore."

"Well, too fucking bad!" Reaper crossed his arms and faced me, his anger palpable. "You'll manage, or we'll all face the consequences together. We're in this mess, and there's no bailing out now."

I shook my head, a sense of dread washing over me. "Maybe it's time to find someone else."

"Who? Who would be stupid enough to take the seat? You said it yourself; the table is all politics. Hate to break it to ya, but the biker world is a far fucking cry from politics. We don't believe in politics. We have our own laws. Our own brand of justice. We don't give a fuck what everyone else thinks."

"That's what I'm saying. We can't do what needs to be done because the table will interfere."

"What the hell are you babbling about now? Do what?"

"Think about it, Max." I steeled my face as I spoke the truth. "The table oversees the underworld. They know all the players. Which means they had to have known about

Jane and the Society and all the shit that bitch was doing, and instead of stopping her, they did nothing. The table is just for show, a figment of law and order when, in reality, there is no law and order.”

“Because everyone does what the fuck they want.”

“Exactly.” I nodded. “Max, the table consists of elected heads of every criminal organization. Each has their own agenda, and their primary job is to ensure that nothing interferes with their organization.”

“You think someone sitting at the table is helping that cunt?”

“I do, and the only way to stop her is to get rid of the table. You told me to keep my circle tight. Only those I trust. Well, I don’t trust the table.”

Reaper grinned, and I narrowed my eyes.

“What?”

“Was wondering when you would figure it out.”

I growled. “You son of a bitch! You fucking knew and didn’t tell me!”

“Where’s the fun in that? Can’t just give you all the answers. You’d learn nothing.”

“I’m gonna kill you.”

“You can’t. You need me and you know it. Face it, fucknuts. You like me too much, and I keep you on your toes. You’d get bored without me. Now, let’s go have some fucking fun.” Reaper laughed as he opened a door I didn’t see before.

Entering the small building, I followed the asshole down a dark hall that led to a solitary room.

There, hanging in the middle of the room from meat hooks, were Renaldo Romero and Reed Scott, each man stripped naked, bloody and bruised.

Looking from the soon-to-be-dead men to the bane of my existence, I sneered, “I still fucking hate you.”

“Aw, you love me, and you know it.” Reaper chuckled, walking over to a table and picking up a baseball bat. Slapping it against the palm of his hand a few times, he reached over and pressed play as the sounds of ‘Have a Holly Jolly Christmas’ by Burl Ives rang out throughout the room. Turning back to me, Reaper smiled. “Merry Christmas, Montana.”

And he was right.

It was shaping up to be a Merry Christmas after all.

Saltillo, Mexico.

Laying on the ground hidden in the brush a quarter mile away, I looked through my scope and watched as several cars pulled into the courtyard of a large mansion. Armed men jumped out of the vehicles, looking around the vast area for any danger. They were cautious, scanning the surroundings with trained eyes, their weapons ready for any threat. The mansion stood tall and intimidating, its grandeur contrasting sharply with the tense atmosphere unfolding before it.

The tension in the air seemed to dissipate slightly as the lead guard gave the all clear.

I adjusted the scope, watching Alejandro Vasquez step out of a large SUV along with

his wife and two children. His presence confirmed the intelligence gathered. The family appeared calm, oblivious to the unseen eyes tracking their every movement from the concealed vantage point. Alejandro's confident stride conveyed an air of authority, while his wife and children followed closely, their expressions serene yet vigilant.

My contract was clear.

No survivors.

Taking a deep breath, I steadied my aim, my finger hovering over the trigger. The weight of the rifle felt like a natural extension of my arm, each breath synchronizing with the rise and fall of the crosshairs. I took aim, fired, and watched the woman fall to the ground.

Guards rushed to protect Alejandro Vasquez, leaving his children unprotected. For that alone, I wanted to kill them all. The guards tried to rush Vasquez into the mansion, only to stop when I fired again in rapid succession.

The horror on Alejandro's face was evident as he watched his two children fall to the ground next to their mother.

Now he fucking knew what genuine pain felt like.

Watching him break free from his guards, running to his dead family, he screamed out.

Yet, I felt nothing.

Not a twinge.

I should have felt something, even if it was redemption, yet I felt nothing while I watched the man who trafficked women and children cry for the ones he cared most about. His guards formed a protective barricade, their weapons at the ready as their boss screamed and howled into thin air.

The sun began to set, casting long shadows over the bloody scene. For a moment, time seemed to stand still, the air thick with the stench of gunpowder and death. The guards, realizing the full extent of the massacre, began to retreat, their faces pale and stricken with fear.

Alejandro Vasquez's cries echoed through the courtyard, a haunting symphony of anguish and despair when he reached into his coat and pulled out his own gun. He placed the barrel at his temple and pulled the trigger. His remaining guards, torn between their duty and their fear, hesitated, their eyes darting between their fallen employer and the darkening horizon.

Slipping away from my vantage point, I moved with practiced stealth, aware that the night would soon cloak the world in darkness. My contract was complete, yet the emptiness inside me remained a hollow void where vengeance should have thrived.

As the darkness enveloped the mansion, I slipped through the shadows, my footsteps silent against the warm ground. The echo of guards' shouts faded into the distance as I made my way to my bike, but the emptiness within me gnawed at my soul, refusing to be filled by the act of revenge.

Sitting on my bike, my thoughts were a whirlwind of conflicting emotions, struggling to find meaning in the hollow victory. The memory of Vasquez's face, frozen in terror and pain, haunted my mind, yet I felt no remorse. It was at that moment I wondered if I had finally become the soulless monster that I feared.

Shaking off the inevitable, I reached for my phone and texted.

Contract completed. Alejandro Vasquez and family are dead.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:39 pm

Kansas

Diamondback MC clubhouse, Lawton, Oklahoma .

I should have been spending the day at the clubhouse with my wife and kids, recovering from all the Christmas chaos that ensued.

But was I?

Nope.

Instead, I was heading to the Lawton Police Department because the new Police Chief Sean O'Rourke called and told me he needed to see me. Why, I didn't know. Only that it was imperative that I get my ass to the station.

I didn't know a lot about the new Police Chief, only that he was a seasoned officer and went by the fucking book. Sean Curran O'Rourke wasn't from Oklahoma. That Irish fucker hailed all the way from Massachusetts. Why he moved to fucking Lawton, Oklahoma, was still a fucking mystery. One that Shadow better fucking figure out fast. I hated not having the inside scoop with law enforcement. It just made my life a little harder.

As I drove through the quiet streets, my mind raced with several possibilities as to why he requested my presence. With everything going on in the underground, I knew it could be anything. But that shit wasn't my concern. As far as my brother knew, the Diamondbacks were not involved. Too bad for him, I was already involved, just not in the way he thought.

What could be so damn urgent that he would disrupt my holiday plans? The chill in the air seemed to sink into my bones, mirroring the uneasy feeling that had settled in my gut as I pulled into the parking lot and saw Chief O'Rourke standing by the entrance, his face etched with concern.

Whatever this was about, it wasn't going to be a simple chat.

Sliding off my bike, I reached into my coat and took out a pack of cigarettes.

Kali had been on my ass for months to quit. She fucking hated my little addiction and lost her shit when she saw Talia pretending to be me one day. I didn't see what the fucking problem was, but Kali ripped my ass a new one and had since forbidden me from smoking around her or the children.

Lighting my cigarette, I took a long drag, savoring the smoke as it seeped into my lungs and sighed when I slowly blew it back out.

"Can't smoke within ten feet of the police station," Police Chief O'Rourke growled, glaring at me.

"Can't have it both ways, O'Rourke. You wanted me here. I'm here."

"Let's go inside."

"Not stepping foot in that building unless I'm in handcuffs. So speak."

"Got a few things to discuss with you."

Taking another drag, I replied, "Then discuss."

"You know a woman named Debbie Brennan?"

Fuck. Of course I knew the bitch.

More importantly, Pence knew her intimately.

Thanks to Jinx and his inability to let sleeping dogs lie, before that fucker died, he investigated the entire club, refusing to believe that the club massacre several years back was a cartel job. Jinx was right about the massacre, but when the fucker started digging around, he found all sorts of damning information that several of the club brothers had wanted to stay hidden. And now, thanks to Shadow and his big fucking mouth, everyone's secrets were out.

The problem? Pence hadn't told his wife that he knocked up a club whore and had a son.

"Should I?" I asked.

O'Rourke groaned, snagging the pack of smokes out of my hand, taking one. Reaching into his own pocket, he pulled out his own lighter and lit the end.

Exhaling, he snarked, "I really fucking hate bikers, you know that?"

"Get to the fucking point."

"My point is, you don't trust me and I sure as hell don't trust you."

"Cool." I smirked. "Glad we had this talk."

"Kansas." O'Rourke growled, then firmly said, "Oklahoma City police found your mother and Happy early this morning. Someone left their bodies on a park bench for anyone to find them. They were executed, Kansas. I need you to tell me that the shit going on in New York isn't coming to my city."

I didn't move. I couldn't. I had to have heard him wrong. My mother was alive and well. Happy told me he was taking my mom to the city to propose to her. After all these years, he was tired of waiting around for the other shoe to drop. He wanted to spend what time he had left with the woman he loved. They were due back today. Kali was planning a celebratory dinner.

She invited the entire clubhouse.

"How?"

"Single shot to the back of the head."

"Witnesses?"

O'Rourke shook his head. "No, and before you ask, the city cams weren't working."

Snuffing out my cigarette with the toe of my boot, I muttered, "Thanks for telling me. Is that all?"

O'Rourke frowned. "Kansas, I just told you that your mother is dead, and that's all you can say?"

Shrugging, I said nothing.

"Fine," O'Rourke snarled. "Then maybe this will get a fucking response out of you. Duncan Police arrested Debbie for prostitution and intent to distribute narcotics. When they ran her prints, they found something interesting. Her name isn't Debbie Brennan. It's Alice Cavanaugh."

"So."

“So, when they ran the name through the system, they found a missing child report from fourteen years ago. Apparently, Alice Soirée Cavanaugh was six years old when she disappeared from some shopping mall in Miami, Florida.”

I stiffened and silently cursed, quickly doing the math in my head. If this fucker was going where I thought he was going, I was going to lose my motherfucking shit fast!

“Don’t fucking say it.”

“Alice is barely twenty, Kansas. Her son is three. That means she was a minor when Pence fathered the boy. I’m going to have to arrest him for statutory rape and child molestation. I’ve already sent two units to his place to arrest him.”

“FUCK!”

“She’s also one of the missing kids from the Trick Pony”

Aleksandr

Rosewood, Virginia.

I hung up my phone and stared out at the window, knowing that when the Italian Council learned what happened, they would come for me. It was the worst of possibilities and there was nothing I could do to stop it, because when they dug into the Romano Brothers’ pasts, they would see my involvement.

There was nothing Maxim could do to cover it up.

The skeletons of my past were catching up to me, and the weight of my decisions pressed heavily on my shoulders. I felt a cold sweat trickle down my back as I pondered the inevitable fallout. The ticking clock on my wall seemed to mock my

helplessness with each second that passed. My only hope was to find a way to mitigate the damage and perhaps, just perhaps, find an ally in the storm.

As I ruminated on my dire situation, a soft knock interrupted my thoughts. The door creaked open, revealing King, the president of the Sons of Hell Motorcycle Club. His eyes met mine, and I could see the concern etched across his face.

“I heard about the Romano Brothers,” he said quietly, closing the door behind him. “Is there anything I can do?”

I took a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves. “No, I need to act swiftly if I want any chance of surviving this.”

King nodded, his expression resolute. “I’ll start reaching out to my contacts. Maybe I can find someone who can help you navigate this mess. What about Lacey?”

His words offered a glimmer of hope, a beacon in the darkness threatening to engulf me. Together, we would face the storm, and perhaps, just perhaps, find a way to weather it.

“I don’t want her involved. I should have just left with the others. I should have known that the past never really stays dead.”

“You’ll figure this out, Aleksandr. You’re smart. You need my club, just say so. You’re Banks’ brother. That makes you one of ours.”

“Thank you, King,” I muttered as he left the room.

Sitting on the bed, my mind raced through potential strategies. The stakes were high, and a single misstep could lead to my ruin. The phone on the nightstand rang, jolting me from my thoughts. Hesitantly, I picked up the receiver.

“Hello?” I said, my voice barely masking the anxiety I felt.

“It’s Dmitry,” came the familiar voice from the other end. Dmitry was a trusted friend and a brilliant strategist. More importantly, he was my brother, and I trusted him with my life. “Word is out about the Romano Brothers. We need to talk immediately. I will be there shortly.”

Within a few hours, Dmitry arrived at the clubhouse. His presence was a small comfort, a reminder that I wasn’t alone in this fight. As we sat down to discuss our options, I could see the wheels turning in his mind, plotting a course through the treacherous waters ahead.

“We need to be smart about this,” he began. “The Council will be relentless, but there may be a way to turn this to your advantage. You need to disappear and gather evidence, find leverage, and expose the Council’s own vulnerabilities. Maxim will do everything he can to hold off the Council, but, brother, you need to move fast. There is only so much Maxim can do.”

His plan was daring, but it was my best shot. With renewed determination, he began to outline his strategy, each step carefully calculated to outmaneuver my adversaries. The weight on my shoulders seemed to lighten slightly as we worked, the glimmer of hope growing ever brighter.

As the hours stretched into the night, neither of us complained. He knew the importance of my task and the urgency it demanded. By dawn, I had a basic blueprint for survival, a path that, if I followed meticulously, could lead me out of the darkness and just might save my life.

As the first rays of sunlight filtered through the window, I glanced at Dmitry. “Thank you,” I said, my voice filled with gratitude. “For everything.”

He simply nodded, understanding the gravity of my mission. With a final handshake, he left, leaving me to contemplate my journey ahead. There would be many challenges to face, but it was nothing I couldn't handle.

With friends by my side, I started to believe that I could withstand the storm and emerge stronger on the other side.

If the Italian Council didn't kill me first.

I knew what I had to do. The plan Dmitry laid out was risky, but it was the only way to uncover the truth and protect our families. Without wasting another moment, I gathered my essentials and slipped out of the clubhouse under the cover of darkness. The streets of Rosewood felt eerily quiet; the usual hustle replaced by an unsettling stillness. It was as if the entire town held its breath, waiting for the storm to break.

My first destination was a safe house two towns over, where Dmitry had assured me I would find the necessary equipment and resources to begin my investigation. As I navigated the labyrinthine alleys, memories of my past flashed before me—the battles fought, the friends lost, and the relentless pursuit of justice that had defined my life.

Upon arriving at the safe house, I found it stocked with surveillance gear, encrypted communication devices, and a dossier outlining the Council's recent activities. Dmitry had been thorough, ensuring I had every tool at my disposal. It was now up to me to use them wisely.

Minutes turned into hours as I painstakingly searched for evidence, connecting dots and uncovering layers of corruption within the Italian Council. Each discovery fueled my resolve, making me more determined to expose the truth. I worked in silence. The enormity of my task was never far from my thoughts, but the stakes were too high to falter.

A knock on the door interrupted my thoughts as I reached for my gun and quickly turned off the lights. Making my way toward the door, I slid back the curtain to see who was outside when I saw her standing there.

Lowering my gun, I whipped open the door and grabbed her, yanking her inside, quickly closing the door fast. Flipping the lights back on, I glared. “How did you find me?”

“I’m a relator, Alek. I’ve listed every property within fifty miles of Rosewood. You weren’t hard to find.”

“You shouldn’t be here, Lacey. You need to leave.”

“No.” The stubborn woman glared at me, crossing her arms over her chest. “No. We need to talk.”

Only I never got to respond as bullets shattered the windows around us.

Massimo

Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois.

Standing in the background, I watched silently as she partied and drank with her friends, oblivious to the dangers that lurked in the shadows. From the moment I accepted the contract and laid eyes on her, I fucking knew she was mine, but I wasn’t ready to claim *la mia piccola vendetta*. For now, I would allow her the freedom to fly before I clipped her wings and sealed her to me for all time.

Miranda Williams was a beautiful woman with her entire life in front of her. She was carefree, enjoying life as a college student should, experiencing everything I never did. I wasn’t ready to snuff out the light in her eyes because that would come soon

enough.

But fate had a way of weaving its own threads, intertwining our paths in ways neither of us could foresee. Though she danced with abandon, her laughter a symphony that echoed through the night, a sense of inevitability loomed over her carefree existence. My presence here was a testament to that.

The night was still young, and the moon cast a silvery glow upon the gathering. Shadows danced in the corners, whispering secrets only I could hear. I tightened my grip on the glass in my hand, the amber liquid within it reflecting the same fire that burned in my chest. She was blissfully unaware, but soon, all that would change.

In the quiet moments when the revelry paused, her gaze would drift, and I could see the flicker of unease pass over her features. It was as if some part of her sensed the tempest that was about to descend upon her world. Yet, she continued, driven by a youthful defiance and belief in her own invincibility.

For now, I remained on the periphery, a silent guardian and the unseen force that would eventually alter her destiny. The night wore on, and with every passing moment, the shadows grew longer, inching closer to the inevitable. Soon, very soon, she would come to know the truth of her existence—her fate intertwined with mine, forever.

I watched, annoyed, as a young male college student danced with her, putting his hands on what was mine. If I had half a brain, I would rip his arms off and beat him to death with his own limbs, but I wasn't ready to let her know that I'd been watching her for weeks now. I knew everything about her. Her likes and dislikes. Her favorite movie, book, even her favorite meal. I knew the clothes she wore were secondhand, and she never splurged on name brands. She didn't wear jewelry and kept her nails trim. She was smart, smarter than me, but didn't parade around in arrogance. When no one was looking, she preferred to cuddle up in a pair of ratty sweats and binge

watch old black and white movies on television. She wasn't a drinker, but couldn't tell her best friend no.

The fact was, *la mia piccola vendetta* was a simple country mouse oblivious to her real past, and soon I would thrust her into a world she knew nothing about. For that alone, I kept my distance. I wanted her to enjoy what time she had left because soon enough, she would learn that all her debts needed to be paid.

Feeling my phone vibrate, I reached for it and read the text message my brother Cesar sent me.

Cesar: Claim her. The Mexican Cartel is no more.

Closing my phone, I grinned.

Finally.

She was mine.

What no one knew about *la mia piccola vendetta* was that she wasn't Jackson Williams' sister. Yes, she was with him when they escaped the Trick Pony, but she had no blood ties to the club brother called Ravage. In fact, Miranda Williams wasn't even her real name, nor was the name she was currently going by now, Savannah Scott. Nope, *la mia piccola vendetta* was none other than the daughter of Crispin Sinclair and Veronica Meeks, the woman he beheaded before he and the others escaped from the Trick Pony, but more importantly and what only Reaper and my brother Cesar knew was that Veronica Meeks was the last surviving legitimate child of Armando Pisano, the very motherfucker who ordered the assassination of my brothers and raped Tomasso, leaving him for dead.

As I slipped through the crowd, cloaked in the anonymity of the night, I could feel the

weight of the impending revelation growing heavier on my shoulders. My heart raced, not with fear, but with the anticipation of what was to come.

I had meticulously planned every detail, every move, anticipating each possible outcome. I knew that once the curtain was pulled back, there would be no turning back for either of us. The world as she knew it would shatter, and I would be there, ready to piece it back together in a form that suited my desires. I observed the way she moved, the way her laughter lit up the room despite the storm brewing on the horizon. She had no idea of the legacy she carried, the bloodline that tied her to a dark and violent past. All she knew was the life she had built for herself—a life that was about to be irrevocably changed.

The shadows whispered secrets of the past as I watched her, the woman who unknowingly held the key to a vendetta years in the making. Her innocence was a stark contrast to the darkness that surrounded me, and I couldn't help but feel a twisted sense of satisfaction knowing that soon the truth would unravel her world.

As I moved closer, the scent of jasmine and something purely her invaded my senses. She glanced up, her eyes meeting mine briefly, and in that moment, I saw a spark of recognition. It was fleeting, overshadowed by the carefree nature she exuded, but it was there, a glimmer of understanding that something was amiss.

I let the distance between us shrink, each step a calculated measure towards the inevitable confrontation. The room seemed to close in around us, the noise of the crowd fading into a dull hum as my focus zeroed in on her. She was a delicate thread in the intricate tapestry of my revenge, and soon I would pull it tight.

When I finally stood before her, the world fell away. Her eyes, wide with a mixture of curiosity and confusion, locked onto mine. I could see the questions forming, the silent inquiry of who I was and what I wanted. Taking a deep breath, I prepared to shatter the illusion she clung to so desperately.

“La mia piccola vendetta,” I murmured, my voice barely audible over the pounding music. “It’s time you learn who you truly are.”

Her eyes widened further, uncertainty giving way to a dawning realization.

The game was about to begin, and I was ready to play it to the very end because if it was the last thing I ever did, the little bitch would pay for her family’s crimes.

Bane

Silver Shadows’ clubhouse, Diamond Creek, Nebraska.

Laying on my bed, I looked at her face. The picture was warm, but I could clearly see the love on her face as she looked up at me. We were so young. So in love. All we wanted was each other. Had I known then what I knew now, I would have run away with her, changed our names and disappeared from the world. Instead, that motherfucker took her from me and even after all these years, I had no idea where she was.

Every night, I replayed our last moments together in my mind, wondering where it all went wrong. We were just stupid kids in love. We didn’t know any better, but when George Stone walked in on us, I knew we were screwed and not in the good way.

He took her from me that night and ordered me to keep my mouth shut or he would kill me and my entire family. I fucking believed him.

That was the night my world changed, all because of George Stone.

As the years passed, my heart grew colder with each passing day, but I never gave up. I never stopped searching. The pain of losing her never dulled, and the anger toward George Stone festered inside me like a wound that refused to heal. I spent every

waking moment searching for her, trying to piece together the fragments of a shattered past. I looked for traces of her in every corner of the world, holding onto the hope that one day, I might find her and reclaim the life that was stolen from us.

But hope had a cruel way of transforming into obsession. My pursuit of answers consumed me, driving me to the brink of madness. Friends and family drifted away, unable to understand the darkness that enveloped my soul. I became a shadow of my former self, haunted by memories and whispers of a love that was mercilessly snatched away.

Despite the isolating grip of despair, there were moments when I could almost hear her voice, feel her presence. Those fleeting instances kept me going, fueling the fire within me to never give up. I would find her, and if that meant sacrificing everything I had left, then so be it.

Over the years, I'd played my part well.

I became a master of deception, hiding my true intentions behind a mask of indifference. The world saw me as a broken man, but I was far from it. Beneath the surface, I was calculating, relentless, and determined to find the woman I gave my heart to all those years ago. The hunt for her had become my driving force, the only thing that kept me sane.

In the shadows, I found allies among those who had suffered at the hands of George Stone. They shared their stories, their pain, and their desire for revenge. Together, we formed a network of informants and spies, each piece of information bringing me closer to her. The clues were often cryptic, leading me on a wild chase through cities and towns, but I followed them with unwavering resolve.

Time had turned me into a seasoned tracker, able to sift through lies and deceit to find the truth. My reputation as a relentless pursuer grew, and even those who had once

doubted me began to take notice. But none of it mattered; the only thing that mattered was finding her.

A few months ago, a whisper reached my ears—something about a place, a hint of her presence. It was a long shot, another fragile thread in the tapestry of my search, but I couldn't ignore it. I packed and embarked on yet another journey, driven by the hope that this time, I might finally uncover the truth. Only this time, my journey led me to Diamond Creek, Nebraska, and the land of endless horizons and hidden secrets. Somewhere in the vast expanse, amid the dust and echoes, lay the answers I sought. I could feel it in my bones—the end was near, and soon, the shadow of George Stone would no longer loom over my existence. While everyone thought I was here because some nutbag forged my signature on some documents, that was the farthest thing from the truth.

I knew she was here. Somewhere.

Since I arrived at the Silver Shadows MC, my instincts screamed I was onto something real. The pieces were falling into place, and the final act was about to begin. The path to her was clear, and I would walk it, regardless of the cost. There were times when I could hear her voice, hear her laughter, sense her presence, but when I turned around, there was no one there. It was almost as if she lived within the walls of this clubhouse. But that made no sense. The Silver Shadows weren't from Nebraska. The club originated in Arkansas. This chapter had only been here for five years, yet I could feel her essence around me.

Sighing, I sat up and swung my legs over the side of the bed.

I knew I would get no sleep tonight.

Heading downstairs, I walked over to the bar and sat, ignoring a few lingering brothers.

“Hey, Bane. What can I get you?”

“My usual.”

The prospect nodded, placing a tumbler before me, filling it with my special blend.

Taking a drink, I sighed, moving my neck from side to side when Amber, one of the club girls, sat down next to me.

“Can’t sleep either?”

“No.”

Neither one of us spoke as we sat in silence, just existing as we drank away the night when I felt my phone vibrate. Groaning, I picked it up off the bar and saw that Silver was calling me.

Connecting the call, I grumbled, “Told you I didn’t want to be bothered.”

“Too fucking bad, asshole. Got a package delivered today for you.”

“Throw it away.”

“Oh, I will once Malice stops using them as a fucking basketball. Bastards getting blood everywhere. If he thinks I’m fucking cleaning it up, he’s fucking crazier than I originally thought.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the two severed heads that were delivered about an hour ago.”

“Whose heads.” I groaned, rolling my eyes as I took another drink.

“Benson Graves and Iris Hughes.”

“So, tell Malice to quit playing with them and have him incinerate them. Why did you call me? You know that bastard doesn’t listen to anything I say.”

“I can handle Malice. I called because whoever sent the heads left you a note.”

“What did it say?”

“She’s within your grasp. All you have to do is reach out and touch her.”

Logic

Disturbed clubhouse, Destiny, California.

Loud knocking woke me from a dead sleep. Groaning, I got up from my bed and flung open my door to find Luc standing on the other side. His expression was grim, and his urgency sent a shiver down my spine.

“What’s going on?” I mumbled, still groggy with sleep.

“Get packed. You’re leaving.”

“Why?”

“Reaper called. They found Sypher.”

“Is he dead?”

“No, it’s worse.”

“What’s worse than dead?” I asked, jumping into a pair of jeans.

“He can’t remember shit.”

“So they want me to help him?” I asked, confused as I searched for a clean shirt. I wasn’t that kind of therapist, but for Sypher, I was willing to try.

“No, Montana and Reaper want you to take the brat and disappear. That bitch Jane Craven sent out a mass text to the entire Biker Federation. Everyone knows about the damn blood link. They want the girl.”

“Hide and seek time?” I grinned, tucking my shirt into my jeans before reaching for my boots.

“You are the best at the game. Do me proud, Logic.”

“Copy that,” I firmly said, walking over to my closet and grabbing my to-go bag. Flinging it over my shoulder, I stepped out into the dimly lit corridor as the atmosphere grew tense. Each of my brothers gave me a nod, a silent acknowledgment of the gravity of the situation. I scanned their faces, drawing strength from their unwavering support. No one said a word, knowing what I was about to face. Anything could go wrong, and the stakes were high, but they all knew I was damn good at what I did.

Heading straight over to her door, I found it open as Ivy hurriedly packed a bag for her, throwing miscellaneous clothes haphazardly into a backpack.

“But I don’t understand,” the girl complained. “Why can’t we stay here where it’s safe?”

“Because it’s not safe. None of us are safe with you here.”

“I want to call my dad.”

Walking into the room, I stepped in front of Emma and firmly said, “I know you’re scared, but as of right now, I need you to do everything I tell you to do. This isn’t a fucking game, Emma. There are people out there who will kill to get their hands on you. Your father needs you safe, and I’m the only one who can do that.”

Refusing to let her say anything more, I grabbed her bag and then her hand, yanking her from the room. With a determined stride, I made my way down to the club garage, where my bike awaited. The cool metal of the handlebars felt like an extension of myself, a tool for the mission ahead. Montana and Reaper trusted me to protect the girl, and I wouldn't let them down.

"Get on," I growled, and Emma quickly jumped on behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist tightly.

Starting my engine, the roar echoed throughout the space, a reminder of the impending danger.

I glanced back at Luc, who stood at the entrance, his expression a mix of concern and pride.

"I'll see you on the other side, brother," I called out before accelerating into the night.

The city of Destiny sprawled past me, a labyrinth of shadows and secrets. I navigated the streets with precision, blending into the darkness as the game of hide and seek commenced. It was time to outsmart Jane Craven and the Biker Federation to keep the girl safe, and I would if it was the last thing I did.

As we sped into the night, the weight of the mission pressed heavily on my shoulders. The lights of the buildings blurred into streaks of color, a stark contrast to the darkness that enveloped us. Emma's grip tightened around my waist, a silent plea for reassurance. I could feel her fear, but there was no time for comfort—not yet.

The city seemed to breathe with the pulse of our urgency, each corner a potential trap, each alley a possible escape. Emma's presence was a constant reminder of the stakes, of the lives hanging in the balance. We weaved through the night, a dance with danger, the hum of the engine our constant companion.

Ahead, the road stretched out like a ribbon of fate, leading us to the unknown. My mind raced with possibilities, strategies to outwit our pursuers. Jane Craven and the Biker Federation would be relentless, but so would I.

Every turn was calculated, every move was deliberate.

There was no room for error.

Suddenly, the sound of engines grew louder behind us. They were closing in. I pushed my bike harder, feeling the adrenaline surge through my veins. The chase was on, and there was no turning back now. The night air whipped around us, adding to the sense of urgency.

We approached a narrow bridge, its wooden planks creaking under the weight of my bike. It was a risky move, but necessary. As we crossed, I caught sight of our pursuers in the rearview mirror. Their headlights cut through the dark like knives, but they wouldn't catch us—not tonight.

On the other side, the road opened up to a dense forest. I veered off the main path and into the trees, my bike's tires crunching on the leaves and twigs. The thick foliage provided cover, but it also slowed us down. We needed to be smart, to anticipate their next move.

"Hold on tight," I whispered to Emma, feeling her trust in the grip around my waist.

Together, we sped into the unknown, ready to face whatever lay ahead.

The forest seemed endless, each shadow a potential threat, each rustle a reminder of the danger lurking close behind. My senses were heightened, every noise and movement magnified in the stillness of the night. Emma's breath was steady in my ear, a testament to her courage amidst the chaos.

As I navigated the narrow trails with precision, I maneuvered my bike deftly between the towering trees. The moonlight filtered through the canopy and cast an eerie glow on my path. I knew I couldn't keep this pace forever. I needed a plan, a way to lose them for good.

Up ahead, I spotted a break in the trees—a small clearing that offered a momentary respite. I slowed my bike to a halt, signaling for Emma to dismount. “We need to find higher ground,” I said, scanning the area for any signs of our pursuers. “It'll give us a better vantage point.”

Emma nodded, her eyes reflecting the same determination that fueled my every move. We moved swiftly, abandoning my bike behind some thick brush, and headed toward a rocky incline that promised a better view of the forest below. The climb was arduous, but my resolve never wavered. We reached the top, breathing heavily, and peered down into the dense foliage.

In the distance, the faint glow of headlights betrayed the position of the enemy. They were still searching, but I had the advantage now. From my perch, I could see their every move, anticipate their strategies. It was a game of cat and mouse, and I had just tipped the scales in my favor.

“We'll wait here until they pass,” I whispered, keeping my voice low. “Then we will double back and take the river route. It's risky, but it might just throw them off our trail.”

Emma's grip on my arm tightened. A silent agreement to the plan. Together, we watched as several men left their cars and combed the forest below, unaware of the trap I had set for them. The night was far from over, but for the first time, hope sparked within me. I was a step ahead, and in this deadly game, that made all the difference.

“How did they find me so fast?”

“I don’t know.”

“They will never stop looking for me, will they?”

I wanted to lie to her and tell her that someday she would be free, but I couldn’t bring myself to do that, so instead, I told her the truth. “You are the ultimate prize, Emma. You are the Golden Sinner. Your life, your destiny, is now tied to Sypher’s. He is the only one who can save you now.”