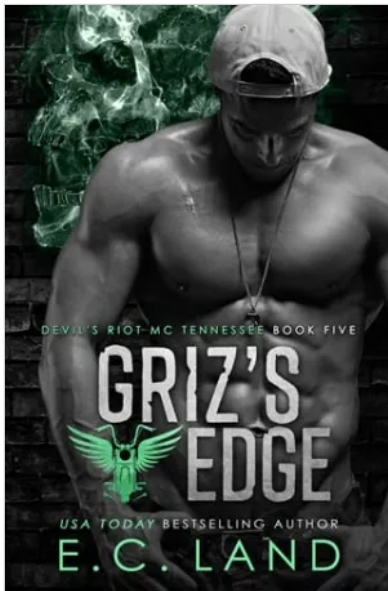




Griz's Edge (Devil's Riot MC: Tennessee #5)

Author: *E.C. Land*

Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: There's a fine line between good and evil. It doesn't matter if you see it or not. It's easy enough to fall off the edge and not be find your way back.

Griz

I'm not a man who you lie to and get away with it. There are no second chances. No way will I allow it in my life. This life I live it's a balance to keep myself and my brothers from getting caught. It's my job to watch their backs. I nearly failed once. I won't do it again.

Not even when she steps in my life. I've been burned once by a woman and won't let that happen again. No matter how much I want her. She's too good to be a part of this life. I won't let her walk to line with me. Not for any reason.

If that means walking away, I'll fall over the edge to keep her safe.

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PROLOGUE

GRIZ

Never in my life did I think I'd fall for someone. It's not in me to give my heart to another. Yet, the woman got under my skin in a way I can't get her out.

I don't understand the reasons for it. My old man once told me that the soul knows its other half. The heart recognizes the one meant to hold it close. He also used to say when a woman gets under your skin, that's where she stays. There's no working her out.

I always figured it was total bullshit. The old man was what some would call a dreamer, but he swore by what he said. It's why he never remarried or found another woman after my mom passed away. She died when I was ten, and I can remember for the first ten years of my life the way my mom lit up a room as soon as she walked in. Dad said she had a pure soul yet was filled with wildfire. Growing up, I knew what I wanted in the woman I chose for myself.

Then I met Hattie. She blew me away the moment I saw her. Her deep blue eyes with a heart-shaped face and ash brown hair. Hattie wormed her way in easily, and I thought she could be the one for me. Then I found out she was lying to me. It might have been by omission, but a lie is a lie. I'm not one to deal with liars. I didn't hide the fact I was in a club. I told her straight up the club was my life, and being with me meant accepting that part of who I am.

The night I caught her on the phone with her dad, a cop, I ended it. I can't be with a

woman who's a cop's daughter.

Since that night, I haven't been able to get her out of my head. I've done everything I could think of, but nothing's worked thus far. She's stuck under my skin, and I can't get her out. I've thought about calling her up and maybe seeing if I could get in her bed, thinking a night of fucking her would get her out of my system. I didn't do it and don't plan to, either.

We've got enough going on around the clubhouse, and I don't need to add more potential bullshit to it. Besides, I've got plenty of work to do at the garage, and I've been going on every run we've had come up.

Like today, I'm at the garage working on an SUV that needs a new water pump installed. I'm immersed in my work when I hear Torch call out my name. Twisting only my head to look in his direction, I find the other man standing near the office doors.

"Yeah," I shout, not wanting to stop what I'm doing. If you don't set the water pump just right with the seal, it'll have to be readjusted, which I really don't feel like having to do. On top of that, the bolts for these things are a pain in the ass to get threaded in.

"Got someone that needs to speak with you in the office," he yells over the noise of air tools being used.

"Who is it?" I don't know anyone who would be visiting me here.

"Didn't give me a name, but she says it's important."

Well, fuck.

Straightening fully, I grab the shop rag hanging out of my back pocket and wipe my

hands while making my way toward Torch. “This better be damn good.”

“From the looks of that sweet piece in there, I’m thinking it’ll be worth it.” He grins.

I glower at him as I pass by and step into the office, and my eyes lock on one hell of a sight. The woman has got to be the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. Standing there in front of me, heels giving her the extra boost in height she evidently needs, brings her to my shoulders, whereas without them, she’d probably come just to my chest. Being six-foot-three, it’s common for women to be smaller, but this woman has a fairy look to her that makes her look much more so than others. Add to that the shimmering emerald eyes and her deep red hair, and she’s a siren waiting to sing her song.

To make matters worse, the rack she’s sporting is just enough to make my mouth water. It doesn’t help that she’s got her arms crossed in front of her, pushing them up higher.

“Can I help you?” I finally ask and clear my throat.

“Are you Graham Holland?”

Fuck me if her saying my name doesn’t send a jolt right down to my dick. “Griz,” I correct her. “No one calls me that name. What can I do for you, sweets?”

I’m willing to bet she’d be the sweetest thing I’ve ever tasted.

“Mr. Holland,” she says sweetly and steps toward me. She drops her arms, reaches into her back pocket, and pulls out an envelope. She grabs my hand, turns it palm up, and places the damn thing in my hand. “You’ve been served.”

I’m stunned speechless. I stare at her for long moments as she steps back, turns, and

starts to walk away from me.

Then it hits me. She just served me with papers. I quickly rip open the envelope and scan over the document. Fury rushes through my veins, and I clench the paper in my hand, wrinkling the damn thing and cursing.

I toss the damn thing to the desk and start after the woman. I don't know who the hell she is, but she's not about to hand me those papers and not answer some questions. Like, what the fuck her name is.

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CHAPTER ONE

MARLEY

Taking a breath, my lungs expand and deflate with each and every one. It wasn't easy. Not with having to stand off with a man as sinful as the one I'd just served papers to.

Graham Holland.

The name doesn't do him justice. Built well over six-three, I barely came up to his shoulders with my three-inch heeled boots. Without the extra height, I might have come to his chest.

I needed to get out of there ASAP.

Not because I was afraid of Graham Holland. He might have been big and hot, but he didn't scare me. Not like you'd think. What was getting to me was that he was hot. Hot in a way that made my knees weak. It sucked to have to serve him papers. I'd have much preferred to have jumped him like the tree he is.

Okay, that sounds lame, but it's the truth.

Talk about libido going into overdrive.

Getting to my car, I barely get the door open before I hear him calling after me.

“Hey, wait up.”

I glance over my shoulder to see him striding my way. Well, he was more or less stalking, not just striding, and the expression on his face is one of a man on a mission.

“I’m just doing my job,” I call out, not wanting to get into it with him. It wouldn’t be the first time that a person tried to argue with me and say I was out of line for serving them papers, but I’m just doing my job. Giving the papers that the courts need to be delivered.

Being a freelance process server should be a simple job, but it never is. There’re always headaches that come with it, especially lately. I only just moved here to be closer to my grandmother, who refused to move away from her home. I get why she doesn’t want to move from here. The views have been nothing but gorgeous.

I’m not talking about the man stalking toward me.

“I don’t give a damn about you doing your job. Those papers are nothing but a joke. But that ain’t why I came out here,” he states, stopping no more than a foot away from me.

“Then why are you out here?” I cock my head just the slightest bit, my curiosity piqued.

“‘Cause I wanted to know what your name is, sweets.” The grin on his face is what I’d definitely call panty-melting.

“Why do you need to know my name?” There’s no way I can give him my name.

“Because I want you to give me your name. Maybe even your phone number.”

Oh my.

If it weren't for the fact we're outside and there was plenty of air around us, I'd lose all oxygen in my lungs completely.

"Are you seriously hitting on me?" I was surprised I managed to ask him without sounding like a twit.

"Nah, sweets, I'm not hitting on you. That's not my style."

Okay, seriously, that grin tugging at his lips is total panty-melty worthy. He could have a woman creaming herself with just that little look. It makes a girl wonder what else he could do with that sexy body of his.

"And giving my name and number out isn't mine," I tell him. It's the truth. I don't ever give my information out to people I don't know.

Shifting enough to open my car door, I glance back at him. "Bye, Graham. I hope everything works out for you."

I really did mean it. I didn't know what he was being served for. It could be a dime a dozen different things. None of them are my business.

I swiftly move, getting in my car and closing the door, not taking my eyes off Graham. He holds my gaze while I start my car and put it in reverse. I only take my eyes off him in order to back up and turn my car around. I feel his gaze still staring after me as I turn out of the parking lot of the garage.

It's a good thing I'd been able to find him at his work and didn't have to go to his house or even the clubhouse where he's a member of the Devil's Riot MC. I knew who the Devil's Riot MC were, and I didn't have a problem with them or any bikers.

That didn't mean most didn't have a problem with me. I knew a lot of people who had a problem with me, but mostly it was when they didn't get their shit together.

You see, other than being a freelance process server, I also handled skip traces and helped work with private investigators. Sometimes, the cops would even call me in to help, however, that had been back home. Here, I hadn't really established a name for myself yet, and I wasn't sure if I really wanted to.

Making a name for myself came with consequences before. I don't like thinking about those said consequences now because it would mean bringing up the past. I told myself when I moved here, I wasn't going to do that. I closed out all of my files and cases before I left. Granted, I still have a copy of all of those files. They are what I call insurance for if I ever need them at a later date.

Regardless, it doesn't matter with being here since I didn't intend to have my name known as it was.

It also means not giving my name and number out to men, no matter how sinfully sexy they are.

Sighing, I drive to my grandmother's house. She wanted me to come by when I finished working for the day. She lives just outside of town, ironically not far from the Devil's Riot MC clubhouse. She lives on a farm, but since my grandfather died twelve years ago, she hasn't done anything with the farm. She managed the yardwork herself the best she could.

Since moving here, I've been doing what I could to help her with the upkeep of it. It was a good thing my daddy made sure I knew how to do stuff on my own. He taught me, alongside my brothers, how to use a zero-turn mower, a weed-eater, and everything else that went along with knowing how to manage a yard. Since he's a hunter, he taught us all how to shoot as well.

Everything he taught was beneficial to us all, and I liked being able to be self-sufficient. It just sucked sometimes. I had my own place in town to take care of on top of helping my grandma. Not that I'd ever complain. I should've just moved in with her when I decided to make the move, but like her, I like my independence just as much as she does. I've been on my own since I was twenty and had the money saved up in order to get my own place.

Grandma Ryans, she's my mom's mom and stubborn as a mule. My mom says I'm just like the woman who raised her, and I take that as a compliment because my grandma is awesome, even if she's a bit batty.

I pull into the driveway to find the old woman outside already with that wide brim hat of hers, weeding her flowerbeds. She's always doing something outside in her flowerbeds. Or in the little rose garden she's got off to the side of the house.

The property is surrounded by overgrown fields, but around the house, it is kept neat.

I park the car and drag myself out from behind the wheel. I pop the trunk of my car and move to the back of it as it slowly opens. There's no way I was sticking in heels for whatever I might be doing out here. I grab my muck boots out and make the switch easily.

"You don't need to be changing them shoes out, sweetheart," Grandma Ryans calls out.

"Knowing you, Grandma, I'm not taking chances," I shout back with a laugh.

Shoes changed, I cross the yard to where she's been working.

"What are you doing out here now?"

“I want to get some brown mulch from town and spread it around. Give my beds a fresh look,” she says, nodding to where she already gotten a patch of mulch done. “See how good that looks. I want the rest of my beds to look the same.”

“It does look good,” I agree. “Want me to get you some delivered?”

“I’ll get it delivered,” she states, planting her hands on her hips.

“Okay, so what was it you wanted me to come out here for this afternoon?”

Grandma Ryans looks back at her flowers momentarily before dropping her arm and starting for the house. “Found something I wanted to show you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it’s something that I thought you would appreciate,” she says, nodding. “You go make us some sweet teas while I get it.”

I knew better than to protest. She’s a woman who, when she tells you to do something, you listen.

I barely get the two glasses set on the table before my grandma makes her way to the little table. Her hands filled with a small little box.

“What’s that?” I ask, gesturing to the thing.

“I just found it last night while looking for something in the guest room closet.”

The guest room used to be my mom’s room.

“So, it’s Mom’s?” I ask, eyeing the box.

“It is, and I figured you could have it. No reason to hold onto it for her. She’s got no need for a little box like this.” Grandma sets the box next to me and takes her seat. “Go ahead and open it. We’ll look and see what secrets your momma left behind.”

Laughing, I shake my head, but still, I do as she says and open the box. Inside, it’s filled with little folded pieces of paper. I open one and read over it. It’s a love letter from the looks of it, but it’s not signed.

“What’s it say?” Grandma asks.

Quickly, I read the letter to her and see her features change.

“These aren’t from Daddy,” I acknowledge.

“No,” Grandma whispers slowly and clears her throat. “It’s not from your daddy.”

“I didn’t think Mom had any other boyfriends before Daddy.”

My parents were always talking about how they were high school sweethearts. The only reason they moved and stayed where they were was because of Dad being in the Navy before he’d gotten out and started his landscaping business.

“Your momma didn’t date anyone else, child. I didn’t even think she kept that letter.” Grandma clears her throat again and shakes her head. “What else is in the box?”

I set the letter to the side and look back into the box. I pull out a thing of flowers that were tied together like a headband and several more letters. At the very bottom, there were a few other trinkets similar to the flower headband.

By the time I finish, my grandma’s expression is one that I’ve never seen before. “Are you okay, Grandma?”

Nodding, she clears her worried expression away and gives me a smile. “I’m fine, sweetheart. Let’s put this stuff back in the box. If you want to take it with you, you can. But do me a favor, don’t mention it to your mother.”

“Okay, but why?”

Why wouldn’t I mention a box that evidently belonged to my mom to her?

“Let’s just keep this between you and me, Marley. Your momma doesn’t need to remember this box.”

Now, that makes me curious as to what’s in the box all the more, and I’m going to have to find out. Otherwise, it’s going to drive me bonkers until I know the truth.

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CHAPTER TWO

GRIZ

Walking into the clubhouse after finishing at the garage, I find the men I'm looking for in my Prez's office.

"Got a minute, Prez?" I ask, looking between him, Nines, Keys, and Markus.

"Yeah," Blow says, nodding for me to come in. "What's going on?"

"Got served these papers earlier today." I hold up the wrinkled papers and hand them straight to Markus. "It's a bullshit protective order."

Markus takes the papers immediately and scans over them. "Do you know this Hattie Deets?" he demands, holding the papers up.

"She's my ex. I broke it off with her when I found out she was a cop's daughter. She didn't like the fact I'd broken it off with her because she hadn't told me. But in my book, a lie's a lie," I tell him with a shrug.

"And you haven't been in contact with her since you broke things off?" Markus asks, handing the papers over to Blow.

"No. I haven't contacted her. I've been busy between work at the garage and doing stuff for the club. I haven't even been to my house in weeks," I tell him and throw my arm out toward my brothers. "Everyone in this room can attest to that."

“He’s right, man’s been on a mission,” Nines says, nodding.

“Thanks to him, we’ve got all our work at the garage complete and no cars waiting to get worked on,” Keys grunts.

“And this woman hasn’t come around here or anywhere else you’d be?”

The repeated question is starting to piss me off. I get that Markus is just doing his job and asking questions even if it’s the same question phrased in different ways.

“I haven’t so much as seen her or spoken with her. You can have my phone to check. Key can look up records if you need them. I’ve got nothing to hide.” I didn’t. I was an open book to my brothers. I didn’t hide shit from them.

Thanks to Hattie, I nearly fucked us, and I wasn’t going to do that again. No bitch was worth the headache it would bring on. Hattie was a lesson learned. Yeah, I’ll admit I’d thought about her. I couldn’t get her out of my head, but then I was introduced to a woman who wouldn’t even give me her name.

I’d even put on the charm a bit to get her to tell me her name and give me her number, only for her to get in her car and drive away. Even now, I wanted to know her name more than I wanted to deal with this bullshit.

It’s a good thing I’d thought to take a picture of her license plate.

“We’ll handle this first thing tomorrow. The court date is this coming Wednesday. Maybe we can have this resolved by then and have it dropped. Otherwise, we’ll have to go in front of the judge. She’s saying you’re harassing her.”

“Can get you the recorders, I ain’t doing shit.”

I don't know what she's thinking, claiming I've harassed her. Please, I ain't spoke to the bitch since the night I ended things. I'm not some sick fuck that has to stalk a woman.

"I'll look into it and see what I can find out." Markus nods and looks to Keys. "Thank you. Can you do a little digging for me?"

"I'll get you what you need." Keys grunts and cocks his head from side to side. "Don't worry about it."

"While you're at it, can you look up the name to this plate number?" I ask as I pull my phone out of my pocket and send him the picture of the car's plate.

"Yeah, you wanna tell me why?" Keys grunts, brow cocked.

"Just wanna know who the woman was that served the papers. I hadn't seen her around before, and y'all know our town ain't that big." It's not exactly a lie. I do want to know her name. I also want her phone number. I wouldn't mind having her under me for a night or two, but that's all I'll allow myself to enjoy.

There's no way I'm taking chances again when it comes to women. Especially one as sinfully sexy as this woman was. They're nothing but trouble and trouble is something I don't want any part of.

"I'll find out and let you know later," Keys says and looks back to Markus. "I'll get the information you need as well. Shouldn't take me too long."

"Sounds good," Markus agrees and shifts his gaze to Blow. "I'm out of here. I'll call ya later if anything else comes up."

"Hopefully, nothing else does," Blow mutters, rising from behind his desk, eyes

coming to me. “You got anything going on today?”

“Nah, I was gonna go to the house and chill. Why? Need me for something?”

“Think you can go with Shiner and Surge out to the farm and get a stock on what we’ve got. There’s a shipment coming, and we need to have the right numbers for when we ship out both what we’ve got in stock and the new shit,” Blow says, crossing his arms.

“Yeah, I’ll help out. You know I ain’t got shit goin’ on,” I tell him. “If you need me to go on the run as well, I’m down for it.”

“We know you will, brother,” Nines states, clearing his throat.

“I’ll go ahead and head out,” Keys says, shuffling past me and closing the door behind him.

I glance to the door then back to my Prez and VP. “Someone want to tell me what’s really going on?”

Nines looks at Blow then back to me.

“We’re just worried about you, Griz,” Blow finally answers.

“I’m good.”

“You’re going on all the runs. Working overtime as hell and volunteering to do shit that not even the prospects do,” Nines mutters.

“Ever since that shit went down with your ex, you’ve been doing everything you can to make up for something that wasn’t even your damn fault,” Blow grunts. Stepping

around his desk, he leans against it.

I let out a heavy breath and shake my head. “It might not have been my fault, but we were raided all the same.”

“Who’s to say we weren’t gonna be getting raided as it were?” Nines demands sarcastically. “We might have been pissed at the time, but it’s done and over with. You ain’t got to make amends for shit that wasn’t on you to begin with.”

“Nines is right,” Blow grumbles. “We’re brothers, Griz. All of us. We all do our part to make sure everything gets done. Stop taking on shit all the damn time. You’re our Road Captain and do a damn good job securing all of the club’s runs. Just do your job and your part as a brother to this club.”

I stare at them all for a beat, unsure of what to say. If I hadn’t been dating Hattie, we wouldn’t have had to deal with the raid in the first damn place. “Don’t know if I can agree that it wasn’t on me.”

“Brother, we could have been raided and ended up fucked. If you hadn’t overheard your ex on the phone, we wouldn’t have known the raid was happening and would’ve been sitting ducks.” Blow has a point.

“Just leave the shit in the past, man, and move on,” Nines says, coming up next to me and slapping a hand on my shoulder. “Can you do that for us, brother?”

“Yeah,” I grunt, nodding. I can’t believe my Prez and VP decided to have some type of intervention with me. Clearing my throat, I jerk my thumb toward the door. “I’m just gonna shower here then and head out to meet Shiner and Surge.”

“Sounds good,” Blow mutters, pulls out his phone, and smirks. “Storm needs me to get to the house. Seems the boys are all down for their afternoon naps, and she’s

ready to have some adult time, as she's put it."

"No offense, Prez, I don't need to hear about Storm wanting some adult time. I know it's her way of telling you to get home and fuck her." Nines snorts.

"At least my ol' lady knows what to do with her free time." Blow chuckles and shoves his phone back into his pocket. "I'm outta here. See y'all tomorrow."

Leaving Blow's office ahead of him and Nines, I make my way to my room while sending a text to both Shiner and Surge. Shiner was the closest thing I had to a best friend, and he'd been the one I told first about what was happening with the raid and my ex. He made sure to have my back, and I appreciated that when I brought the whole situation to Blow's attention.

Wanting to get out of here and get to the farm to help them, I take a quick shower and do my best to shove thoughts and everything else out of my head. It's total bullshit with that stupid bullshit protective order I was served. I mean, what the fuck is Hattie thinking? Is this her way of fucking with me for breaking things off with her? I hadn't even seen her, and I changed my number just after to keep her from being able to contact me.

I didn't want her to have any way of contacting me. I probably could've just blocked her number, but changing it ensured she couldn't get a hold of me, period.

Hopefully, Markus will be able to get this shit handled without me having to deal with anything else. I don't want to have to go in front of a judge and tell him that I'm being accused of something I didn't do. Judges seem to always have a way of siding with the alleged victim and not with the actual wronged person.

Shaking the thought away, I shut the water off, get out, dry off, dress, and get my shit together. Time for me to get to the farm and get done what needs to be done. I don't

have time to think about bitches and the headaches they come with. That includes a certain red-haired beauty that I still need the name of.

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CHAPTER THREE

MARLEY

“Hey, Marley, were you able to serve those papers yesterday?”

I twist around to see the sheriff’s deputy, Riggs, coming in my direction.

Inwardly, I groan. Outwardly, I paste a smile in place. “Yep. Easy peasy. I was able to get everyone served without a problem.”

“That’s good,” Riggs remarks, smirking. “Makes things easier on us when we ain’t gotta be out there serving papers all the damn time. Ya know what I mean?”

“I get what you mean.” It’s all I can do not to roll my eyes at the jerk. He’s the kind of guy that always seems to get on my nerves. He’s got that ‘Pretty Lady’ mentality. The one where he thinks women shouldn’t have jobs and that they should be seen, not heard. He also likes to believe that he’s got more important things he could be doing rather than serving papers to people.

“You got plans for this weekend?”

Of course, he’d ask that. He’s been asking that for the last month and a half. Thankfully, I hadn’t had to lie to him. I did have plans. I’ve been fixing up the little house I was renting. Not that it needed a lot of work, I just wanted to give it a feel for home. It’s a beautiful little place that the landlords let me paint and fix up how I wanted.

Unfortunately, I can't lie worth a dingdong, and I didn't have any other plans this weekend except for going to my grandma's house Sunday for dinner. She's deemed Sundays for family dinner since I moved to town. Sometimes we go out together somewhere. Other times we eat at the house.

It means I have nothing to tell him I'm doing.

"Nothing yet. I'm still up in the air, debating on what I'm doing," I tell him, clear my throat, and give him what I hope is a lie he won't see through. "I think my folks are planning to come, but they haven't confirmed it just yet."

That is definitely not happening. My mom doesn't come to town more than a couple times a year, and it's not near any of those times.

"Well, you wanna grab some dinner Friday night with me over at the diner?"

And there's the question I didn't wanna have to answer.

"Let me get back to you," I lie. God, I hate lying. "I need to find out from the folks first."

Please don't see through the lie.

I'm a horrible liar. My dad claims I don't have a poker face worth a monkey's butt.

Riggs nods and gives a grin. "You let me know as soon as you find out."

"I'll do that." It's all I can do to give him a smile, nod, and wave as I start down the stairs of the courthouse. All I want to do is get away from the man. What's sad about it all is he's actually not hard on the eyes. It's just his demeanor that makes it all a big fat 'NO' when it comes to going out with him.

Getting to my car, I unlock it and climb in without being stopped again. I was done for the day, and I didn't have anything else to do. Since moving to town, I haven't really made any friends yet. Which is fine, but it sucks when I go out to dinner to get something to eat. There's not anyone to talk to.

A lot of the time, I end up talking to my best friend back home on the phone a couple times a week for hours. Usually, she's filling me in on the latest news, and I've got to give it to her, she's always got the latest gossip for me. You'd think there wasn't much for her to tell me about what's going on, but she's always finding something to be able to fill me in on.

I do my best to figure something out for dinner on the drive through town. I'm not the best cook, but I do alright. It's just me most nights, so I prefer to eat out a lot of the time. Passing through town, nothing appeals to me. It's all pretty much the same thing.

The town consists of the garage, several fast-food chain restaurants, the diner, two Mexican restaurants, a couple bars—one of them a biker bar, then there's a coffee shop, and then there are two other restaurants that I ex'd off immediately. The food was not my cup of tea.

I finally settle on just swinging into the diner. They always have something good. I love their loaded cheese fries. I could fill up on those alone. Turning into the parking lot, I find a parking spot and park my car. Snagging my purse, I throw my keys inside the open compartment and get out. I make my way to the front doors and stop at the sound of the heavy, thundering rumbles of motorcycles coming down the road.

My heart skips a beat, and my stomach clenches. I force myself to step into the diner. I don't need to stand there like a fool looking to see who the bikers are. I definitely don't need to look to see if it's a particular biker.

Last night, I hadn't been able to stop thinking about him. Every time I stopped doing one thing or another, my mind wandered to him . . . to Graham Holland. I won't even deny that I had some pretty naughty thoughts where he's concerned while lying in bed.

"Don't go down that road, Marley." My mind all but screams at me.

I find a table easily and wave to Deloris, one of the waitresses. She's an older woman who has had me cracking up a time or two while she waited for me to order.

"I'll be right with ya, suga," Deloris tells me and goes back to taking the order of one of the other customers.

"Take your time," I tell her and slide into the booth. I knew what I was at least going to start off with. A sweet tea and those fries.

Maybe tonight I'll try one of the burgers. I'd eaten the chicken tenders and the pasta plenty of times. Chicken is one of my go-to foods. You can never go wrong with chicken. Well, you can, but it's harder to screw up. The cook here, he knew how to fry up anything, it seemed. One of my favorites was the tender sandwich on the menu. Best part of it is the ranch and BBQ sauce it's served with. Both were homemade and can't be found anywhere else.

A few minutes pass before Deloris comes to stand next to the table and sets down a sweet tea. "Already put an order in for the fries, suga," she says, grinning.

"Am I that predictable?" I snort out a laugh.

"Only when it comes to those fries and your drink." Deloris cackles. "What can I get you for dinner?"

“I’m thinking of going with a burger tonight. Any suggestions?”

I always take her suggestions. Deloris hasn’t steered me wrong when it comes to food here.

“My opinion?”

I nod.

“I’d go with the hamburger steak burger. Comes smothered in caramelized onions, Swiss cheese, gravy, and comes on a brioche bun.”

Now, that did sound good.

“That’s not on the menu,” I tell her, nodding to the menu.

Deloris grins and plants a hand on one hip. “Darlin’, that insufferable old coot back there, he don’t always like goin’ off a menu. He makes his own specials for those that are locals. Menu’s mostly for the tourists comin’ through town.”

“Ahhh, that’s understandable.” I like the reasoning. “Then I’ll get me the hamburger steak burger.”

Deloris laughs, nods, and writes it down. “I knew you’d like that. Trust me, you like his tenders, you’ll definitely enjoy this.”

“Can’t wait to try it,” I tell her as she starts away.

“I’ll have them fries out in a jiffy,” she says as the bell over the door rings.

We both look in the direction, and my heart nearly leaps out of my chest. It’s him.

Graham Holland and he's got his eyes directed right on me.

CHAPTER FOUR

GRIZ

“Well, if it isn’t my handsome nephew. You coming to see me, darlin’?”

Grinning at my aunt, I make my way in her direction. But it wasn’t because of her that I was walking that way. It was the woman sitting in the booth. Regardless, I greet the old woman.

“Hey, Deloris,” I greet and give her a hug. “You doin’ okay?”

“Same as always, Griz, same as always. You need something, or you here to eat?”

“Here to eat,” I answer and step back, going ahead and sliding into the seat across from the woman who has caught my eye.

Deloris looks between the two of us and cocks a brow. “You wanna beer?”

“That’d be great, Deloris,” I tell her and nod toward the woman. I learned her name was Marley. “I’ll have whatever Marley’s havin’ for dinner.”

One of Marley’s brows cocks as she watches me closely.

“Gotcha, darlin’, and I’ll let the old coot know you’re here for dinner. He’ll wanna see ya,” Deloris says as she walks off.

I don't bother giving her a response. Instead, I stare at the woman in front of me.

"See you figured my name out, did you?"

God damn, her voice is like sin all in itself.

"I have my ways." I grin, shrugging my shoulders slightly. "So, what are we getting for dinner?"

"The hamburger steak burger," she answers and lifts the tea in front of her to her lips. "There's also an order of loaded fries coming."

"Gonna be a good meal, and you were gonna eat all by your lonesome. It's a good thing I stopped in."

Marley scans the diner, and I know a few of my brothers are in here. We all had stopped in together, but I saw her car in the lot and told them they'd have to eat without me.

"How come you're not sitting with your friends?" she asks, eyes coming back to me.

"Cause I'm sitting here with you."

I don't know what it is about her. I hadn't been able to get the vision of her out of my head. After one damn meeting with her, and I wouldn't even call it that, she worked her under my skin. To make matters worse, she hadn't even tried to do that, it just fucking happened.

"You don't have to sit with me. I'm perfectly capable of eating alone," she says, taking another sip from the straw.

“I’m sure you are, Marley. However, this evening, I’m having dinner with you.”

Keys had gotten back to me last night with her name. Marley Keys. New to the area and was a freelance process server and skip tracer—interesting choice in the line of work. My brother had made a joke about how she and him had something in common, and he hadn’t even met the woman. He’d thought it was hilarious his road name was her last.

“I’d love to know how exactly you found out my name,” she says, setting the glass to the side as my aunt comes to the table. Without a word, she sets my beer in front of me before walking away.

“I’ve got connections.” I shrug.

“I see, but that doesn’t explain things,” she points out, her fingers clasping in front of her with her elbows out, and her body leaning in just the slightest.

“I suppose not.” Grinning, I lift the beer to my lips and take a long draw from it before lowering it back to the table and leaning back in the booth. My legs stretch in front, caging hers in. “Tell me, Marley, what’s a girl like you doing moving out here?”

I was all kinds of curious about her. The way I see it, if I get her in my bed, I could work her out of my system and move the fuck on. It’s bad enough she’s got me on the edge, and I want to know all that I can about her.

If I’m honest with myself, it pisses me off that she intrigues me so damn much. I mean, with the bullshit Hattie pulled and now being served those papers, I shouldn’t want anything to do with any woman. Period.

“I decided on a change.” She shrugs. “Want to tell me why I was serving you papers

yesterday?”

“You didn’t look?” This woman can’t be for real.

Marley shakes her head and leans back, hands unclasping, and she places them flat against the table. “I don’t make a point to look at what’s in the envelopes I serve. I just deliver them and move onto the next. If there’s something I need to know, then the clerks at the courthouse will let me know.”

I can’t tell if she’s being honest or not.

Before I can ask my next question, Deloris is back with Marley’s loaded fries.

“Here ya go, suga.” Setting them down, she glances between the two of us before locking in on Marley with a grin. “The ol’ coot back there even gave you extra ranch to dip ‘em in.”

“Tell him thank you and that it won’t go to waste.” If Marley’s face could brighten any more with the smile she gives my aunt, I swear she’d light up the damn diner blinding everyone.

“Sure will,” Deloris says, stepping back. “I’ll let him know once I check on my nephew here’s friends. Gotta get their orders. Your food should be coming up here shortly.”

“Take your time, Deloris.” I give her a wink and shift forward to grab one of the cheese and bacon-coated fries, only to have Marley swat my hand away. “What’s that for?” I ask, surprised she’s gone and smacked my hand.

“Get your own fries.” She glares and plops one of the fries in her mouth and chews before finishing. “These are mine.”

“There’s more than enough to share.” The plate was piled higher than what they normally serve to customers. This means the old man in the back likes Marley.

“So? They’re mine, and I don’t share when it comes to my food.” She stares at me for a moment before shocking the hell out of me as she mutters, “Or anything else.”

“Didn’t your momma and daddy teach you to share?” I chuckle.

“They did, but I also have a brother and sister. I’m the middle child. I learned quickly if I wanted something to stay just mine, I didn’t share. As much as I love them, they were pains in my ass.”

“Let me get this right, because of your brother and sister, you don’t like to share?”

“Because of them and other reasons.” She shrugs. “Let’s just say I learned quick what happens when it comes to sharing, and I don’t do so well.”

My cock thickens more than it already was as I read between the lines. She’s not one for sharing or being shared.

Damn this woman, why couldn’t I have met her before being burned by Hattie?

I follow her movements as she plucks another fry into the ranch and plops it into her mouth. Thoughts of other things she could be doing with her mouth filter through my mind, and I have to readjust my jeans.

“You going to answer my question about the envelope?” she asks, going for another fry.

“I’ll tell you if I can have one.” The response is out of my mouth before I can stop it. What the fuck is up with this woman that I’m saying shit I shouldn’t.

“Fine, you can have one,” she says, scooting the plate marginally.

Grinning, I take one, dip it into the ranch, and toss it in my mouth. Once I finish the fry, I give her the answer. “It was a protective order. Complete bullshit if you ask me, considering that it’s for a woman I ain’t seen in a while.”

“How long is a while?” she asks, cocking a brow.

“About three months now, I suppose.”

“Let me guess. She’s scorned and didn’t want to end things.”

“Something like that.”

Marley shakes her head. “Women who put out bullshit protective orders get on my nerves. They make it even harder for the ones who actually do need them to be granted.”

“You actually believe me when I say it’s bullshit?” You’d think she’d be running for the hills to get away from me, that she’d believe the woman.

“Do you know how many times I’ve seen men accused of something they didn’t do? What a woman will do when scorned is more vindictive than any man could think up. I mean, women are tedious when conniving to get what they want. Granted, there are men who do the same thing, but I’ve learned to tell the liars from the real thing.” Marley points a fry in my direction. “You’re not lying to me.”

“How do you know I ain’t lying?”

How the hell is this woman sitting across from me?

“It’s your eyes,” she says simply and shrugs, putting that damn fry in her mouth.

“What do my eyes have to do anything?”

“Your eyes didn’t shift one way or another. They didn’t dilate, flicker, or anything. They were still as they are now, but the difference in them now is they’ve darkened ever so slightly.”

“You’re very observant, aren’t you?” This woman is something else, and my cock is throbbing to get inside her.

“In my line of work, I’ve had to be.”

Nodding, I take another fry and grin, earning a glare from Marley.

“Now that I’ve told you something, you gonna answer my question that I asked you first, by the way?”

“I moved here ‘cause my grandma is here, and someone needed to move to be near her since she refused to move closer to my mom.”

“She didn’t want to uproot her life.” I get that. When your life is in one place, it’s hard to change things up.

Deloris comes by and drops our plates off in front of us, and shuffles away without a word. Guess she didn’t want to interrupt.

“Exactly, my grandma says she’s lived here all her life and wasn’t going to go anywhere else.” Marley glances at the plate in front of her, and her eyes widen. “Whoa, this thing looks amazing, but there’s no way I’ll be able to finish it and my fries.”

“Should’ve shared the fries.” Snorting, I pluck the pickle off the side of my plate and take a bite. Like most things in the back of the diner, my uncle makes his own pickles as well. Everything he does comes from the garden he keeps year-round. Thankfully, he’s gotten over the fact he can’t do everything by himself anymore and got some help. Some kid that he knew. He took him under his wing and has him helping on weekends and evenings.

“Don’t start.” The glare she shoots me is near comical, but it has the same effect her smile has on my cock.

“Yo, Griz,” Surge calls out from across the room.

I twist to look in his direction and see him, Scorn, and Flash getting to their feet.
“What?”

“Gotta roll, Blow needs us at the clubhouse,” he grunts and waves his phone.

Fuck.

Nodding, I look down at the burger and sigh. Deloris is there a moment later.

“I’ll take care of this, Griz, I know you gotta go. Give me a minute, and I’ll get it boxed up for you.”

“Thanks, Deloris, appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem, darlin’.” She takes the plate and looks at the others. “I’ll get y’all’s orders to go as well.”

“You’re a rockstar,” Flash shouts.

“Appreciate it, Deloris,” Scorn adds in.

“Guess you have to go then,” Marley remarks.

“Yeah.” I didn’t want to leave. I wanted to stay right here while the two of us talked. Sliding out my side of the booth, I hold her gaze. “Any chance you want to give me your number?”

Marley looks at me closely, like she’s weighing her decision before smirking. “You found my name easily enough. I’m sure you can figure out what my number is just as well.”

Well, fuck me.

Placing a hand on the table, I lower my head until we’re nearly nose to nose. “Challenge accepted, sweets.”

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CHAPTER FIVE

MARLEY

My phone pings next to my bed two days later while I'm doing my best not to throw the book I'm reading across the room. The pinging noise catches my attention as the idiot hero in my book makes a fool of himself and hurts the heroine's feelings for the umpteenth time. I don't know what it is about the dang thing that keeps me engrossed in it, but I keep on reading, waiting to get to the good part where the hero will get his head out of his ass.

Setting my book down next to me, I reach out and snag my phone to see who on earth would be texting me this late at night. It might be a Friday night, but still it was late. Everyone I know, knows better than to call me so late and that I really hate texting.

Glancing at the screen, I don't recognize the number right off.

Opening it, I can't help the grin that forms. It's Griz. He did exactly what he said he'd do and found my number, but instead of calling, he decided to text me.

Unknown: Told you, challenge accepted, sweets. Wasn't too hard to get your number.

Me: It only took you two days, amateur.

I quickly save his number to my contacts and drop my phone down next to me.

Giggling, I grab my book and read one line before my phone pings again. Rather than

just setting the book aside, I grab my bookmark, save the page I'm on, and set my book on the nightstand. Scooching down in my bed, I curl up under my blanket and pick up my phone to see what Griz has to say.

I can't help but laugh at his response.

Griz: Amateur, my ass. Sweets, I had your number within thirty minutes of leaving your delectable self at the diner.

Seriously?

Me: And it took you two days to get around to messaging me?

Figuring I'll be up awhile with this, I grab the TV remote and find something to watch. I settle on a crime documentary when my phone pings.

I glance at the screen to read his message.

Griz: Was dealing with some things for the club. Wanted to have time when I sent you a message.

Hmmm . . . Interesting.

Me: And why's that?

There's a knock at my door as the phone pings yet again.

I furrow my brow as I get out of bed and look at the screen.

Griz: Answer the door and I'll tell you.

Oh my . . . holy mother butter balls.

Graham ‘Griz’ Holland was standing at my front door, and I was wearing nothing more than a dang oversized North Carolina State jersey and a pair of panties. Panties, I might add, are nothing more than a scrap of material.

Oh boy. This isn’t good. It’s a very bad idea. Very bad.

My phone pings again, and I look at the screen that is still unlocked.

Griz: Are you coming? Or do I just camp out here like a lost dog?

Laughing, I shake my head, toss my phone onto the nightstand, and take a breath.

Here goes nothing.

I make my way out of my room through the little house to the door. Unlocking it, I squeeze the doorknob a little tighter than I probably should and draw it open just enough to see Griz standing on my small porch, that sexy grin of his in place.

“You gonna let me in?”

“I’m debating on that one,” I tell him, knowing I’m going to let him in. But I can’t not play first. “What makes you think I’d let you in my home? Do I look like the type that would just let someone in my house? For all I know, you’re a serial killer in disguise.”

Griz chuckles and holds his hands out to his sides. “Think I’m the type who could be considered a serial killer?”

I slowly rake my gaze over him, memorizing every last inch of the man standing at

my door.

“I don’t know. Did anyone think Ted Bundy was a serial killer? Or even better, Countess Elizabeth Bathory?”

“Who the fuck is Countess Elizabeth Bathory?”

The way his brows draw up and his lips twitch.

“She was a Hungarian noblewoman who was related to a King of Poland. Elizabeth Bathory was accused of killing over six hundred victims. Granted, there are also claims that it was closer to two hundred and fifty, but she’d written down the names. There’s no known exact number of kills. The woman was known as the Bloody Countess, and she holds the record in the Guinness World Book for being the most prolific female killer.”

Griz blinks, and then blinks again, following this up with a shake of his head. “Sweets, where the fuck do you come up with this shit?”

“I read a lot. Plus, I love crime documentaries.” I shrug, shift the door open again, and motion for him to come in as I continue. “For instance, Countess Elizabeth Bathory did most of her killings after she was widowed and dripped honey on the bodies of her victims to attract insects. Then, in the colder months, she’d put them in ice baths. That’s not even the worst of it. She’d torture her victims by driving needles in their fingers, cutting their noses and lips. She’d bite them, and the most messed-up part of all is she’d burn their flesh, sometimes burned their genitals.”

“And I’m gonna stop you right there, sweets,” he says, stepping into the house and closing the door. “I think I might have nightmares now, wondering if you’ll be the next Countess Elizabeth Bathory with all the information you know about her.”

“Well, I did do a research paper on her while in high school,” I explain, like it wasn’t that big of a deal.

Griz stares at me like I’ve got two heads for all of a second before he notices what I’m wearing. “Baby, you realize you’re in Tennessee. NC State ain’t got nothing on us.”

“My brother went to NC State. He was on the football team before he blew out his knee.” I didn’t go to college there. I ended up at Hokies, which my brother thought was a disgrace, considering he was a Wolfpack.

“Good to know it’s not some other man’s jersey. I might have to rip it off of ya, sweets.”

My thighs clench involuntarily, and a shiver rushes along my spine. I like the idea of him ripping my shirt off way, way too much.

“Well, technically, it is another guy’s. I stole it from him.” Now, why did I say that?

Griz chuckles, shakes his head, and steps closer, one hand going to my hip, the other curling around my neck. “I’ll rephrase, if it were a guy you’ve fucked, I’d have to tear it off ya, sweets. I find that I’m not a fan of you wearing someone else’s clothes. The fact it’s your brother’s, that’s still somewhat borderline.”

Wow.

I didn’t know how else to take his comment.

“So, umm, what are you doing here?” I ask him. I’m sure he can hear the nerves in my voice. I’ve never felt what I’m feeling right now. Sensual and feminine. Like I was beautiful and that he wanted me. I don’t know how I know it. Maybe it’s in his

touch. But the way he's looking at me, the lustful glint in his eyes mixes with something else that I can't put a name to.

It also doesn't help that my own thoughts are screwing with me. This man has been screwing with my head since the first time I saw him in that garage where I had to serve him.

I don't know what it is about him, but I find him more than a little interesting. The moment he sat across from me at the diner, I had to catch my breath from the momentary loss of it. Then he started a conversation with me, and it was easy to talk to him. I loved that he was able to make me smile.

Even better, he didn't criticize what I decided to eat. I'm not one of those women who refuses to eat in front of a man. My momma and daddy, well, they made sure to bring me up not to be afraid to be myself or always to speak my mind. They definitely made sure I knew not to fall for a man who wasn't going to treat me as the woman I was meant to be.

"Are you going to answer me? Or are you gonna just stare at me?"

"I was thinking more along the lines of kissing you," he murmurs, lowering his head.

"I didn't tell you that you could kiss me."

Oh, please, please, please, kiss me. I want nothing more than for him to kiss me hard. Kiss me deep. Kiss me with those amazing lips. I'm betting he could kiss me so good that I'd be begging him not to stop.

"You didn't not tell me to kiss you, sweets," he says, his lips nearly touching mine now. "I gotta say, I'm wanting to kiss you. Been wanting to kiss you, and I'm gonna kiss you."

Those are the only words he gives me before his lips are on mine. My own part marginally, and he takes that little bit as a way of deepening the kiss.

Oh my.

I don't think I've ever been kissed so well. His tongue slides in and swirls, stroking along mine.

Griz's arm around my waist tightens as he groans, and I moan. My arms go up and around his neck. His fingers at my neck go up and tangle in my hair.

Oh yes, yes, yes.

I don't realize we're moving until I find myself being lowered, my back pressing into the seat of my couch. One of Griz's legs nudges between mine and presses right against the heat of my sex.

He moves the hand he'd had around me to my side and slides it up under my shirt.

The touch of his fingers on my bare flesh feels absolutely amazing. The better part of it is when his finger slides over the curve of my breast. His thumb strokes over my nipple, sending a tingle of sensations straight between my legs, soaking my panties all the more.

Griz rips his lips away and drops kisses along my jaw and down my neck.

"Fuck me, sweets, I can feel how wet you are for me. You're soaking through my jeans," he murmurs, pressing his leg more firmly against my pussy. "I'm looking forward to going down on you and fuckin' you with my tongue. I bet you'd be just as sweet as this sweet mouth of yours."

His lips cover mine again. Fingers join his thumb as he pinches and pulls. If not for his mouth on mine, I'd cry out from the pleasure of his touch. Instead, I moan into his mouth and writhe beneath him, grinding myself down on his leg. The friction of it against my clit is so good. More than good. But still, I need more. I want more.

Releasing my nipple, he jerks his arm out from under my shirt, only for him to yank it upward, exposing my body. A cry leaves my lips as he breaks it and pulls away enough to glance down at my chest.

“Damn, baby, your tits are a damn sight to see. Beautiful pink little buds just ready for me to suck into my mouth.” He brings his gaze to mine and lowers his head. “Want me to suck your tits, Marley?”

Yes. Yes. Yes. Oh my . . . yes. More than anything.

I don't say any of this. Instead, I nod slowly and give him a breathing, “Yes.”

“Tell me what you want me to do, sweets. Tell me to suck your tit,” he orders, his lips a hairbreadth away from my nipple.

“Please, Griz, I want you to suck my nipple into your mouth.”

Never in my life have I ever spoken to a man like that. No one has ever demanded I tell them what I want. Or ordered to do anything sexual.

Griz flicks his tongue over one of my nipples, drawing a gasp from my lips. “Cup your tits, Marley, and hold them out for me. I want you to offer them up for me to devour.”

Releasing my fingers from around his neck, I do as he tells me. Feeling completely erotic and nervous all at the same time.

Slowly, Griz takes his time drawing one nipple in his mouth while twisting my other one between two fingers.

“Oh yes, Griz, please more. Harder. Suck my nipple harder.”

Griz does so, and it was absolutely amazing. I could come just from what he’s doing with my breasts. Between my legs, my clit throbs, and juices saturate my panties as I grind myself against his thigh.

He switches between breasts and curls his tongue around the tip.

Oh yes. It’s absolute heaven.

I’m so close. So, so close. I want to feel him moving inside me rather than just against me.

“Griz,” I whimper and release my breasts to wrap my fingers through his hair, knocking the hat he’s wearing backward off.

The two of us were in a perfect moment. That is until the sound of “Hail to the King” started playing.

Griz draws away with a curse. “Sorry, sweets, I’ve got to take this,” he says, sighing heavily.

I stare up at him, watching him through heavy lids as he pulls his phone out and answers it.

“Yeah?”

That’s one way to answer a call. What happened to hello or even hey?

“Yeah, I’ll head there now.” Griz is silent for a moment and grimaces. “Yeah, just tell Markus to hold up until I get there.”

Pulling the phone away from his ear, Griz shoves it back into his pocket. His eyes lock on my face. “Sorry to do this to you, sweets, but I’ve gotta run.”

I nod, shove my shirt back into place, and start to slide out from under him. “I guessed that from what you were saying.”

Griz captures my waist, stopping me as he leans back over me. “I don’t want to leave, but the club’s attorney is there and needs to talk to me.”

Again, I nod. “I didn’t know attorneys made visits at this late of an hour.”

“Considering how much Markus gets paid, he makes sure everything gets handled no matter the time of day,” he explains. “You busy tomorrow?”

“I’m going to my grandma’s to help her out with the flowerbeds and then help her pull some things out of the attic.”

“What about Sunday?”

“Dinner with my grandma. We do dinner every Sunday together since I moved to town.”

Griz nods. “You spend a lot of time with her, don’t ya?”

“You could say that.” I shrug. Some people might not like spending time with their grandparents, but I do. Grandma Ryan is hilarious. Plus, I want to learn more about those letters and my grandma had said Mom had more stuff up in the attic from when she was younger. I wanted to go through them.

Those letters have me intrigued.

“I’m free tomorrow, though, after I finish at my grandma’s,” I tell him.

Griz grins and dips his head toward me. “When you finish with your grandma, text me, and I’ll come pick you up. We’ll go out.” He kisses me briefly, pulls away, gets to his feet, and brings me with him. Curling his fingers in my hair, he kisses me a little bit harder before letting me go. “See you tomorrow, sweets.”

“Oh, okay,” I whisper, watching him as he heads to the door.

Griz looks back at me with that sexy grin and opens the door. “Lock up behind me, baby.”

Nodding, I move to the door as he steps through and closes it behind him. I lock both the bottom and top locks. I turn the lights off as I release a heavy breath. My body is still humming with the need for release. Since he’s not here to give it to me, I’m going to have to take care of the problem all by my lonesome.

My mind made up, I dash through the house to my room. I throw myself onto my bed, reaching for the drawer of my nightstand when my phone pings. I left it on the bed when he’d told me he was here. I glance at the screen, seeing it’s him, and smile. I grab my toy from my nightstand before falling back on my bed, settling in, ready to pleasure myself.

Grabbing my phone, I unlock it and stare at the screen reading the message.

Griz: You touch yourself, I’ll paddle your ass for it.

How the hell did he know what I was going to do?

Feeling brazen, I reply.

Me: How would you even know if I did anything or not?

No sooner I sent it, I got a reply.

Griz: Don't think I won't know if you took care of yourself. I'll just know.

This message is followed by another.

Griz: You pleasure yourself, sweets, it'll be with me watching while I stroked my cock. You take away my pleasure of watching, then you'll have to be punished for it.

Holy shit on a stick.

Well, if he wants to punish me, then he'll just have to have at it. There's no way I can go to sleep without easing the tension he built inside me.

A thought crosses my mind, and I go for it. Pulling my camera up on my phone, I quickly capture a picture of my toy pointing down between my thighs.

I send the picture to him with a message.

Me: Good night, Graham. Guess you'll have to punish me for it.

Turning my phone on silent, I close my eyes and do just what I need while imagining it's him pleasuring me rather than my hand.

CHAPTER SIX

GRIZ

Spanked.

Swear to fuck, when I get my hands on her tomorrow, I'm going to spank her ass.

It's bad enough I had to leave her place to deal with this bullshit. Why Markus had to come this late at night and not in the morning, I'll never know. But fuck. I'm gonna have to dub his ass the Cockblocker from Hell.

I walk into the clubhouse, shove my phone in my pocket after saving the damn picture she sent me, and find the men I'm looking for. They all have their bodies twisted in the seats where they're sitting and watching me closely.

"He looks ready to kill someone." Lucky smirks, that cocky grin of his in place.

"Think you blocked him from getting laid tonight." Surge snorts.

"Fuck y'all," I grumble and take a seat between the two of them, eyes locking on Markus. "Why the fuck couldn't this wait until the morning?"

Markus chuckles and lifts his beer to his lips, taking a long pull before lowering it. "I wanted a beer. Didn't feel like dealing with the bullshit of going to a bar or sitting at home." He shrugs and slouches back in his seat. "Plus, I've got shit to share with you about the protective order against you."

“It better be some damn good news.” For pulling me away from Marley the way they did, it better be worth it because I’d been enjoying what I was doing to Marley.

Fuck me.

I don’t think I’ve ever seen a woman react to my touch the way she does. It’s like she ignites right up into a burning flame of fire. My jeans were still wet from where her pussy had soaked through the barely-there fabric of her panties saturating my jeans. I’d felt the heat between her legs and knew once I got my mouth down there, I wouldn’t be disappointed.

Damn her.

She’s under my skin in a way I don’t know how to work her out. The fucked-up part? I’m not sure I want to. With only a couple of times speaking to her, she’s consumed me.

“Considering that I spoke with Hattie and her father myself, which I might add put me on his radar, she dropped the order against you. Her old man wasn’t pleased to hear she’d lied about it. Said he wasn’t going to tolerate her being with a gang member, but he also wasn’t gonna tolerate her being the reason a war was brought against this town because of an accusation that she claimed happened.”

Well, la de da .

“And?” I prompt.

“Well, she had been beaten, and said it was you. Her face was all battered, so someone had to have done it . . .”

“She just wasn’t saying who,” I finish for him.

“Exactly.” Markus nods, clears his throat, and rolls his shoulders, cocking his head side to side. “Adam caught up with me a bit ago. Told me that Hattie’s dad was ranting at the station about his daughter doing something as stupid. Heard him rant about how his daughter couldn’t get over some hooligan that was no good for her. Adam also heard him say he thinks she caused the bruises to her face herself to make it look like someone had beat her.”

“Why the fuck would she do something like that?” Surge scoffs, shaking his head.

“She’s pissed I broke it off with her because I wasn’t putting up with the bullshit lies.” There’s no other explanation for it.

“Talk about one scorned woman with a grudge,” Lucky mutters, “It’s a good thing she ain’t my ex. Think Chelsea would go ballistic on her. Hell, she finds this shit out, which by the by I ain’t tellin’ her, she’ll lose her mind. Who knows what she’d end up doing to some unknown poor soul. Even if they deserve it.”

“The bitch ain’t scorned, she’s downright psycho,” Markus remarks.

“What needs to happen now? Is she dropping the order? Do we still have to go to court?” I ask, wanting to make sure of what’s gonna happen next.

“Don’t worry about anything. You don’t have to show up, but I’ll be there already, so I’ll make sure everything is handled myself,” Markus says and finishes his beer.

Nodding, I lean back and glance around the table. “Is that all y’all needed me here for?”

“Were you doing something that we interrupted?” Blow asks, a shit-eating grin on his face as my brothers join him laughing.

“You could say that,” I grumble, rub a hand over my face, and release a harsh breath. “Fuckers are some serious cockblockers.”

“Is it the woman from the diner?” Surge asks.

“What woman?” Lucky asks, cocking a brow. “Didn’t know you were seeing anyone?”

“Her name is Marley,” I mutter.

“Marley Keys?” Markus asks, brows drawing together.

“Yeah, why? You know her?”

I watch him closely, tension slowly growing inside me.

“She’s the one who served you the papers. She’s a process server for the courthouse.”

“I know. She freelances, and she also does skip traces. Keys looked into her for me,” I tell him and glance over to Blow, then Nines. “I wasn’t going to do anything stupid without knowing anything about her first.

“She must’ve made an impression on ya, Griz,” Blow states more in question than in statement, but it was a loud statement all the same.

“You could say that.”

Marley did more than make an impression. She seared that impression in my head in a way there’s no getting her out.

“You think it’s a good idea to get mixed up with her?” Markus asks cautiously.

“You know something I don’t?” I ask in return.

“Don’t really know her. Seen her around the courthouse when I’m there. One of the deputies has been hitting on her. Trying to get her to go on a date with him, but she’s been politely rebuffing him. She’s a pretty thing. Clerks there like her. She’s also Mag Ryan’s granddaughter.”

Now, that was something I hadn’t known. Mag Ryan is the owner of the farm just down the road from the clubhouse. Her land butts up against the woods that sit between the clubhouse and Mag’s farm.

“You talking about little Marley Keys?” Sniper asks, coming to join the group.

“Yeah, why, you know her?” Nines asks.

“Ain’t seen that girl since she was a little girl. Her momma and daddy are from the area,” Sniper explains, taking a seat across from me at the round table we’re all surrounding. “Why y’all talking about Marley Keys?”

“Griz’s is seein’ her,” Surge answers with a chuckle.

Sniper slowly brings his gaze to me with a questioning look. “You seein’ Marley Keys?”

“When the hell did I have to start reporting who I fuck?” I was starting to get pissed. “Yeah, I fucked up once.” I jerk up out of my seat and glare at them all. “I know I fucked up bringing this bullshit with Hattie to the club. I carry that fuck up with me. I own it.”

“Brother, no one’s blaming you for that shit,” Blow states getting to his feet.

Sniper also gets to his feet. “I only asked if you were seeing Marley because I knew her dad, Michael Keys.”

Letting out a harsh breath, I retake my seat. “Why the fuck does that matter?”

“It doesn’t, but you should know her daddy, last I heard, was a Seal.” Sniper keeps his gaze locked solely on me. “Remember him, and he’d been a damn good man. Took his woman away from here right after he finished his training. Rain visits Mag Ryan’s at least once a month. According to Rain, her daughter wanted her to move closer to her, but she refused to leave the land she’s lived all her life on.”

We all know the woman. She’s not scared to speak her mind or tell you what to do. Her husband died some years back, and she’s been alone since. Her farm butts against the back of the land that our clubhouse sits on. On the other side of her land sits the farmhouse we own.

“That woman would shoot anyone who dared take her away from that land.” Blow snorts, shaking his head.

The tension was still surrounding me, but the more they talk, the more it eases. The fact I blew up so easily shows just how much I’m still sitting on the edge where that shit is concerned. Because of Hattie, I could’ve lost everything that mattered to me.

Maybe I should cool things down and back off of Marley. She’s too much of a damn temptation. I can’t afford to fuck things up with the club. I’m the damn Road Captain of this club, and I know, just like every other member of this club knows, the club comes first. Always.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MARLEY

Three Weeks Later . . .

“I don’t care how you have to go about this, I just want you to find my daughter.”

It’s all I can do to keep from sighing in frustration. The man on the phone just doesn’t seem to get that I’m not a bounty hunter or a private investigator. I don’t go find people like that. Not anymore. I learned my lesson before I moved here.

Sure, my job is to find people, but the difference between me and a bounty hunter is I can’t actually serve as a bounty hunter. Not anymore.

I gave up that part of my life, and I wasn’t going back to it. I made the decision that the day I moved out here to Tennessee, I was sticking strictly to skip traces and process serving. All you had to do with those two things is focus on research and have knowledge of databases. It was simple enough to serve papers for those who had to go to court. It wasn’t bad to handle finding people for the courts or even law firms. I’ve even done a couple for debt collectors when they needed to find someone. The work was easy enough yet still a challenge for my mind.

“I’m sorry, ma’am, but I can’t help you. If you want, I can refer you to someone who can,” I murmur, pinching the bridge of my nose. “I know several private investigators who would be more than happy to help you.”

“I don’t want anyone else to handle finding my daughter. I heard you were the best, and I’m hiring you to do it. I don’t care if you’re out of the game now or not. I want you to find my daughter,” the woman on the other end of the line snaps. “Now, you need to take down the information to find her.”

“Ma’am, again, I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to find someone else. I can’t help you.”

It’s not exactly true, I could, but something about the way the woman spoke, she didn’t sound like a frantic parent. But rather a snooty one who demanded to have their way about everything. I hated working with people like that. Nine times out of ten, the results always ended with the people ran off to get away from them. The runaways always have a good reason, and right now would be no less because the person on the other line definitely isn’t fully concerned with finding the daughter as she should be. It probably has to do with the money she keeps bringing up.

Rolling my eyes, I quickly give the woman my recommendations and hang up before she can snap at me some more. No way was she going to convince me otherwise.

I give a sigh and toss the phone to my desk, my frustration growing even higher. In the past three weeks, that’s been happening a lot more and more. Which sucks. Big time.

I know where the frustration is rooted, and it ticks me off all the more because of it. How did I allow myself to let this happen?

I hadn’t heard from Griz since we texted after he left me all hot and bothered. At first, it hurt because he never showed for the date he said he was taking me on. He hadn’t called. Didn’t text. Nothing.

I never reached out to find out why.

I wasn't going to be one of those girls that clung to a man and demanded to know what happened and why he didn't call.

My plan is to push it all down and move on.

Or that's what I keep telling myself.

Which makes it even harder, because I don't want to be one of those girls who falls hard for a guy when I don't even know him. It's like he's under my skin in such a way that I don't know how to get him out.

Last weekend, to try and get my mind off him, I went home to visit my mom and dad. It hadn't helped. If anything, it made things worse for me.

Mostly because I'd asked my mom about the letters in the box Grandma Ryan gave me. I don't think I'd ever seen my mom pale as she did. For that matter, seen my dad become as furious as he did.

I ended up leaving their house more upset. Sure, they called later to apologize, but I didn't answer the call. I hadn't spoken to them since. I just listened to the voicemails they'd left. They'd also sent a few text messages, none of which I responded to.

Sure, it might not be the best way to handle it. I should accept their apologies, and I have. My problem is the way they reacted to me telling them about the letters and the other stuff that had been in the box. It makes me want to dig into it further and figure out what had happened.

I hadn't started to do so just yet. I'd been doing my best to stay busy with other things. Between helping Grandma Ryan and work, I've done well so far. But now, with it being Friday night and not having anything else to do this weekend, I ended up agreeing to go to dinner with Deputy Riggs. Thankfully, he didn't mind me

meeting him at the diner rather than him picking me up here.

I still can't believe I ended up agreeing to dinner with him. Suppose I'm just tired of being home alone.

Shaking my head, I pick my phone back up. The thought of canceling crosses my mind as I check the time. Deputy Riggs suggested we meet there at six and here it is going on five now.

Great.

Guess I should get ready.

Hopping up from my office chair, I tuck it back in front of the desk and make my way out of my home office. To do what I do, I didn't need to have anywhere else. I didn't need some fancy office. That's what's great about being a freelance worker. I work where I want. I just have to go into the courthouse to grab whatever needs to be served for the day. Then I'm done. Some days, there's nothing. Other days, there could be close to fifty or more.

I make my way through the little house to my room. It doesn't take me long to pick out an outfit to wear. It might be a date with Riggs, but that doesn't mean I can't dress up for a date. Granted, dressing up for me isn't much different from any other day.

The difference being is that I change the top I'd worn throughout the day for a different one. Where the other was a silky blouse, this one is more fitted and shows off my ample cleavage. I also switch out my heels for boots that have a heel on them. Being that I'm only five-foot-five, I love wearing heels every chance I get.

Hell, I'm an expert on all things heels. I've done everything in them. Ran, fought,

strutted, even in the rain. It's surely not easy. I've sprained an ankle a time or two, but I learned not to do that in the process.

Clothes changed, I head for the bathroom to touch up my makeup and brush out my hair.

Once done, I take a good look at myself in the mirror.

Not bad.

I wasn't being conceded by any means. I have my flaws, but I learned long ago to enhance the parts of myself I love the most.

Taking a breath, I make my way back out of the bathroom and through my room. I step into my office long enough to nab my phone and purse, then make my way toward the front door. I snatch up my keys from the hook I hang them on. Finally, I walk right out of the house and right into a wall of muscle.

"What the . . ." I snap, my head snapping back to glare at the face the wall of muscle belonged to. "What are you doing here, Griz?"

I couldn't believe he was standing on my doorstep. Who does he think he is? Three weeks since I've seen him, and he's back at my door. For what?

"Where ya going, sweets?" he asks, his arms going around me, pulling me even closer. Not that there was much space between the two of us.

"That's none of your concern." Planting my hands against his chest, I shove against him, only he doesn't budge. "You can let me go, Griz. You can also leave."

"Know you're pissed with me, baby, but I'm not gonna let you go."

Oh, the arrogant SOB. Who the hell does he think he is saying something like that to me?

“Let me go, Griz, I mean it.” I give another shove and lift my thigh enough for him to feel it against his groin. “I’m not afraid to put my knee to your balls in order to feed them to you.”

Griz gives me that shit-eating grin of his and presses me into my front door. “You wouldn’t do that to me, sweets. One, you might have your knee where you got it, but I won’t let you get the chance to actually use it. Two, if you try, it just means another reason to spank your sweet ass. Now, tell me where you’re off to looking sexy as you are?”

“I’m not telling you where I’m going because it’s none of your business. You aren’t going to be doing anything to me other than letting me go and leaving me the hell alone.”

Griz loses his grin and stares at me intently, but he does let me go. However, he doesn’t move far enough away from me for me to get away from him. I could at least breathe. Though with each breath I inhale his amazingly sinful cologne.

I suck in a breath and shove back my nerves at seeing him again. “I’m going to be late, so if you’ll please leave, that would be great.”

“I know I fucked up with you, Marley, and I’ll let you go wherever the fuck you’re going. Just know, though, when you get back, we’re talking. I don’t give a damn how late it gets.” Griz draws me close once again, his hand curling around the back of my head, and slams his mouth down on mine.

The kiss wasn’t gentle. It wasn’t sweet. What it was, was scorching hot that burned all the way to my toes. Just as quickly, he breaks his lips away from mine, releases

me, turns, and makes his way down my porch to where he parked his bike right behind my car.

While he does this, I follow him with my eyes. Watching him walk, the way his jeans fit him, damn, it's more than enough to make a woman swoon.

I don't even want to go on this stupid date. I should just say screw it all and find me a hotel to hole up in to get away from everyone for a night. Maybe the whole weekend.

No, I can't do that. I have plans tomorrow. Well, not really. It's just some things I want to do, and I intended to do them tomorrow.

Griz's gaze comes to mine as he swings his leg over, straddling his bike. The grin slides back into place on his lips. Oh boy, does that grin do things to me. Just as everything else about him seems to do. Even three weeks after he stood me up.

At that thought, I come out of the foggy daze of watching him and break eye contact with him. Gathering myself together, I make my way to my car while he starts his bike up. The thundering rumble of his beautiful bike comes to life, making me jealous of it. I don't think I've ever been jealous of an object as such. In fact, I've never actually been jealous in my life.

I take that back. I was as a teenager, and the boy I liked started going out with a friend of mine. It didn't last more than a couple of months, and that friend ended up ditching me, but it was whatever at that point. I figured anyone who would do that to a friend, knowing they have a crush on said boy, isn't worth being friends with.

Shoving that thought away, along with all thoughts Griz, I start my car. When Griz is out of the driveway and gone, I back out, stopping to check for any coming cars before going out on the road.

It's always best to be safe than sorry. I'd seen more than one car on this road nearly get hit by a speeding vehicle as it passed by. Driving toward the diner, I can't help but check behind me, searching for Griz. I'm not afraid to admit to myself that I was hoping he'd be following me, wondering where I was heading.

The fact that he gave in and left without much fight baffles me. More, it doesn't sit well with me. I mean, why on earth did he have to come this evening of all evenings?

God, I'm such a freaking idiot.

Pulling into the parking lot for the diner, I don't bother looking around for my date. He's probably already inside and waiting for me. I park in the first spot I find and get out, making sure to bring my purse with me.

I glance around the lot while making my way toward the door, my heart racing and blood pumping.

Dang it all to hell and back. What is wrong with me?

I should have kicked Griz when he kissed me.

I take a breath and step into the diner, spotting Deputy Riggs right away, sitting at one of the side booths. His head comes up, and he grins. Not a grin like Griz's by any means, but a genuine one.

Totally weird.

As I make my way toward Deputy Riggs, he slides out of the booth.

"I was starting to think you weren't going to show up," Deputy Riggs says.

“Sorry, I was held up with a call,” I lie.

I flipping hate lying. I’m not a liar, and I’m not really good at it either. What makes me feel better about this lie is that it was the last thing I did before getting ready to leave the house.

“It’s all good. You’re here now.” Leaning forward, he grips my hand in his.

My gaze shifts to where he’s touching me. I can’t help but feel awkward from the fact he’s even touching me to begin with. I shouldn’t be here. I should’ve canceled. I should never have agreed to the date in the first place.

Deloris comes to the table a moment later, eyes on me. “Hey, darlin’, how you doing today?”

I jerk back slightly, a sense of guilt filling me for some unknown reason.

“Deloris, I’m good. What about you?” I greet sheepishly.

“Same ol’ same ol’. Still kickin’ it. You two want your usual drinks?” she asks. I’m guessing she knows Deputy Riggs’s order by heart as she does mine.

“That’d be great.” I shift a look to my date to see him grinning at Deloris.

“Sounds good, Deloris. Can we both get the daily special for today as well?” he orders.

Orders for both of us.

What if I didn’t want the daily special? I want to ask this, but I bite off the question and glance back to Deloris.

“What is today's special?”

“Old man in the back has got a Mississippi roast slathered up on some mashed taters and his homestyle gravy. It also comes with a slice of cornbread to go with it.”

Okay, well, that sounded amazing.

“Sounds like it'll be good,” I murmur, nodding.

“It sure will be.” Deloris grins. “Be back with your drinks.”

“Hope you don't mind me orderin' for us both,” Deputy Riggs says as Deloris walks away. “They always have good daily specials.”

“It's fine. I just like to know what I'm getting before I get it,” I tell him.

“I get that.” He nods and shifts back in his seat. “So, what made you move out this way?”

“Someone had to be close to my grandma.” I shrug and clasp my hands in my lap. “You know, I don't even know what your first name is. I keep wanting to call you Deputy Riggs.”

Chuckling, he slouches in his seat and cocks his head slightly. “It's David.”

Nodding, I give Deloris a smile as she places the drinks on the table. “Thank you.”

“No problem, sweetheart,” she says as the bell over the door chimes.

I glance over to see who it is, only to feel my heart start racing at the sight of Griz. His eyes locked on me as three other men step in behind him.

Oh boy. This is not good.

And if the look he gives me is anything to go by, I'm in trouble.

Big trouble.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

GRIZ

Fucking bullshit.

I knew I shouldn't have walked away from her when I was at her house.

If I hadn't left, she wouldn't be sitting at a table with fuckwad Deputy Riggs. The asshole was doing his best to flirt and touch her.

From where I sat with my brothers, I could clearly see them both.

"You got it bad for her, don't you?" Blow asks from across the table.

Blow, Keys, and Shiner had decided to join me at the diner. I hadn't even had to ask them. They saw me in the lot parking my bike, and the three of them followed suit. No questions were asked about what I was doing here.

They all know it's owned by my aunt and uncle, and you can always get some damn good food.

"From the looks of it, I think she's got it just a bad," Shiner states laughingly. "You see the look she got on her face when she saw him come in?"

"Oh yeah, it was the look of a woman who knew she was in fuckin' trouble." Key chuckles, playing with the edge of the menu. "Gotta admit, brother, she's pretty in

person.”

“What are you gonna do about her date?”

I shift a glare at each of them before answering Blow’s question. “I’m just waiting for the right moment to put an end to the bullshit date.”

In the past three weeks, I’ve done my best to stay away from her. I worked around the clock getting shit done at not just the garage but also the club’s other businesses. I even helped my uncle here a few times when he needed something fixed.

It’d been hard staying away from Marley. I found myself several times going in the direction of her house only to turn around and head wherever it was I was going in the first place.

The very fact I can’t get the woman out of my head pisses me off. I barely know a damn thing about her.

My dad’s words filter through my head, constantly reminding me of the saying he made sure to ingrain in me.

Fuck.

One thing I’ve concluded in all of this is Marley is mine. Seeing her with fucking Deputy Riggs just pisses me off all the more. What the fuck is she thinking?

I swear when I get her back to her house, I’m going to give her the spanking I should have given her weeks ago. Too many times, I’ve jacked off to that damn picture of her and that toy. Because of her, I haven’t been able to fuck any of the fallen harlots at the clubhouse or any woman for that matter. I tried once. Bitch got her mouth on my cock and couldn’t get me going enough to do shit.

“Whatcha plannin’ to do, brother?” Keys asks.

Grinning in his direction, I cock a brow. “I’m gonna get her ass on the back of my bike, take her where she won’t be able to get away from me, then I’m gonna show her the error of her ways.”

“You sure you wanna do that?” Shiner asks.

“Yeah, why you ask?”

Why wouldn’t I want to do what I said?

“Because it seems she’s ending the date and leaving now,” he remarks, jutting his chin in Marley’s direction.

I whip my head around to see Marley leaving, a container holding food in her hand. I glance back to where she’d been sitting to see Deputy Riggs was also gathering his stuff and leaving.

Interesting.

Climbing out of the seat, I give my brothers a two-finger salute and follow after Marley. I keep a good distance between us, not wanting her to see me just yet. She didn’t know that I was going to follow her ass back to her house and get started on what I’d already warned her I was planning to do.

I narrow my gaze on Marley, watching as she struts her ass across the parking lot toward her car. My cock thickens at the sight of her sweet ass. My hands itch to grab hold of her ass and hold onto it while I slam into her pussy. The fact is in the past three weeks, all I could think about was getting in her pants, sinking into her pussy. I thought about it so much it was in my damn dreams. To make it even worse, I hadn’t

been able to get the taste of her kiss out of my mouth. I didn't even want to.

Marley gets in her car, starts to back up, and only then do I move to my bike to follow her.

Pulling into the driveway behind her car, I don't waste time in getting off the back of my bike and moving to her.

By the time Marley gets out of her car, I'm right there in her space.

"What are you doing, Griz?" she demands, her nostrils flaring, cheeks flush, eyes narrowed.

"Wanna explain why you decided to go on a date with fuckin' Deputy Riggs?" I throw the question in answer to hers. "You want to explain to me why not even three weeks ago, I had my hand in your pants, mouth on your tits, and you feel it's all good to move on to the next guy?"

"I don't need to explain myself to you or anyone else, Graham Holland," she snaps, shoving me just the barest bit. But it was enough for her to maneuver the car door closed. "Go away and leave me alone."

Rather than grabbing her, I follow behind her, eyes on her ass, enjoying the view. Damn, if it ain't a beautiful sight. It's not overly large. And it wasn't small. Marley's ass was just the right amount to fill a man's hands. Now, her tits were another story. They were large enough to spill out of my hands. I could easily fuck her tits and intend to do just that while she holds them for me and sucks the head of my cock at the same time.

The two of us walk up the walkway and the two steps onto her cute little porch. Marley unlocks the door and comes to a halt just inside, her body going rigid.

Glancing past her, there's no missing the destruction of the room.

"The fuck?" I demand, hands going to her waist. I pull her out of the way, grab my gun from the shoulder holster under my cut, and move into the little house.

"What are you doing, Griz?" she demands, coming behind me.

"Stay put until I give you the all-clear," I order her and move farther into the room. I scan over the disaster of the living room and make my way to the hall leading to the other rooms. I quickly check first the one that she's made an office then go to find her room. Both rooms weren't touched like the living room was, but on her dresser mirror was a message.

Leave bitch .

The hell is that about?

Who the hell would ransack Marley's living room but leave the rest of her house alone?

Quickly, I re-holster my gun and went back to the living room to find Marley already on her knees, cleaning up some papers in front of her and putting them back in a little box.

"Rest of the house is good," I tell her, and start picking up some of the other stuff. "But whoever it was left you a message."

"What message?" she asks without looking up.

"On your mirror, says 'Leave bitch' in black marker."

“Great.” I hear her mutter to herself.

“You know anyone who would do this?”

“Nope,” she answers sharply, taking the little box and setting it gently on the coffee table she already righted. “I can handle this on my own. You don’t have to help.”

Straightening from my crouch, I close the distance between the two of us. I grab her upper arm and haul her up and into my arms, one going around her waist, the other into her hair.

“I’m not leaving you to handle this shit by yourself. Plus, you and I, we’ve got shit to work out.” Dipping my head down, I brush my lips across hers. “We’re gonna do that, sweets. We’re gonna get shit cleaned up, talk, then I’m gonna fuck you. Then tomorrow, we’re gonna talk some more.”

Marley’s lips part in a gasp, but she doesn’t say anything, just stares into my eyes. “There’s nothing to talk about, Griz.”

“Graham,” I correct her.

I don’t know what it is, but I don’t want her calling me Griz. When she said my name outside by her car, I liked it. Even if she was using it to scold me.

“What?” She blinks, brows furrowing.

“You don’t call me Griz. To you, I’m Graham.”

Before I showed up at her place earlier, I made a decision and I was sticking to it. Marley was going to . . . no, not going to . . . she is mine. She just didn’t know it yet.

“Are you serious right now?” she snaps, pressing her hands into my chest, doing her best to shove me away.

Her shoving was completely pointless since I wasn't gonna let her get away from me. I like her right where she is.

“Oh, I'm definitely serious. More serious than you know.”

“More like you're a nutso.”

Grinning down at her, I claim her lips for a hard, quick kiss and let her go. “Let's get this stuff cleaned up. Then we'll talk.”

CHAPTER NINE

MARLEY

This can't be happening. Griz being here. Him seeing my house in disarray. Seeing that someone had come in and violated my home. Sure, they didn't do more than toss things around, flip things over, and knock stuff off tables. Oh, and I can't forget the message they wrote in freaking permanent marker on my damn mirror.

But none of that is what I can't believe is happening right now. It's the fact that Griz is telling me what's going to happen.

I swear the man is a total nutso.

I could easily have cleaned up my living room without his help, but I have to admit it's nice to have him here. Knowing someone was in my home that hadn't been invited doesn't sit well with me. I have a security system, and I remember setting the dang thing before leaving the house.

Or at least, I'm ninety percent sure I did. Griz had been at my door when I was leaving, so I could have been distracted. I'm pretty sure, though, that I did set it.

What also got to me was the fact Griz was under the assumption the two of us were going to do the dirty. After he blew me off three weeks ago, I was not going to just give in and let him between my legs like that. No way. No how. Nope. Nada.

To make things worse, I ended my date early because I couldn't enjoy my meal with

Griz being at the diner. He'd been so close to me, and after that kiss he'd given me, I'd been unable to think of anything else.

David Riggs hadn't noticed this. He was more about talking about himself and work that when I found the chance to end the date, I did by faking a phone call. It was easy, telling him that I had to go. Something had come up, and he took it all in stride. Even asked me to dinner again, to which I had to tell him I'd have to check my plans for the upcoming week.

What I didn't tell him was that I had no intention of going on another date with him.

This doesn't mean I was going to jump right back into things with Griz, either. He freaking ghosted me for weeks. He stood me up and then showed up out of the blue.

Why won't he just leave?

Right, because he says we're going to get shit cleaned up, talk, then he plans to fuck me. Oh, and he said tomorrow we're gonna talk some more. What's there to talk about?

Sighing, I shake the thoughts out of my head and take a breath, readying myself to face off with Griz. It didn't take long for us to get my living room cleaned back up, thankfully. Whoever did this probably wanted to freak me out, but all it did was annoy the hell out of me. I mean, it's immature bullshit, in my opinion. Trying to scare me off isn't going to do anything else but tick me off.

I actually like where I live, and I don't plan on moving. They'll have to come up with something else to scare me away.

"Well, that's done now," I mutter, wiping my hands on my jeans and facing Griz. "You can tell me what it is you want to talk to me about so you can leave." I don't

mention him screwing me because I can still remember the feel of his mouth on my breasts.

Griz grins and stalks across the room, coming right at me. His arms come around my waist, and he shifts us, twisting. He sits down on my couch and brings me down on his lap, my legs straddling either side of his hips. “Now that we’ve got the room cleaned up, it’s time we talk.”

“There’s nothing to talk about.” I huff, crossing my arms in front of me, knowing just what my arms crossed does to my breasts. Griz doesn’t even hide his interest in the fact my breasts are pushed upward. Or that my shirt is showing an ample amount of cleavage.

“Sweets, we can either talk, or I can take you to your room and fuck you, your choice.”

Okay, that did not go straight between my legs and make me cream my panties. The huskiness of his voice mixed with the look in his eyes and his fingers stroking my waist, it’s all nearly too much. All right, so it is too much. Way. Way. Way. Too much. He’s going to my head, and it honestly baffles me how easily he gets to me.

“Fine talk,” I snap. I lean back, planting my bottom fully on his legs.

“Why’d you go on a date with Deputy David Riggs?” he asks.

“That’s none of your business. Get to the point of you being here already.”

I just wanted him to finish this conversation and leave.

Griz loses the glimmer of lust in his gaze, his eyes darkening in another way. One I don’t know how to decipher.

“I fucked up, sweets,” he states, his tone deepening further, almost gravelly. “Three weeks ago, I fucked up by not showing up to take you out.”

Well, at least he acknowledges that he screwed up.

“The last bitch I was seeing put out a bogus protective order against me. The club’s lawyer was able to get to the bottom of that shit and get it dismissed. But it all fucked with my head. I ended shit with her because I don’t deal with liars. I can’t stand a liar. I do what I gotta do to protect my club. I didn’t like the fact she didn’t tell me that she was a cop’s daughter, and her old man was going to fuck with the club.”

“I’m not following how she lied.” The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them.

“She hid the fact that she was a cop’s daughter from me. That in itself was a lie.”

“A lie of omission.” I could understand that.

“Exactly, anyway, I ended things with her. It fucked with me because I did like her. Thought I did, at least. What it was that fucked with me most was that I let a woman get under my skin and close to me. Again, I thought I did. For a while, that’s what I thought. Then you popped by the garage, served me those fuckin’ papers, and damn, if I didn’t learn the difference. Learned it quick, and that alone was enough to fuck with my head all over again.”

“I’m not following,” I tell him. His words are a bit confounding. I mean, sure, I get some of where he’s coming from, but I don’t get the parts about me and how I get under his skin.

“Three weeks ago, I made the decision that I wasn’t going to see where things could go with you. It’s why I fucked up and didn’t show for our date.”

Now, that didn't make me happy in the least. I didn't need him telling me this. I already knew. Him saying it now is like him rubbing it in.

“What you gotta get though is I'm here with you now. Because in those weeks, I also learned that I can't get the taste of your mouth out of my head. I can't even get the feel of you beneath me while I sucked your tits in my mouth out of my head. All I keep thinking about is how good you felt under me. How I liked the sounds of your moans. You, sweets,” his fingers of one hand shift upward until he curls his fingers along my neck and pulls me forward, his head tipping back slightly, “you got under my skin in a way I didn't want to understand. Hell, I wanted to fight it. But I can't. I want you too damn much to think of anything else.”

With those words leaving his mouth, he claims my lips. His tongue plunges in, and there's no other way to put it, but what it is, he kisses me thoroughly. Beautifully. I didn't think a kiss could be like this. Even the one we shared weeks ago holds no resemblance.

Griz shifts us until I'm under him in the same position we'd been in the last time we were here like this.

I whimper into his kiss, loving it, at the same time hating it. I don't get why. Okay, I do, because I know I'm going to end up giving in to his touch. Giving in to him in every way I know I shouldn't. He'll take what he wants from me, then leave me in the dust right alongside every other girl who gives in to a man like him.

Griz needs to get the word heartbreaker tattooed across his head as a warning because that's exactly what he does to women. He just doesn't know that's what he's doing.

Needing more of him, I tighten my arms around his shoulders and rub myself against him.

Unlike last time, I intend to make sure that the two of us finish what we started. I'm not going to let him leave me longing for him again. Not this time around. I won't be left burning for him when he's done with me. I'll take from him just as he takes from me.

CHAPTER TEN

MARLEY

“We’re moving this to the bedroom. There’s no way I am going to take you on the couch,” Griz snarls, jerking his body away and getting to his feet.

Before I can completely comprehend what he’s saying, Griz has me in his arms. I’ve never in my life been carried in such a way. In fact, no one has ever picked me up. Not since I was a little girl, and my dad would pick me up and twirl me around.

I refuse to pay attention to the fluttering in my stomach and how dainty Griz makes me feel by holding me like this.

The moment we clear my bedroom door and get close to my bed, he lowers me to my feet.

“Strip, sweets, I wanna see all of you,” Griz states while removing his cut and toeing off his boots.

Oh my.

My eyes follow his movements as he sets his cut on my nightstand. He places the hat he seems to always have on with it. His shirt is the next to go, and I find myself struggling to breathe at the sight of his magnificent chest, bare of any hair. I knew he was fit, but I didn’t realize that under his fitted tee.

Damn, my panties which were already wet, become soaked at just the sight of him. He's glorious, and for at least tonight . . . he's mine.

"You're not getting naked, Marley. I don't want to have to rip those pretty clothes off you, baby, but I will if you don't strip them off right now."

A tingling shiver rushes down my spine at the husky tone of his voice.

"And if I want you to rip them off me?" I ask at the same time, reaching for the hem of my blouse.

"Sweets, you want me to ruin those pretty clothes? I've got no problem doing just that," he says, hands going to his belt.

Griz's eyes go to my chest as the shirt clears over my breasts, and I draw it over my head. Dropping it to the floor, I lift one booted foot to unzip the side. "This is only going to be a one-time thing," I decide to inform him, letting the boot fall from my foot and doing the same to the other.

Griz's gaze snaps back up to mine, and one of his brows cocks, giving him a cockier appearance. "Is that so?"

"It is."

There's no way it can be more than that. I won't let it. This man could end up hurting me. Not just physically, if he so wished, but emotionally.

"We'll see about that," he says, stepping into my space, hands on my hips. Dipping his head down, Griz brushes his nose against mine. "We'll just see about that."

Between one breath and the next, I find myself going backward, falling onto my

back.

Griz comes with me, his arms going to the buttons of my jeans. “We’ll start by seeing just how good I can make you feel.”

Wow.

“I am serious about what I said. One time, Griz. That’s it.”

Griz’s eyes flash with something I’m unsure of how to describe it. Maybe lust mixed with frustration. Or maybe both of those with determination. Yeah. That has to be it.

“We’ll see about that.”

Before I can say anything further, his lips are on mine, his tongue sliding in past my parting lips. Everything moves at the speed of lightning, yet still slow enough, I feel every touch as if it were hitting each cell in my body.

Griz uses his hands to toy with my breasts, pinching and pulling at my nipples. His lips break away from my mouth and he peppers one kiss after another along my jaw, down the side of my neck, between my breasts, trailing downward to my pelvis.

With his fingers at my breasts, he lowers his head even farther and slides his tongue right across my clit.

“Oh God.” My body involuntarily bucks at the simple touch of his tongue.

Griz tweaks one nipple between two fingers while lowering the fingers of his other hand down my stomach to join his tongue in tormenting me further.

With tongue and fingers, he toys with my entrance. One finger slides through the

juices, dips inside, hooks, and hits just the right spot that draws a lengthy moan from my lips.

“Feels good, doesn’t it, sweets?”

“Yes,” I breathe unable to speak properly. The sensations are nearly overwhelming, but it feels oh-so good.

“Wanna feel even better?” he asks, sliding a second finger inside to join the first. “Wanna feel like you’re gonna die if you don’t have that next bite of pleasure I can give you?”

Fingers scissor inside me, touching just right, drawing a gasp from me.

“I take that as a yes.” Griz chuckles.

“Stop talking and fuck me with your tongue.”

Did that come out of my mouth?

“You want me to fuck you with my tongue, huh?” he asks, cocking a brow, eyes flashing with that lustful glint filling them.

“Yes.”

More than anything. I’d been tormented by dreams where he used his mouth on me, delivered such pleasure that I thought it could have been real. Unfortunately, it wasn’t, and I need him to give me what I wanted. What I need.

“Tell me again, baby, tell me that you want me to fuck you with my tongue. Make you fly.”

Oh my.

Holy mother of creaming orgasms, he's going to make me do that just with those words alone. That and his fingers that are growing slicker with my juices.

"Make me fly, Graham."

I barely get those words out before he goes about doing just that.

Griz devours me and drives me to the edge over and over again. Yet, when I thought my release would come, he changed tactics. Whimpering and thrashing, it's all I can do to keep from begging him to stop tormenting me. If I did that, he might stop altogether, and I didn't want him to. I want . . . no . . . I need more of him.

Him inside me.

Moving, filling me deep with his cock.

With each touch, he's taking a part of me, and I didn't think it was possible.

It's all I can do to keep from allowing him to take it all.

It's only one night.

It can't be anything more than that.

I lose count of the times he brings me to the edge. I want to scream in frustration. I want to beg him to keep going. To let me come. To fuck me. Hard. Deep. I just want him to give it all to me once and for all.

"So fuckin' sweet, Marley," Griz murmurs. He lifts just enough to look up and meet

my gaze. His fingers toy lazily with my pussy. “I could eat your pussy, all day long and never get enough, sweets, but gotta admit, my cock wants inside your sweet heat. It’s hard enough to pound nails. I don’t think any bitch has ever gotten me this hard, baby.”

“Did you just call me a bitch?” I ask, panting slightly.

“No, baby, I didn’t call you a bitch.” He grins, laps at my entrance, and pulls his fingers out. He lifts his body over mine. Face dipping down for him to kiss the tip of my nose, “Said no bitch has ever gotten me as hard as you’ve got me right now.”

Oh my.

Well, okay, then.

“Now, I’m gonna fuck you, Marley, and you’re gonna go wild for me. I want you flying over the edge and taking me with you.”

Griz lifts my legs, hooking them over his arms, and thrusts home. The movement is abrasive. It’s harsh. Still, it’s beautiful. Feeling him fill me so full is glorious. He wants me flying over that edge he’s kept me teetering on. If he keeps this up, I’ll do just that.

Two strokes into him filling me, and he gets just what he wanted. Griz sends me sailing right over the edge, and as he does so, he starts pounding inside me, giving me everything I never thought I could feel. I had sex before, but it’s never felt like this. Like I was coming home rather than just getting off.

“Graham,” I cry out his name, skin my nails into his shoulders, and hold onto him.

“Fuck, Marley, your pussy is so damn good. Tastes sweet on my lips and grips me

just as I knew you would. Fuck, baby, you're gonna suck me dry, and we're only just getting started."

Just getting started?

That can't be.

Sweat drips from his brow and beads his body and mine. I didn't ever think sweat could be sexy or erotic, but with Griz, here and now, oh yeah, it definitely was.

I don't know how much time passes, but when Griz tightens the grip he has on my hips, I find myself catapulted straight into yet another orgasm right along with him.

It's a beautiful thing, and I almost hate that it's going to be over so soon. Maybe I could take on more than just a night. Have more of him.

No. Just tonight. No more. He'll only break my heart when he decides he's done with me .

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GRIZ

Fuck me. No other woman has ever been as sweet as Marley is. Just the taste of her alone is enough to make me an addict for her pussy. I could eat her all day long and never get bored of it. Her responses for me . . . shit, no one has ever come as hard as she did. Her juices drenched my cock, coated my tongue, and sealed itself in my memory.

If she thinks she can really get away with thinking this shit was happening for one night only, she's wrong as hell. That wasn't going to fly. Seeing her at the diner with Deputy fuckwad Riggs, I made the decision she was gonna be mine, and I wasn't going to change it.

Now, I have to get her to see my way of thinking.

Breathing heavily, I reluctantly pull from the depths of her sweetness and collapse next to her, pulling her into me. No way am I going to lay here and not have her in my arms. Even if I have to get up and take care of the condom. It's lucky I'd even remembered to put one on in the first place. I'd been hard as hell and ready to fuck her.

"Give me a sec, sweets. I'll get rid of the condom, and we'll go again." I press a kiss to her temple and take a breath.

"Again?" she whispers, lifting her head from my chest. "Not possible."

“Again,” I confirm, grinning. “It’s very much possible, baby, and I’ll prove it to you.”

Fuck getting up. Discarding the condom quickly, I snag another, rip the wrapper open, and slide it into place. Rolling Marley to her back, I come over her, between her legs, and slide right back into her heated, slick pussy.

“Fuck yeah, sweets, you’re gonna burn me alive with how hot your pussy is for me.”

“How can you be hard again already?”

I grin down at her at the astonishment of her question.

“‘Cause I’ve wanted nothing more than to be right here for the last three weeks. I jacked off more times than you can count to that picture you sent me. Fuck me, I’d think of you playing with yourself and come hard just thinking about how hot you’d be for me.”

Moving inside her, I want to demand that she acknowledge there was something between us. That she was going to be mine. If that means spending the rest of the night inside her, then so damn be it. It won’t be a problem for me. Just means I’ll enjoy exhausting us both until daybreak. Then again come morning.

“You need to leave, I have plans today,” she murmurs sleepily.

“What plans would those be?” I ask, stroking my hand along her spine.

“Doesn’t matter what they are, just that I have them.” Even as she says this, she snuggles into my chest.

“I know you don’t work weekends, so what’re your plans?”

If she thinks she's doing anything today that doesn't involve me, she's in for one hell of a surprise.

"How do you know I don't work weekends?" Marley lifts her head off my chest enough to meet my gaze with her inquisitive eyes.

Swear I'll tie her to the bed if I have to and make her scream in all the right ways. The idea holds merit. I wouldn't mind seeing her tied up and ready for me to treat her to all the pleasure I could give her.

There'll be time for that later.

The two of us still need to have our conversation.

"Already told you, I've got my ways of finding out information when I wanna know something."

Keys had been generous in getting me info on her. I hadn't wanted him to get everything on her. Her life story is something she can share with me herself.

"You looked into me? How much did you look?"

Now, why would she ask that?

"Got something to hide, sweets?"

"My life isn't any of your business." Marley shoves away, rolls, and goes to get out of her bed.

I let her do all of this before reaching for her. I grab her at the waist, drag her back into the bed roll her back to her back, and come over her. "Told you already I was

making you my business. That you and me, we're gonna work this shit out between the two of us."

"And I told you, Griz, that it was only going to be one night. Night's over. Time for you to go."

"Oh, I don't think so."

"Why's that?" There's no missing the snarky tone in her voice.

"Because, Marley, baby, the way you lit up for me last night, no way in hell I won't be getting back in there."

"You're delusional, Griz."

"That's not what you were saying the third and fourth time I fucked you."

She'd been begging for me to take her harder. To give her everything I had to give, and I'd done it. I fucked her hard. Fucked her rough. Fucked her without holding back. Only during the last bout did I flip positions up to have her ride my cock while I watched her ride me. Damn, the sight was a beautiful thing, and I look forward to enjoying her riding me again.

Maybe I'll even record her doing it. Get something for when I'm on a run. It'd be better than a damn photo, for sure. Especially with the way she goes wild for me.

"Screw you," she snaps, shoves at my chest, her nostrils flaring. "Get off me."

"I get off you, you gotta lose the attitude 'cause we still have shit to talk about."

We had to talk. Especially about the fact someone broke into her house, and she

didn't seem phased by it. Didn't even blink. Just cleaned the shit up and went on with her business.

"We don't have anything to talk about." She huffs, drops her hands, and glares.

"Baby, we do, and you know it."

Deciding to change tactics. I roll off Marley, out of the bed, and snag my jeans off the floor. I pull them on, leaving them undone. I turn back to her and stretch a hand out to her. "Come on, sweets, let's get some coffee and talk."

Marley looks at me for a moment like she's trying to decide whether or not she should or maybe could. Whichever, it didn't matter. She was going to do it regardless.

Ignoring my hand, Marley gets out of the bed, walking—not bothered by being naked in front of me—to her bathroom, closing the door behind her. Moments later, she comes out, still naked, and walks straight to me. Only then does she squat down, grab my tee, and pull it on, covering her body.

Fuck me. I can see it now. She's going to be a pain in my ass. But in my gut, I know it'll be damn worth it.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MARLEY

What the hell am I doing?

Why couldn't I make him leave?

Instead of forcing him to go, I put his shirt on and made my way out of my room to the kitchen. If I was going to have to talk, without that much sleep, I needed coffee. Lots of coffee and substances.

Without a word, I prep my coffee, grab two slices of toast, and put them in the toaster before looking at Griz.

Damnit, all to hell. Why does he have to be so unbelievably good-looking?

"Do you want toast?"

Of course, I have to be polite and ask him. My mom would have a conniption if she found out I had a guest, no matter the reasons why, and didn't offer something to eat or drink.

"Yeah, sweets, I'll take some toast." The grin that slides into place on his lips causes me to clench my thighs together. It's a good thing his shirt falls to my knees.

Rolling my eyes, I snatch out two more slices of bread. "Grab the butter and

strawberry jam from the frig.” If he’s going to be here, he can at least help.

“Strawberry jam? What’s wrong with grape?” he asks, sounding more than a bit amused.

“Yes, strawberry jam. It’s homemade, thank you very much. And for the record, I don’t like grapes unless they are green ones. They’re way better. Plus, strawberry tastes better no matter what,” I inform him while taking the two slices already finished out of the toaster.

Sliding the other two slices in, I twist to him as he sets the butter and jam on the counter. “Do you have a problem with strawberry jam?”

Okay, so it comes out a bit snappish, but I’m coming out of my sex-induced fog that hazed over all my brain functions, and I need to eat. Having not done that and not having caffeine, now that’s a problem, and he doesn’t want to deal with me. I’ve been told I could be a real bitch in the morning without my needs being met.

“No problem with it, sweets, but gotta say my preference is to the grape.” He chuckles and comes toward me, wrapping his arms around my waist. “Still doesn’t matter. To me, I’ve found something that I like a whole lot more.”

Well, okay, then.

It’s all I can do to ignore the feeling those words cause inside me. There’s no denying it, though. I like the way they make me feel.

In the process of ignoring this, I slather the butter and jam on both slices already out and set them on one of the little plates I use for breakfast toast in the morning. The plates are cute and little saucers, I just don’t see the point in putting them in the cabinet. They’re just the perfect size, and I like having them on display.

Sliding the plate toward Griz, I nod to it. “Go ahead and take these two. I’ll get the other two.”

The toaster pops up, and I quickly slather both pieces and take a bite while pouring a cup of coffee for myself. I set the pot down next to Griz. He could fix his own.

I barely move away before Griz hooks me around my stomach and pulls me close once again.

“You don’t have to hold onto me,” I say, pointing out the obvious, and he doesn’t seem to care.

“Know that.”

That’s all he says, fingers flexing at my stomach, and he fixes his cup of coffee. Like me, I notice he drinks it black. No cream, sugar, or milk.

I don’t speak another word to him until I’ve eaten both slices of toast, and I pour myself a second cup. Griz releases me, takes both plates to my sink across the kitchen, turns the water on, and surprises me further when he rinses both plates off.

Wow. A man who actually knows how to at least rinse. This is fine with me, but I would have washed it and put it in the strainer. Since it’s just me, I don’t ever have a lot of dishes, so there’s no use in using the dishwasher. I think the only time I used it was when I first moved in and wanted to wash all my dishes before putting them away. I couldn’t just unpack them and put them in the cabinet. They had to be cleaned, though they already were.

Turning the water off, Griz comes back to me, takes my hand which is not wrapped around my coffee mug, and pulls me into my living room with him. Once there, he sits and draws me down onto his lap, my legs on either side of him, and his hands

resting on my bottom. How he managed this without me spilling a drop of coffee on him is somewhat baffling. It's a full mug, and he maneuvered me with such ease.

"Now that we got that out of the way. It's time for us to have our talk," he says firmly.

Blinking, I lift the mug to my lips and take a sip, staring at him, waiting for him to continue.

"Someone broke into your house, and you didn't even blink. This happen before?"

"I don't see how any of this is any of your business," I inform him and take another sip of my coffee.

Griz's hands leave my bottom. One goes to my hip, the other coming to take the mug from my hand. He sets it on the end table next to my couch and brings his hand back to my hip. All of this he does quickly as tension seems to build in him.

"You wanna change that answer, sweets?"

"Why would I do that?"

"Maybe because I think I've shown you multiple times throughout the night I was makin' you my business. You tell me or I do a deep dive and find out what you seem to want to keep hidden."

"You wouldn't dare," I snap, balking at the very thought, but even as I say this, I know he has the means of doing it. He found my address and the little bit he has.

"Sweets, I've got no problem doing what I gotta do to find out what I want. I'd prefer it if you told me rather than me having to get the information elsewhere. It'd be a

whole lot easier.”

“Why do you seem not to get this? We’re not a thing. Last night was a one-time deal. You have no right to look into me. Nor do you need to worry about what happened.” I shove against his chest and do my best to get up. I’m caught off guard that he actually allows me to do so.

Getting to my feet, I put space between us, hands on my hips, all the while glaring at Griz. However, I don’t miss the calculating glint in his gaze or the fact that he sits there lounging back. He looks like he has no cares in the world, but my senses are screaming at me to be wary of the man sprawled out in front of me.

“You just need to leave, Griz.” I sigh, hating myself because I don’t want him to. It’s just for the best.

I take a step back, watching Griz stand, unfortunately, I didn’t calculate that he could move. Between one second and the other, I find myself not moving back from him but plastered to his front.

“I’m not leaving, Marley. You can get that thought out of your head. I want you. I want this. What we’ve got between us. I know you feel it as much as I do. We’re gonna explore it. See where it goes between us.”

“And what if I don’t want this? How do I know you aren’t going to flake on me? Hurt me? Or —”

“Fucked up with you,” he says, interrupting me. His fingers slide up into my hair, tangling in the strands. “I know I fucked up by leadin’ you on then ghostin’ you the way I did. But I’m not gonna fuck up like that again. Not with you, Marley. Can’t guarantee I won’t hurt you, though, I’d never fuckin’ hurt you on purpose. I’m an asshole, and I know it. I’m sure to say some shit that could hurt your feelings. That’s

when you gotta get in my face about it. I will say, you never do that shit in front of my brothers, though. You got something to say, or I do some shit, you tell me when we're alone."

"So, what, you can talk to me as you want in front of your friends, and I'm just supposed to take it?"

If that's the case, then I definitely won't be partaking in any relationship with him.

"No, that's not what I'm saying. If I did, my brothers would have my balls themselves. Hell, their ol' ladies would be all up in my shit. What I'm sayin' here is that we got a problem, I fuck up and you need to get in my face about it, you do it in private."

I open my mouth to say something, only to close it. Griz has me totally and completely flabbergasted. I'm not sure what to say. On the one hand I can respect what he's saying. It's the way my own parents are. If they have problems, they handle them in private. They don't bring it to anyone else around them. On the other hand, I don't like being told what I should or shouldn't do, especially if it comes to someone talking to me in a way that will piss me off.

"I see you're struggling with the idea of you having to hold your shit back in public," he says. The side of his lip twitching, not quite turning up into a grin.

"Well, who can blame me? I'm the type of person who lets things fly when I have to." I shrug nonchalantly. "It's who I am."

"And I wouldn't want you to be anyone else."

Okay, that was really sweet.

Maybe more than a little sweet.

It's majorly sweet.

And I really, really, like it.

"How about this," he murmurs. He shifts us from where he had us, moves us to the couch, lowers me down, and comes over me. "We just see where it goes. Take it day by day. That work for you?"

I could do that. Day by day is the way I live my life. I could totally do that.

"I could do that." I nod.

"Good. Now, talk to me about who the fuck would have broken into your house."

Sighing, I relax underneath him. "I honestly don't know who would break into my house. And before you ask, no, it's not the first time someone has done something like this. I had a guy do it before. He was trying to scare me into dropping something I was working on."

"What were you working on?"

Wasn't that a loaded question?

Shifting slightly, I divert my gaze, focusing on his shoulder, not answering right away. Griz takes notice of this, shifts off me, and then maneuvers the both of us until we're fully stretched out on my couch. My body between his and the back cushions. His body braced up on his elbow, his body along the back cushions. The fingers of his free hand coming up to grip my chin gently.

“Tell me, Marley.”

“You already know I’m a skip tracer and process server, both I do freelance.”

“Got that, baby,”

“Right.” Nodding, I trace my fingers on his chest. “I worked alongside some friends who had a business in the same line of work, but they were more. They’re bounty hunters, and I helped them bring in some seriously bad dudes. Unfortunately, one of them had friends who were just like them, only worse because they knew how not to get caught.”

Montrell and his crew, they’d been some serious creepy dudes. I wouldn’t say they were a cult or anything, just a group of weirdos who knew how to stalk and kill. Montrell had been head of the group, and his right-hand man was the one who we caught. He didn’t take to kindly to it and ended up stalking me. Grail and Bash, they’re the ones who convinced me it was time for me to move. Since I moved on, I hadn’t heard anything from Montrell or anyone who followed him. And what happened in my living room was nothing compared to what I’d seen them do.”

“So, you had something like this happen before. It’s why you didn’t even blink,” Griz notes.

“Yeah,” I confirm. “But this isn’t the same MO.”

“You don’t think it’s the same person?”

“No, Montrell made sure I knew it was him and his people who broke in. The message was distinct. This was child’s play.”

“Child’s play or not, it’s not something to fuck around with. Who would want you to

get out of town?”

“I don’t know.” I honestly didn’t know. I haven’t been here that long to have made enemies. Shoot, the people that I’ve served papers to, I’ve seen multiple times, and not once have they said one bad thing to me. They might have been pissed about being served papers, but it wasn’t me who did that to them.

“Did you really move to town because of your grandma or because of this bullshit?”

I didn’t expect Griz’s question, and as I stare at him, I learn quickly what I should have already known, this man is in no way, shape, or form dense in any way whatsoever.

“I could’ve moved anywhere. Closer to home with my parents, I mean, I wasn’t that far from them, but I was at least a thirty-minute drive. I could’ve gone to live in Florida or even California if I wanted to. Instead, I came here. My parents, at dinner one night, were talking about how mom wanted Grandma Ryan to move closer to them and how she wouldn’t. I got that and told them I’d move here to be near her. She’s not a hapless old woman by any means. And she likes her freedom.”

“Can’t blame her there. She’s a good woman, makes cookies for the club every Christmas.” There’s no missing the affection in Griz’s voice.

“I didn’t know she made the cookies for the club.”

Every Christmas, when Mom and Dad would meet with Grandma, she’d have loads of cookies for my siblings and me. They were the best. I’m hoping since I’m living here now that I can get her to teach me her secret to making them so dang good.

“Yeah, she’s not far from the club, and Rain, Sniper’s ol’ lady, she visits with your grandma all the time.”

Interesting.

“Well, anyway, I highly doubt this has anything to do with Montrell,” I state, getting back to the subject at hand. “But to confirm this, I’ll give Grail or Bash a call. Last time I talked to them, they were out on a job chasing some idiot who thought he could beat the hell out of his wife and then skip town without consequences.”

“Go ahead and give them a call now, sweets. We rule this person out, we can see about figuring out who the fuck broke in. It might not seem like a big deal to you, but it’s still a damn big deal.”

“Okay,” I mutter. I know he’s right, but I still think it’s someone playing with me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GRIZ

Keeping my eye on Marley, I listen as she finishes her conversation with the two men she worked with before. I know myself well enough to know I'm not the jealous type, but I'm a possessive one. Listening to the way her voice changes, the affection in it, bothers me as I thought it would. Mainly because it held a different note than what she sounds like when I've got my cock inside her, or better yet, when she's talking to me in general.

I glance around the room while listening to her talk, and my gaze locks on the little box on the coffee table. Yesterday, before cleaning anything else up, I saw Marley clean up the contents of that first.

Looking over to Marley, seeing she's got her back to me, I reach over and open the little box. I noticed all of the papers looked older and wrinkled. I grab the first one on top and scan over it, instantly feeling the hairs on the back of my neck go up. Grabbing the next, I take in the contents of that one.

What the fuck are these?

It doesn't take a genius to know this shit is serious.

"What are you doing?" Marley snaps. She tosses her phone onto the table, snatches the paper from me, and closes the little box. "You had no right to go through this."

Staring at her, I don't move from where I'm sitting. I simply watch her closely.

Marley's nostrils flare, her eyes narrow, and she crosses her arms in front of her, pushing her tits upward. I trail the length of her body, enjoying the sight of her legs being on display beneath my shirt. My cock thickens in my jeans. I know what lies beneath my shirt. Not a damn thing. I could easily take that shirt off her, and she'd be naked. I'm willing to even bet between her legs is nice and slick, ready and waiting.

"What exactly is that bullshit?" I finally ask, leaning back and stretching an arm across the back of the couch.

"None of your business." Huffing, she sets the box back down and plants her hands on her hips. "You should leave."

"We've already had this discussion. I ain't leavin', Marley. When it comes to you, sweets, what that shit is in that box, it's my business."

The way her eyes seem to flare and her body tenses, I wait for what she might say next. I'm not about to let her piss me off. Not after we've established some of the bullshit between us. I won't let her go backward on any of it.

Marley opens and closes her mouth several times before clamping it shut once more. Stomping forward, she grabs her coffee mug and again and stomps off toward the kitchen.

It's all I can do not to laugh at the tantrum she seems to be having and yet controlling herself from saying something. Something she probably knows will get her in trouble. Not in trouble with me, well it could, but who the fuck knows.

I wait for her to come back into the room, the coffee mug still in her hands. It seems my woman really likes her coffee. I wonder what else she likes besides that. I want to

know more and more about her. Learning her favorite foods, shows, movies, all of it. I want to know.

Slowly, Marley comes to sit next to me, not looking at me directly but at the little box.

“Grandma Ryan gave me the box a while ago. It was my mom’s. Seems my mom had a stalker years ago. I’ve been going over them to figure out any clues as to who it might have been or if I could find the person responsible for them.”

“Did you ask your mom about them?”

“She refused to answer me about them. Honestly, she was furious I even brought them up and that I had them. My dad, he’s protective over my mom, he lost it. I’d never seen them like that, especially toward me. I’d come back home, and though they’ve called and texted, I haven’t really talked to them much since going home and asking them about them.”

“And you didn’t think you looking into those letters that the person who broke in was associated?”

“They can’t be related because I hadn’t fully started looking into them,” she denies and shakes her head. “I was going to start looking into records this week.”

“Why would you want to look into something that obviously freaks your parents out?” It doesn’t make sense to me.

“Because my mom had a stalker and because of this person, Mom rarely ever comes here. It’s why she wants my grandma to move closer to her, so she doesn’t have to come here. Whoever it was, was never caught.”

“Did she say it was her stalker?”

“She didn’t have to. What’s in that box is more than enough to prove it. On top of that, the way she reacted when I asked about them. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to come up with the logic for it. I know my parents. Whoever it was, had been and probably is still dangerous enough to keep them from coming back to where my mom’s from.”

That was as good an explanation as any.

“What did your friends have to say on the phone?” I ask, changing the topic.

“That Montrell was dead.”

I don’t miss the sigh of relief that the man was dead.

Cocking a brow, I shift to face her. “Dead?”

“Yep.” She nods, sets her mug down, and faces me. “Grail reported Montrell bought a bullet to the head from a rival, and his little band of misfits has dispersed. Without the head of the snake, they were lost and went separate ways.”

“Guess that’s good,” I grumble and reach for her. Grabbing Marley’s hips, I drag her over my lap until she’s straddling me. “We’ll figure out who it was that broke in, sweets. Until we do, though, I want to get Keys to set up a security system.”

“I already have one. I don’t?—”

“The one Keys will set up is top of the line, better than anything on the market,” I interrupt her, not letting her finish her little protest. “You gotta stay safe, and this is one way to do it.”

Marley watches me for a long moment before nodding. “I take it Keys is some electronic guru who is also the same guy you had look into me.”

“Yeah,” I confirm, giving her a grin. “The one and the same. But don’t call him an electronic guru to his face. He’s got enough of a boosted ego he doesn’t need more.”

Laughing, Marley relaxes into me and leans forward to rest her head against my shoulder. “I guess I can let Keys put in a new system.”

“Good.” I kiss the side of her head and give her a squeeze.

“You know it’s kinda weird you’ve got a friend you call Keys, and that’s my last name. Keys isn’t his last name, is it? That would be a bit freaky.”

“Nah, he’s called Keys cause of how fast the fucker can type.” I snort, leaning my head back.

“Interesting,” she mutters and lifts her head.

“Not that interesting.” I shift beneath her, letting her feel how hard I already am for her. “Now, I gotta ask one thing, sweets.”

“What’s that?” Marley’s voice drops just a bit.

“You look into this shit, you don’t do it alone. Let me and the club help you. We don’t know what you could uncover, and it’s always good to have someone at your back.”

Marley seems to think about this for a moment before nodding. “Fine. I’ll let you all help.”

“Good.” Grinning, I slide my fingers up and into her hair. “Since we’ve got all that sorted, it’s time to sort something else entirely.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MARLEY

Monday mornings are the worst.

I didn't want to get out of bed. I especially didn't want to get up this morning. Mainly because I'd been enjoying the warmth of Griz's arms around me. Other than getting up to eat, we stayed in my bed for the rest of the weekend, and it had been completely and totally marvelous.

Even now, I could still feel the luxurious aches all over my body even after getting up, getting dressed, then going to work, mostly between my legs. I didn't think a man could go as many times in a day as Griz went. Each time had been different. Several times, he'd taken me slow, built a burn inside me I didn't think he'd be able to extinguish or grow even higher. Regardless, Griz did. Other times, he took me fast. However he took me, it didn't matter. I enjoyed every bit of it. My favorite part had to be when I rode him. It was my favorite because he'd grip hold of me while he sat up, kissing me.

I didn't want to leave him this morning, but he also had to get to the clubhouse, saying he had shit to do. I didn't know what he did for the club and honestly, I wasn't sure I cared. I'm sure he'll let me know what he does when he's ready. I, for one, won't be demanding he tell me, considering I get club life, though I've never lived it. It's just that I've been around men like him all my life.

The only men who filled me in on everything were Grail and Bash, only because I'd

been part of the team. Technically, I still was a part of it.

I sometimes miss working alongside them; however, I don't think I'd ever be able to move back. In a short amount of time, I've come to find this town my home.

I love being able to go to the diner and chat with Deloris when I'm grabbing dinner. I enjoy being able to see my grandma more often. Granted, I ended up canceling on her this weekend. She seemed fine with it. She said she was going to play bingo at the community center. I didn't even know she played bingo.

My phone shrills its loud ringtone I have set for my dad and mom when they call, pulling me out of my thoughts. Sighing, I press the answer button on my steering wheel as I drive through town toward my destination. I had papers to serve, and I wasn't looking forward to it. This isn't the first time I've served this particular person with papers, and it's never pleasant. Not that he's done anything wrong, but he's always an ass about it.

"Marley?" Dad calls before I manage to greet him.

"Yes, Dad, I'm here, what's up?"

Turning the wheel, I pull into the establishment's parking lot and park.

"Just checkin' in. You've been dodging calls all weekend."

"I wasn't dodging calls. I was just busy."

No way was I going to answer the phone while I enjoyed the pleasure of being in Griz's arms. My dad has a sixth sense about things he needs not to know.

"Okay, but before this weekend, you'd been keeping your calls short, not barely

talking. Can't fix things when you don't talk, darlin'."

"Everything's fine, Dad, I'm good. Y'all are good. Nothing to fix."

The only way anything was going to be fixed was if I could find the person responsible and put both my parents' minds at ease.

"That's bullshit, Lee-Lee, and you know it," Dad remarks, not pussy footing around. "You came home and brought up a subject that is best left in the past. Neither your mom nor I handled it the way we should?—"

I totally wasn't in the mood to have this talk with my dad right now. "Dad, I get you want to talk right now, but I'm in the middle of some things and can't really talk about this."

I didn't want to talk about it at all right now. Not until I solved who was behind it.

Dad doesn't say anything for a while, and I thought he might've hung up at first until I looked at the screen.

Nope, he's still there.

"Dad?" I murmur his name.

"We've got to talk about this, darlin'."

"And we will. I just can't right now. I'll give you a call later when I'm not busy."

I mentally put it on my to-do list right after going to the grocery store. Griz is coming back later, and we're having dinner together. Tomorrow, he said we were going to eat at the diner together, and he's already filled me in that Friday I would be on the back

of his bike going to the clubhouse for a party. I wasn't sure I wanted to do this or not.

"Right," Dad grunts. "If you don't call me back, Lee-Lee, you'll force me to get your siblings involved, and you know how much you hate when they get involved."

Now, that was just a whole other level of just plain ol' wrong.

"Dad, there's no reason to draw Marshall or Marla into this. There's nothing for them to get involved in, as it were."

I didn't need or want the headache of those two. I love my big brother and little sister, but we're all like oil and water most of the time. We fight and argue constantly when we're put in the same room with each other. It didn't matter where we were. We could be in the middle of a restaurant and start arguing. Marshall thought because he was the big brother he was right and that he had a say in just about everything in my life. Marla, being the baby, she figured she could get her way with just about anything.

Me, on the other hand, I refused to let either of them think they could pull their stunts with me. I wasn't going to let it happen. One time, we all ended up in a food fight. If it weren't for the fact the owner was sitting right there and was good friends with my parents, he'd probably have been far more pissed than he actually had been. It was just plain luck that the cops didn't arrest us.

"You know I've got no shame in callin' a family meeting, Marley. I'll do it, and in doing so, I'll bring them into it to have it resolved."

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I let out a sigh. "I promise, Dad, I'll call you back, and we'll talk. Okay?"

"All right, darlin'. I'll wait for your call. But be warned, you don't call this evening,

I'm callin' the family meeting."

"I'll call."

I finish the conversation and hang up, more than glad to have gotten off the phone. My dad wasn't an old man in the least bit. He was fit and could take on anything or one, but the fact he didn't take on the stalker my mom had, has me questioning what exactly happened back then. For them, I should drop it, but I'm not. I can't. I need to know.

Right now, though, I need to not worry about any of that. I push the thoughts away, grab the envelope, turn my car off, and get out. It's time to get on with the day and get it over with. I have better things to look forward to. All of which I couldn't wait for.

I couldn't be happier to finish the day out. All I wanted to do was get home, run a bath, and enjoy a nice and relaxing soak. Some days, I hate serving papers to people. They seem to go along with the 'kill the messenger' saying.

Unfortunately, my car starts acting weird. It stutters and starts to shake. It gets bad enough that I pull off to the side of the road. I'm not one to neglect my car. I always make sure to have the tires rotated every six months or after putting so many miles on them, whichever comes first. My oil gets changed every ten thousand miles only because I use an oil meant for that mileage. Tune-ups are done regularly.

My dad always drilled it into us to always take care of our cars, and I've made sure to do just that. Nothing should be wrong with my car now.

I put the car in park, pop the hood, and barely get out before my entire car goes up in a ball of fire. The force of the explosion throws me backward onto the road. My body collides with asphalt. By no means was it a pleasant collision. It hurts.

I'm lucky that no other cars were close enough, otherwise I'd be dead right about now, not just feeling a bad case of road rash.

Getting to my feet, all I can do is watch what used to be my car burn in front of me.

"Oh my God, are you okay?" a woman shouts from behind me.

Slowly, I turn to face the woman in question as more people stop. Sirens could be heard in the distance, but I couldn't focus in on those. My ears were ringing, and my body hurt.

Regardless of all of that, one question pops into my head. How the hell did this happen? My car shouldn't be a ball of smoke right now. I should be getting home for a bath.

"Marley."

I hear my name being shouted as the sirens grow near. I twist to see not only Griz but several other men rushing in my direction.

"Griz," I whisper, unable to move. I couldn't if I wanted to. I felt cemented in place.

The instant he gets to me, I find myself drawn into his arms, one arm going around my waist, the other coming up for his fingers to curl into my hair.

"Fuck, Marley, you okay?" he murmurs, his lips brushing against my forehead.

"I'm okay." I really wasn't, but I was alive. "What are you doing here?"

"Was on the road heading back to the clubhouse. Saw all the traffic and the fire, we wanted to know what the hell was going on. Saw you standing here and had to get to

you.”

That’s sweet.

“We need to get her checked out,” another guy says softly from next to him. “Ambulance is pulling up now.”

“Right,” Griz mutters, releasing me only to guide me farther away from the wreckage and toward the ambulance. “Let’s get you checked, sweets.”

I simply nod, but my gaze is drawn back to the wreckage.

“My car,” I murmur softly.

“Don’t worry about that right now, baby,” Griz says just as gently.

“But . . .”

“Marley, sweets, let’s just worry about you getting looked over right now. We’ll talk about your car later.”

“Okay.” I nod as one of the paramedics rushes toward us.

Griz lets me go so they can look me over, though he doesn’t move too far away. He stays close, and I appreciate him for doing just that.

I don’t know what happened here today with my car. It freaks me out because it can’t be a coincidence that this would happen days after my house was broken into and the message was left for me on my dresser mirror. I guess whoever it was isn’t playing games with me after all.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GRIZ

Not taking my eyes off Marley, I listen to my brothers murmuring beside me.

All I can think about is how I nearly lost Marley. I don't know what happened for her to have not been in the car when it went up in a ball of fire, regardless, I'm glad she wasn't. I'll have to ask her about it once I'm able to get her out of here.

"Sniper's on the way with his truck. He'll take your bike to the clubhouse," Shiner says, getting my attention.

I glance at him briefly before nodding and returning my focus to Marley.

"I got the prospect bringing the tow truck. Already told the officers we'll take it in," Lucky mutters. "They didn't seem too happy about it, but I told them she's one of ours. Only thing is they think of her as one of theirs as well."

"What exactly does your woman do, Griz?" Scorn asks.

"She's a process server, serves papers for the court clerks, frees up the deputies, and she's a skip tracer," I grumble my answer and frown, noticing Marley seeming to argue with the paramedic. I'm betting she's refusing to go in to be further checked out. "Someone broke into her house Friday while she was at the diner."

"Why didn't you call us about it?" Shiner demands.

Turning toward him, I give him the only answer I could. “Let’s just say Marley isn’t like other women. She walked into her broken in house, only room in disarray was the living room, and she says it was nothing more than child’s play.”

“Seriously?” Lucky snorts. “And how else is she different from other women?”

“She works with, well, she used to, two bounty hunters before she moved here. And she’s also hardheaded enough to look into something that happened years before she was even born.”

“What is she looking into?”

I shift a look to Scorn at his question. “I’ll fill y’all in on all of it later. I already asked Keys to go and redo her entire security system at her house this morning. I also asked him to see if he could make a copy of what she had in that box of letters. I didn’t get to read them all and wanted to have the chance to do that.”

“You think this could be related?” Shiner asks.

Nodding, I return my attention to Marley, who is hopping off the gurney. Guess she’s got the paramedic to relent and leave her alone. That or she’s just doing what she wants anyway.

“You should take her to the clubhouse,” Lucky suggests.

“Yeah,” I agree.

We had plans for the evening at her place, but those won’t be happening now, not after this shit.

Marley needs to rest. I’m sure she’ll protest, but to rest, she needs to be in the safest

place she can be. Right now, that's gonna be at the clubhouse surrounded by men who can watch out for her. I already know she's not gonna like it. One thing I've figured out about my woman is she's very independent.

"Soon as Sniper gets here, I'm taking her to the clubhouse. Let the cops know they can talk to her there." I wasn't about to let them talk to her on the side of the road while her car sat there charred.

My brothers nod, and I move away from them, making my way to Marley just in time to hear her snap at the paramedic that she didn't need to go to the hospital. She was fine. At least that's what she was telling them. I could see the truth in her expression. She was in shock. I couldn't blame her for it either.

It was just my luck that we'd been coming back and decided to take the way we did to the clubhouse. After having been out handling club business, I'd been more than ready to get back and then get to her place. If it hadn't been for the smoke that caught our attention and we wanted to check it out, we'd have turned around went to the clubhouse a different way.

I'm not one to believe in higher powers or anything like that, but even I gotta admit fate stepped in on this one.

"Scorn will keep an eye on her," I tell the paramedic. Being that both he and Torch were volunteer firefighters, they have the skills to know what to look for. "If anything happens, we'll get Marley to the hospital, deal?"

"Guess it'll work," the paramedic gripes and walks off.

Turning fully to Marley, I wrap an arm around her waist and hold tight. "Come on, sweets, let's get you out of here."

Nodding, she doesn't say anything but rather lays her head against my shoulder. Instead of letting her walk, I scoop her in my arms and carry her away from the wreckage toward where my brothers were waiting. I notice immediately that Sniper has already made it along with Blow and Nines.

"Keys?" Sniper stretches a hand out, holding a set in his hands.

"Appreciate it," I tell him and make my way past him and the others. "Need to get her out of here and to the clubhouse."

"Why are you taking me to the clubhouse?" Marley murmurs quietly.

"Scorn can't keep an eye on you if you aren't at the clubhouse, baby. And until the car cools off enough to look it over and figure out what caused the explosion, I'd prefer you to be where no one can get to you."

"Okay," she relents without an argument. This was good cause I didn't want to argue with her about her safety.

Not bothering to look around at anyone in the crowd that had gathered, I carry Marley away, more than ready to get her out of here. My brothers could handle watching the crowd for anything or one that might spark an interest into who could have been behind this.

"Adams is going to come to the clubhouse in a bit after we get the car towed to the garage. He wants to look at it first." Blow states, walking next to me. "I think I might follow and take a look at it myself."

"You do let me know what you find."

"My car started making a funny noise," Marley whispers, lifting her head marginally

from my shoulder. “I pulled to the side of the road and just popped the hood and got out when it happened.”

So, that’s how she survived it. She noticed something off and stopped on the side of the road to check it out.

Fucking hell. My woman saved her own damn life just by being observant.

“You need to let your grandma know you’re okay,” Sniper grunts, speaking directly to Marley.

“She shouldn’t know anything about this so soon.”

Sweet Marley. She doesn’t know how fast word travels around here. Her grandma probably got the call within minutes of it happening.

“I’ll swing by there and let her know,” Shiner grunts. “I need to go by there any way to pick up the caramel clusters she made for Milo’s birthday.”

“Damn woman and her sweets.” Lucky chuckles. “The woman makes a batch of her cookies for Chelsea every damn week, and my woman won’t even give me one.”

“Maybe if you’re nice enough to her and say please, Grandma Ryan will make you your own batch.”

Chuckling at Marley’s statement, I make it to Sniper’s truck. Scorn reaches around and opens the passenger-side door for us. I step around him and set my woman inside. Without a word, I buckle her in and move back, closing the door and sealing her safely in the confines of the truck.

Taking a breath, I twist to face my brothers. “I’m gonna get her to the clubhouse. I

need someone to go by her place and pick up some things for her. I know she's gonna want some of her work stuff and clothes."

"I'll get Chelsea, and we'll go over and grab what she needs," Lucky states.

"Appreciate it."

"See ya back at the clubhouse in a bit," Blow states, tapping the hood of the truck as he backs away.

"Yeah." Starting around the truck, I look to Sniper, "Think you can go by the diner? Ask Deloris for Marley's usual and two of the specials for the day." I figure since we're not gonna have dinner at her place, I could get her something I know she'll enjoy.

"No problem," Sniper agrees.

I nod to the others as they start to the bikes. Getting in behind the wheel, I start the truck and put it in reverse.

"Someone blew my car up," Marley murmurs quietly. I'm sure she's probably talking to herself, but still, I heard her.

"We'll find out who did it, sweets." Reaching over the console, I grab her hand and bring it back to my lap. "Blow is going to take a look over it after they get it towed. He's got an eye for finding shit. So does Nines. They'll probably call in Calyx to take a look at it as well."

I could see Nines calling Meadow's biological dad. Considering his profession, he'd be able to find something faster than anyone else. Still, the car needs to be gone through with a fine toothcomb to find anything and everything that could have been a

part of the problem.

“My phone was destroyed. All of my cards. My wallet. My birth control pills.”

We hadn’t talked about that shit, and I fucked her more often than not without a condom on. I knew I was clean. I didn’t have to worry about her having anything. It was one of the things Keys had in the report on her. Granted, he hadn’t put in there she was on the pill.

“We can get you a new phone. Same with all of your cards. But don’t worry about any of that right now. We’ll handle it all later after you’ve rested and had a chance to process everything that happened.”

“I need to call my dad.”

Cocking a brow, I glance at her briefly before focusing on the road once again.
“Why?”

“I told him I’d call him this evening. I promised I would. He said if I didn’t, he was calling a family meeting, meaning my brother and sister were going to get involved.”

“Wanna enlighten me into what they’ll get involved in?” She’s not making sense to me.

“In the fact that I’ve been short with my parents since I asked them about the stalker my mom had. Marshall, Marla, and me at a family meeting is not a good idea.”

“Now, you want to explain that?” As far as I knew, she loved her brother and sister. I heard the affection she holds for them in her voice the first time she mentioned them to me.

“Remember me telling you about not liking to share? Well, because my siblings and I are like oil and water. If I don’t talk to my dad, he’s all but siccing them on me.”

Ahh.

Sibling rivalry.

The best kind of relationship you can have. They might fight, but they’d do anything for each other.

“You can use mine to call him. We don’t need you stressing about anything more. You’ve been through enough, I think, for the day.”

“Thank you,” she whispers on a breath.

“No problem, sweets. Once we get you settled at the clubhouse, you can make your calls.”

If I had it my way, she wouldn’t be calling anyone. I’d hold her up in my bedroom and keep her there until I knew for sure she was out of harm’s way. Meaning, until I found the fucker who tried to kill her.

After having spent the weekend with her, inside her, I knew deep down she was meant always to be mine. I could kick myself for almost fucking it all up with her. It’s a good thing I’d been able to convince her otherwise. I had enough of riding on the edge of what I wanted. I decided to go full-on out to do whatever it takes to make sure I got what I wanted, as well as keep Marley right where I have her.

Anyone who comes after her, I’ll kill before letting them get to her.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MARLEY

All the times I'd driven past the Devil's Riot MC clubhouse, I never thought I'd actually be stepping into it. Not until Griz came into my life.

Sure, Griz said I was coming here for a party on Friday, but that was at the end of the week. I thought I'd have time to get used to the idea of being here around so many people I didn't know.

Instead, I'm freaking out on the inside, and I don't know why. I've never been the nervous type. I've been around bikers before. Even loads of rough around the edges' men. I grew up with a man like my dad. I shouldn't be in the least bit freaked, yet I am since I'm essentially meeting Griz's family for the first time.

Over the weekend, during one of the breaks of our marathon sex, Griz and I were cuddling while he told me that the club was his family, them and his dad. His mom died years ago. His dad was still around, though he's been out of town for the past two months, having decided to go riding coast to coast.

"Don't get out," Griz orders after parking the truck. He quickly gets out and slams the door shut behind him.

I watch him as he rounds the hood and comes to my side. I barely get my seatbelt off before he's there, the door open, one arm beneath my knees, the other behind my back. Griz scoops me out of the truck with such ease, it doesn't jar me in the least bit.

“Once we get you inside, we’ll get you cleaned up and into bed,” he murmurs, making his way to the front door. “I’ve got one of my brothers stopping in town to get something from the diner for you.”

“Bacon cheese fries, I hope.” If there was any time for loaded cheese fries, now would be it. It’s comfort food and so good.

“Told him to get your usual and two of today’s special. Before you ask, I don’t know what it is.”

It didn’t matter what the special was, I knew it would be good. The diner always has great food.

Relaxing into Griz, I close my eyes as we approach the clubhouse. I don’t know who all will be in there, but having seen so many of Griz’s brothers at the scene of the wreck, I’m not sure how many more there are. It’s something I hadn’t asked Griz about.

“Hey, Griz,” a woman calls out the instant we step inside. “Blow called and said you were on the way. He said you might need some stuff for your woman. I put it on your bed. Hope you don’t mind.”

“Thanks, Storm, appreciate it,” Griz grunts.

Opening my eyes just enough, I’m surprised to see the woman who he called Storm. I’d seen her around town a few times. Off to the side of the room, there were several other women, all dressed scantily, where Storm was dressed in jeans and a white fitted tee with the Devil’s Riot MC logo across the front, emphasizing her breasts.

Storm’s eyes meet mine, and she gives me a smile that isn’t fake in the least. “Hey, Marley, I’m Storm, Blow’s ol’ lady. If you need anything, let me know. What I put in

Griz's room was a pair of fresh leggings, and by that, I mean new panties and a bra, as well as a tank top. There's also some girly soap so you don't have to use Griz's. Blow had said you and I looked about the same size. I guess he was right."

"Thank you," I utter, unsure what to think about the woman. She's young yet seems like she would be an incredibly sweet person.

"No problem." Nodding, she looks to Griz. "I'll be in the kitchen getting the boys' dinner together if you need me for anything. They're napping, so I need to get on that before they get up and I've got my hands full."

"You wouldn't have it any other way, and you know it." Griz snorts and walks past her, making her laugh.

I close my eyes as he keeps going. I didn't have it in me to look around or to pay attention to the scantily clad women. I make a mental note to ask Griz about them later. Right now, I am too exhausted. My body was screaming at me. My head hurts. I want a shower. Then I want to climb into a bed and just go to sleep.

Well, I want to eat something before I do that. Maybe take something for the aches and pains.

Griz stops us a few minutes later, jostles me slightly as he opens a door and steps through, closing the door behind him. "You've got a choice, sweets, we can shower first, get you clean, or we can make that phone call. You pick."

"Shower." There was no picking to it. I smelled like smoke and blood.

Something had hit me in the middle of my car exploding. The paramedic had cleaned a wound at my hairline along with the rest of the road rash that could be seen. I could feel a few other spots I hadn't let them look at. My back was scraped up. My bottom

hurt. Those places I didn't let them exam.

"You got it, baby," Griz murmurs, carrying me across the room through another door to the bathroom.

"This is nice." I thought he might have had to share a bathroom with a bunch of others, instead it was attached to his room.

"We all have our own bathrooms. The brothers, that is. The fallen harlots all share one, though."

"Fallen harlots?"

"It's what we call the women who stay here for . . . ugh, best way to say it is they're here to fuck and give it up whenever their services are wanted."

"So, they are whores," I note.

"Yep."

Interesting.

"Have you?—"

"Sweets, since meetin' you, I ain't been with anyone. Doesn't mean I haven't fucked my share of women. Those bitches out there, they're nothing but a hole to stick a dick in."

"That's comforting." Not really. I believe him when he says he hasn't been with anyone.

“Come on, sweets.” He sets me on my feet and starts the shower before helping me out of my clothes. By that, I mean he rips my shirt the rest of the way off me. As for my pants, he’s far more gentle with them. The thong I’d put on was nothing but a slit of fabric which he tears right off. My bra has a front clasp he unclips and helps me out of.

Griz makes quick work of his own clothes and hangs his cut on the back of the door. Taking my hand in his, he guides me into the shower stall. It’s not overly big, but it was just enough room for the both of us to fit. Granted, our chests are flush against each other. Still, Griz makes it work. He takes the time to wash my hair, taking care not to touch where I am hurt. My back is another story altogether.

Same with my bottom.

He doesn’t say anything, but there’s no missing the tightening of his lips.

By the time he is done making sure I am clean, I am not only exhausted but so turned on that I am ready to beg him to fuck me.

Griz must read my mind because his fingers slide between my thighs, and two fingers slip right inside. He moves them in and out, driving me closer to release. Panting, I hold onto him. His free hand comes up, fingers gripping my chin, lifts my head until he’s able to capture my lips. Kissing me with all the hunger I feel for him.

The orgasm that washes over me is all-consuming. Beautifully amazing. I love it.

By the time Griz’s fingers slide out, I’m drained. Still, I want to give him what he just gifted me. Unfortunately, Griz catches my wrist before I’m able to wrap my fingers around him, stopping me.

“This is all about you, baby, not me.” Pressing one last kiss to my lips, he shuts the

water off.

“What if I wanted?—”

“Marley, sweets, you don’t gotta do anything right now. This was about you, baby. Later, when you’re not hurt, we’ll have our fun.”

Nodding, I step out before he does and grab a towel. I barely have my hair wrapped in it before I feel Griz behind me, wrapping another towel around my body.

“Fuck, Marley, your back is torn up.”

I can feel it.

And I did.

It hurt.

“We need to put some ointment on your back to keep it from getting infected.”

“It’ll be okay.” I didn’t want anything put on my back. “It just needs to air out.”

“Marley.”

I whirl around to face Griz and shake my head. “No, Griz, seriously, I don’t want anything put on it. It’ll be fine.”

“Fine,” Griz grumbles and nods curtly. “Come on, you can put on one of my shirts. It’ll be looser on you more than anything Storm left on my bed for you.”

“I’d prefer one of your shirts as well.” As sweet as it was of Storm, I’m not a big fan

of wearing other people's clothes. There's nothing wrong with it, I guess you could say it's just me. I'm a weirdo about my clothes, I suppose.

Okay, so it's not that I won't wear other people's clothes, it's more I don't like wearing clothes that belong to strangers. Griz isn't a stranger to me.

Griz takes my hand and pulls me into his room, lets me go in, opens a drawer, and grabs the first tee on top. Turning to me, he helps me into the shirt before finally dressing himself.

While he's doing this, I look over the stuff that Storm left for me. New toothbrush. New hairbrush. Unopened hair products, expensive products at that. There are even some hair ties and lotion. As Storm mentioned there was a brand-new pair of underwear for me. Thank God for that. I might wear thongs and whatnot, but I don't do commando.

I grab the panties, remove that tag, and slide them up my legs. They're cute black and white polka dot boy shorts that fit perfectly. The little bow at the front makes them even cuter.

Griz gathers the rest of the stuff Storm left for me and puts it on top of his dresser. Turning to me, he jerks his head to the bed. "Hop in, sweets."

He didn't have to tell me twice. I climb onto the bed and snuggle up under his fleece blanket. He didn't have a comforter like I did. Just solid gray sheets with a red and black fleece flannel-looking blanket, best of all, it was soft. I love a soft fleece blanket. I have a whole collection of different ones I trade out on my couch every so often. Even better, as I lay back against the pillows, I find he didn't have cheap flat pillows. They were super comfortable.

Griz climbs in next to me, hand gliding up and down my side. "You good?"

“Yeah.”

“Someone tried to kill you today.” I didn’t need the reminder, but I don’t think that’s his intention.

“I know.”

“I could have lost you.” Griz’s voice takes on a ragged tone that clenches at my heart. “I just got you in my life, and I could have lost you. Just like that.”

“I’m right here. Safe and whole.”

“Yeah.” His fingers curl around my hip beneath the shirt. My heart lurches at the emotions blooming inside me.

“I need to brush my hair,” I tell him, changing the subject.

“I’ll do it for you. Food should be here soon. After that, you can either rest or make that phone call to your dad.”

“I better make that call before eating. I think after I eat, I might just pass out. It’s been a long day. Not including the explosion. I already had a stressful day dealing with jerks who don’t know the meaning of ‘Don’t shoot the messenger’.”

“Wanna elaborate?” Griz asks, cocking a brow.

Sighing, I shake my head. “Not really. It’s a typical day in the land of being a process server. Some days are better than others.”

“So, not only did you have to deal with prick assholes today, but you also have to deal with this shit,” Griz notes.

“Yep.” I nod as someone knocks at the door.

“Yeah,” Griz shouts.

The door opens marginally. “Cops are here to talk to Marley, and food’s here.”

“Thanks, Shiner, we’ll be right out,” Griz mutters and looks at me. “Guess while you talk to the cops, you can eat so it doesn’t get cold on you.”

“Great.”

The last thing I want to do is talk to cops right now. I made friends with some of them in passing, thanks to my job, but I wasn’t really looking forward to being questioned about why my car exploded or who could potentially be behind it.

Plus, I still needed to call my dad before it was too late to make the call.

Griz scoops me out of the bed, sets me on my feet, moves to the dresser, and grabs the leggings. “Not about to let you walk out there in only my tee,” he says and hands me the leggings to me. I didn’t want to put them on, but I also didn’t want to be in a room full of men with nothing more than a shirt and panties.

Gingerly, I pull them on while Griz pulls a hoodie for me out of his closet. He comes to me and helps me pull it on over the shirt. Lastly, Griz takes care of brushing my hair out for me and gives me a pair of thick socks. I didn’t want to put my heeled boots back on. They wouldn’t go well with what I was wearing.

Once I’m ready to go, Griz guides me out of the room, taking me back in the direction he carried me through earlier.

Inwardly sighing to myself, I push back the fear wanting to take hold of me. Now

isn't the time to breakdown. Not when I'm about to have to answer a million questions. None of which I want to answer. I don't know who it was that tried to blow me up. Nor do I know who broke into my house. What I'm sure of, though, is they have to be connected. They have to be. Nothing else makes sense to me.

It's strange, though, thinking on it now, whoever it was, they wanted me to get out. Weeks ago, I'd forgotten about it, but I'd found a stupid note on my windshield outside the courthouse. The note said I needed to watch my back. I thought it was some bullshit someone trying to freak me out. It wouldn't be the first time someone tried to do that. What if that was connected to this as well?

All three events have to be connected, but who in town would want to scare me off or even kill me? What if it were the person who stalked my mom?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

GRIZ

“Hate to have to ask this again, Marley, but do you know anyone who would want to hurt you?” Adams asks, pen hovering over his notepad.

For the past hour, he and Detective Ratford have patiently spoken to Marley while she nibbled on the fries and her dinner sent by Deloris. I swear my aunt must love Marley because she also sent over her chocolate pecan pie. The whole thing. She only makes them every once in a while. It’s a rarity at the diner.

Sniper informed us all when we’d seen the pie that Deloris said if anyone touched the dessert before Marley got a slice, she’d cut us all off from eating at the diner for a month. Rain actually took the pie and put it away, labeling it Marley’s.

“I don’t.”

It’s the same answer she’s said already. She’d given them the list of names she visited that day serving papers but said nothing about her house being broken into just days ago.

I’m glad she did, and at the same time, surprised she didn’t. The club needs to handle this. Whether she realizes it or not, she’s one of ours. She’s my woman. Mine. I’m not about to let this slide. My brothers won’t let it slide.

“If you think of anything, you’ve got our number,” Detective Ratford says, sliding a

card toward her. “We’ll leave you to rest up. Hope you feel better soon.”

“I’ll be back at work tomorrow,” Marley states.

Both Adams and Ratford look at her like she’s grown two heads right alongside a few of my brothers.

“I’m sure you need to take a few days to heal up,” Adams remarks.

“No, I’m good. I’ll borrow my grandma’s car until I can figure out what to do about replacing mine, but I’m not going to let this stop me from going to work.”

I dip my head down and lift a hand at the same to pinch the bridge of my nose. Marley and that will of fucking steel. In the span of the time I’ve known her, no matter how short the time may be, I’ve learned she’s damn stubborn as hell.

I’m gonna have to have a talk with her about that. She’s not going to work tomorrow. Not if I can help it. The woman needs to take a day to let her back heal up. Fuck, seeing all the road rash covering her back had me wanting to commit murder. When I find the person responsible for hurting her, they’re gonna wish for death before they’re granted it.

“Right then.” Detective Ratford grunts, nods curtly, and leaves.

Adams sticks back and waits for Ratford to leave before turning to us. “Don’t know what you’re planning to do, know that you consider this club business, but what you gotta get is Marley might only be a process server, she’s helped us several times since moving here, and us at the station consider her one of our own.”

“Don’t worry, Adams, we’ll keep you in the loop,” Blow states. He’d come in halfway through the interview and looked grim as he reported we were gonna have to

wait until the car cooled down more before we could get a look at it.

Nodding, Adams straightens his sports jacket. "Forensic team will be out in the morning to go over the car."

"Prospects guarding it tonight to make sure nothing happens to it."

I figured Blow would do that. He's not taking any chances. With all the bullshit the club's already dealt with, we've all learned from the mistakes.

"Right, I'll check in later," Adams mutters, looking toward Marley just as she shoves a couple fries in her mouth. Her eyes widen as she takes in those of us watching her. "Check you later, Marley."

"Same," she mutters, mouth full of food, head nodding, and a hand coming up to cover her mouth.

Smirking, I can't help but shake my head. She's fucking cute right now. Never in my life have I thought about a woman eating food as cute. I hadn't thought about it all. We all eat, but the way Marley does it is something else. Hell, watching her eat turns me on. Then again, anything she does, causes me to get hard. Just the thought of her has my cock stiffening.

Adams leaves, and I join Marley at the table.

"You good?" I watch her closely as I ask.

"I'm okay," she murmurs and pops another cheese-covered fry in her mouth.

"You didn't tell them about your house being broken into," I note.

“I know I didn’t. They don’t need to know that,” she remarks with a shrug. “I don’t need them making it a big deal.”

“Why?” I have a feeling I know the answer without her telling me.

“Because I’ll find the person who did it before they do,” she says, holding my gaze, eyes full of determination.

“I see you’ve gotten over your fear.” I reach for one of her fries, and I’m not surprised she narrows her gaze to shoot a glare at me, but she doesn’t stop me from getting one.

“Well, Dad always taught us to push the fear aside ‘cause it doesn’t do anything but get in the way,” she murmurs.

“Gotta agree with that, but still don’t like that you were able to do so as you have. As for finding who did this, I can’t stop you, I know this, so I’m gonna ask you don’t do anything without me.” Marley opens her mouth to speak, but I keep going. “You might not like it, but it’s what’s gonna have to happen. You want to be involved, fine, whatever, but . . .” I lean forward, getting in her space, “you’re my woman, and I take care of what’s mine. We work together on this.”

Marley seems to look like she’s weighing whatever she’s gonna say next. Finally, she nods and reaches for her fries as she gives me an answer. “You don’t try to keep me out of it, then fine I can agree working with you on this.”

“Good.” Sitting back in my seat, I nod to her fries. “You gonna share the rest of those and that chocolate pecan pie my aunt sent for you?”

A look comes over Marley’s face, and she nabs yet another fry. “Why should I do that?” she asks cocking a brow, a smirk playing on her lips.

Leaning in even closer, I stretch an arm out, curl it around the back of her head, and pull her to me. “You share, you get rewarded.”

The way Marley’s eyes flicker with need, I know I’ve got her. “Fine, I’ll share. But on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“I get to do what I want later.”

My cock stiffens in my jeans at what I know she’s insinuating. Marley wants my cock and not just inside her.

Fuck me.

“You can do whatever you want, sweets,” I agree, grinning.

“Break it up you two.”

I inwardly groan at Chelsea’s voice. Cocking my head slightly to see not just her but Storm, Meadow, and Olive, all standing on the other side of the table, moving to take a seat. “What are y’all doing?”

“We’re welcoming our newest sister into the fold.” Storm laughs, taking her seat. “Mom’s watching the boys so we can get to know your woman while you go meet with your brothers.” Shifting her gaze to Marley, Storm smiles brightly. “As ol’ ladies to these men, we’ve got to stick together. Otherwise, they’ll drive us all mad.”

“I could see that happening.” Marley giggles, shifting in her seat to face the other women.

“Guess that’s my cue to leave y’all be,” I grumble, not wanting to leave Marley. When her attention comes back to me, her smile in place, I know she’ll be good. Still, I lean in and press a kiss to her lips. “These women, they’re nutty as hell, crazy as shit, don’t let Chelsea pull you into any antics.”

“I resent that statement,” Chelsea snaps but looking in her direction, I don’t miss the grin pulling at her lips.

“Babe, just ‘cause you ain’t played any of your bullshit pranks lately doesn’t mean you don’t have antics,” Lucky says.

“Hey, I’m pregnant and getting closer to having this baby. I don’t have the time to come up with antics, but since you said that, I just might come up with something.”

“You do that, but leave that damn snake in her tank.”

“Snake?” Marley pipes up. “What kind?”

“Sass is a ball python, sweet as can be, and hates being in her tank if she doesn’t have to be,” Chelsea answers. “Lucky’s making a room into a tank for her at the house we’re moving into. Instead of her being in a small tank, she’ll have space to slither around. He’s even found a custom door that’s made out of plexiglass that we’ll be able to look through to be able to see her. He doesn’t want to take chances of her escaping, so he’s coming up with every damn thing he can think of, so I won’t let her out to play.” Rolling her eyes, she sits back and grins mischievously. “What he fails to understand is Sass is smart. If she wants out, she’ll get out, but usually, she’s good with where she is. She’s lazy and likes to bask in the heat of her lamp.”

“Interesting.” Marley nods.

“Yeah, with her having the room, she’ll be even happier. Plus, I’d never do anything

that would put my little boy in harm's way."

"Right, y'all have at your conversation." Standing, I bend and press a kiss to Marley's lips. "You need me, just ask these nuts where to find me."

"I'm sure I'll be fine," Marley murmurs, smiling at me.

"Yeah, you will be," I tell her, snatch one of her fries and pop it in my mouth.

"Hey," my woman snaps and swats at me.

Grinning, I leave her to it and head toward where my brothers are waiting for me.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GRIZ

“What do we know so far?”

The question is asked no sooner than the door closes, and we’re all locked in the room we hold church in. Blow doesn’t wait around or waste any time bullshitting when it comes to shit like this.

Lately, it seems like things are happening far too much when it comes to the ol’ ladies. First, the shit with Storm’s biological father and his will, all that leaving us to deal with the Crimson Blood Clan. Then there’s what we had to deal with Meadow’s past. The strings of the past and present are constantly tied in ways I’ll never understand.

Then there’s what those Crimson bastards did to Chelsea. Lucky nearly lost his mind thinking he was going to lose her. Lastly, Shiner’s ol’ lady Olive, her sister had been one twisted bitch to let what happened to her happen.

To make matters worse, we’ve now got to deal with the shitstorm surrounding my ol’ lady. My brothers don’t even know the half of it.

“Need to fill y’all in on a few other things before that question gets answered,” I say, glancing around the table.

“What?” Nines demands.

“You all know I asked Keys to step up a security system at Marley’s house ‘cause of the break-in. Someone had tossed her living room and wrote ‘Leave Bitch’ on her bedroom mirror. Nothing else was messed with. I found this strange and asked her about it.”

“What did Marley have to say about it?” Shiner asks.

“Marley’s not like the other ol’ ladies. She isn’t the type to stand back and let someone else take the reins,” I inform them and lean back in my chair. “Y’all know Marley’s a process server, and I told y’all she does skip tracing. She worked with two men who were bounty hunters before moving here. She called them to ask ‘em about a group. She wanted to make sure she wasn’t missing any intel regarding them, she hadn’t thought she was, but to be safe, I told her she needed to make the call and find out, just to be on the safe side.”

“Wanna elaborate?” Blow grunts.

“No need to elaborate. The one that had caused her trouble is out of the picture, and I mean that as in he’s dead. The rest of the group scattered,” I explain and keep going. “Anyway, Marley has this box that I noticed she cleaned up the contents of first in straightening her living room. While she’d been on the phone with Gravel and Bash, I opened it and looked. Was filled with old ass letters from a stalker her mother had.”

“Her mom kept stuff from a stalker?” Shiner quips, tapping his fingers on the table.

“Don’t know the full story there . . .” I didn’t, and I won’t lie saying I do, “but what I know is, Marley confronted her parents about it, and it didn’t go well, they freaked on her. She hasn’t really spoken to them much since, and that happened in the time frame of the past three weeks.”

“I’d suggest talking to her old man,” Sniper says.

“You know his number?” Blow asks.

“Yep.” Sniper nods.

“You give him a call.”

“Give it to me, and I’ll call him.” No way was Marley’s dad hearing this shit from anyone else but me. “I was already gonna be giving the man a call for Marley anyway. Evidently, he threatened to sic her brother and sister on her if she didn’t call him tonight.”

“So, you’re just going to make the call for her?” Lucky laughs, shaking his head. “Bet that’s going to go wonderfully for you.”

“I’m still looking through things,” Keys finally says, jumping in before I can answer Lucky. “I won’t know much more than Griz does until I do a full dive. But what I looked into so far, Griz has already told you I was able to figure out. From the little bit, I found out for Griz when he asked me to look into her, I didn’t go deep into her, but I found she’s a damn smart-ass bitch who knows how to take care of herself. Reason she moved here other than for her grandma is because of the group Griz mentioned. And he’s right, I can confirm the one who made her a target is dead. Other than that, I still need to look more into what’s going on to know who could be targeting her now. She hasn’t made any enemies here that we know of.”

“I’ll talk more with Marley. She didn’t tell Adams and Ratford about her house being broken into. I told her over the weekend that I’d help her look into the stalker thing. I also talked to her today about everything, that she works with me and not try to do shit on her own. She agreed.”

All of my brothers look at me as if I’d grown two heads, but I didn’t care. I’d work with my woman if it meant she didn’t go off on her own looking for answers that

could end up getting her killed.

“Gotta say, brother, you’re better than me to work with your woman. If it were Storm, her ass would be locked away,” Blow remarks with a snort.

“You know Storm wouldn’t let you do that.” I chuckle.

We all know that Storm and the others would kick all our asses if we tried to hold them back from something they wanted to do. The difference between them and Marley is that they won’t intentionally put themselves in harm’s way.

Marley will.

My brothers go over a few more things, and Sniper gives me Marley’s dad’s number and his name. I didn’t know who the guy was, but I was about to make a call that I’m sure is going to piss Marley off.

Blow adjourns church. Everyone clears out, but I stay behind to make the call in private. Or as private as it can be, considering Shiner and Blow both stay with me.

I put my phone on speaker, set it on the table in front of me, and wait for the other man to answer.

“Who is this?” Marley’s dad answers.

“Michael Keys?”

“Yeah, that’s me, who the fuck is this?” Michael demands harshly.

“Name’s Griz, I’m seeing your daughter, Marley,” I tell him, not bullshitting around.

“Know you’re waitin’ on a call from her, but you and me, we need to talk before you

talk to her.”

“The hell do you mean we need to talk, and you’re seeing my daughter?”

There’s no missing the fury in his voice.

“Your daughter was nearly killed this afternoon when her car blew up. She was smart enough to have noticed something was off about her car, pulled over and got out, barely got out before the damn thing exploded.”

“Someone tried to kill her?” Michael’s voice thickens even more. I didn’t know the man, but I could imagine his eyes were narrowing and his teeth clenching.

“Yeah, that’s the way it looks. We got her car towed to the garage. We’ll be combing through it tomorrow?—”

“I’m on my way. Don’t touch a damn thing until I get there.” The other man hangs up before I can so much as finish explaining things to him.

I glance at both Blow and Shiner, brows raised. “Was that strange to y’all?”

“Yeah, seems maybe Marley’s dad might know what’s going on, and we won’t have to go around our asses to get to our elbows on this one,” Blow remarks and adjusts the bill of his hat.

“Agreed.” Shiner grunts and raps his knuckles on the table. “Guess we play the wait and see game until he gets here.”

“Looks like it.” I nod, grab my phone, shove it in my jeans, and let out a harsh breath. “I’m gonna check on Marley. Make sure she’s good. Since her dad’s on the way here, no reason for her to make the call, means I can get her ass into bed for a little while.”

Both men snort, shit-eating grins in place.

“Yeah, get her to bed, ‘cause when she finds out you called her dad, I’m betting she’s gonna wanna kick your ass.”

Shrugging, I let Shiner’s remark go ‘cause I know it’s damn true that she’s gonna try to do just that. I didn’t care either way. Long as, in the end, she was safe and whole, I didn’t give a fuck what she tried to do.

Her being mine meant I’d do what it takes to protect her, and I’ve already told her this.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MARLEY

“Is everything okay?” The question slips past my lips the moment the door closes behind Griz and we’re alone in his room.

I could see the tension in him when he rejoined me after meeting with his brothers. I enjoyed talking with the other women. They’re hilarious, and some of the pranks Chelsea and Storm told me about, I couldn’t believe they did. Then again, if some woman was trying to screw with my man, I’d do the same thing. Well, I’d be a bit more ruthless. There might be some hair-pulling and the crushing of a nose.

“All good, sweets,” Griz says. The snick of the lock goes, and he steps toward me, arms coming around my waist. “But do gotta talk to you about something.”

“What’s that?”

I didn’t want to talk about anything, I wanted to do other things, things I’ve wanted to do with him. Honestly, I was still amped up from the orgasm he’d given me earlier. I wanted to ease the need inside him, I knew he was still dealing with. I saw the thickness of his cock behind his jeans. My mouth watered to have him fuck my mouth like he did the first night. In between everything, when he’d driven me wide with his mouth, I’d done the same to him. The only difference had been when he was done playing, he stopped playing around and got down to it.

“While in the meeting with my brothers, when everyone else left the room, Shiner

and Blow stayed behind with me while I made a phone call.”

That sounds ominous.

“Okay,” I say, my voice trailing the word, unsure of who he called, but my stomach tightens at the possibility of who it was.

“Sniper had your dad’s number and gave it to me. I called him, and he’s on his way here.”

I stare at Griz for a long moment, just staring.

“I’m sorry, did you just say you called my dad? Without me, I might add, and he’s on the way?”

“Yeah.” Griz’s voice deepens and becomes gruffer. “If you’re wantin’ me to apologize, I’m not. What I will do is tell you that he now knows someone tried to kill you. He didn’t like the sound of it, told us not to let anyone get near your car until he gets here.”

“He said that?”

Of course, he would like the sounds of someone trying to kill me, but he’d have demanded to talk to me.

Griz nods and backs me farther into the room, his fingers gripping the bottom of the hoodie he’d given me. “How’s your back feel?”

It hurt, but I wasn’t going to tell him that, instead, I shrug. “It’s fine.”

“Liar.” A smirk curls on his lips, and he strips the hoodie from me, taking the shirt

with it. “Guess I’m gonna have to show you what happens when you lie to me.”

“Guess so,” I utter, my breath catching in my lungs.

The thought of him touching me is enough to get me going. Already, I was wet and needy for him to be inside me, but I still wanted to have fun first.

“Take your pants off, Marley,” he orders, taking a step back and removing his own clothes.

I do as he says and go to my knees right there in the middle of his room to help him with his jeans.

Griz’s cock springs free of the jeans he’s wearing, and I curl my fingers around the thick shaft. I lick my lips and look up to see Griz’s eyes locked on me. Beautiful dark orbs filled with lust stare back at me, heightening the thrill for me.

I stroke him as I lean forward, eyes still trained upward to hold his gaze as I take him in my mouth. Griz groans, one hand coming to the back of my head, fingers tangling in my hair.

“Suck my cock like a good, sweet girl.”

Okay, the raspiness of his voice shoots tingles all along my spine.

I do as he tells me, taking him as deep as I can and swallow, earning another groan of approval from him. Taking my time, I suck him how I want, his fingers guiding the way with the tug and tightening of his fingers.

“Fuckin’ love your mouth on my cock, baby. You don’t know how hot it is watching you suck me off.”

I wanted more than just to suck his cock—I wanted him to fuck my face.

Griz must read my mind because no sooner I think it, he tightens his fingers more, and he holds my head still while he thrusts his cock with quick short movements. “You’re gonna take me to your throat, sweets. I wanna come done that pretty little throat of yours.”

Quickening his movements, I also relax my throat. I could feel the pulse of his cock and moan as the first jets of his cum hit the back of my throat. I tighten my lips around him and moan, sucking every last drop from him.

Griz lets out a ragged breath, pulls his cock from my mouth, and reaches down to scoop me off the floor. “Now that you’ve gotten to have your fun, I’m gonna have mine.”

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” Griz asks, voice gruff and harsh.

“No,” I breathe, still trying to catch my breath.

Griz, it seems, is nearly insatiable when he wants to be. Okay, more like all the time.

“You sure?”

“I’m sure.”

No way could he hurt me. Even taking me roughly, he hadn’t taken me hard enough to cause any more damage.

“Sleepy,” I tell him, snuggling into his chest.

“Then sleep, sweets, I’ve got you.”

That he did.

We still needed to talk about the fact he called my dad without me, but that could wait. I knew his reasons. I understood them. It didn't mean I didn't think he should have waited for me to make that call. For Christ's sake, it was my dad he called, damnit.

Snuggling in deeper, I allowed myself to sleep, knowing with him holding me, nothing was going to touch me.

A pounding on the door startles me awake. Who on earth is that banging on the other side of the door?

"Fuckin' hell," Griz grumbles. Rolling away from me, he shouts, "Yeah?"

"Got company, brother." I want to say it was Scorn or maybe Shiner. I wasn't exactly sure.

"Give us ten minutes," Griz calls out and rolls back into me. "Time to get up, baby." The gentleness of his voice touches a part of me I didn't think possible. Touches even more when he kisses the shell of my ear.

"Ugh," I mutter, not wanting to get up. My body was sore, more so now than it was yesterday. I guess I was hurting far more so than I thought. "I don't want to get up."

"Gonna have to." Griz slowly rolls me to my back and grips my chin. "How you feeling this morning?"

"My body feels like I've been run over by a Mack truck," I tell him, knowing it's no use to lie about it.

“I knew I shouldn’t have fucked you last night,” Griz grumbles.

“I have no regrets for doing what I wanted, and you better not either.”

Just because I was hurting, didn’t mean I was going to let it hold me back from enjoying the pleasures of being in Griz’s arms or the sex the two of us have. It’s magnificent, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Marley, no way would I regret a damn thing we do together. I just don’t want to hurt you.”

“Only way you’ll hurt me is if you treat me like I’m fragile and an invalid when I’m not.”

Yesterday, after everything happened and he held me, that was perfect. He didn’t baby me. He comforted me and gave me what I needed.

“I’m not gonna do that, Marley. Remember that ‘cause I’ll fuck up plenty, but I’d never treat you that way.”

“Don’t be sweet to me now when we have to get up,” I remark snappishly. What he said was sweet. All I want to do is kiss him, which will lead to other things, and we can’t do that right now.

“We got time.” Griz smirks, slides a hand between my thighs, and immediately slips two fingers inside me. “Fuckin’ love that you wake soaked for me, sweets.”

“What can I say? You do it to me.”

Griz definitely did it for me. He does it for me in a way I didn’t think could be anything other than what it was . . . me falling for him.

Or maybe it's that I've already fallen. It surely feels that way.

CHAPTER TWENTY

MARLEY

“Oh God, he brought everyone with him,” I grumble louder than I mean to.

Griz chuckles, tucks me closer to his side, and guides me into the main room of the clubhouse. Thankfully, I’d been able to dress in my own clothes. Chelsea did well to pack my favorites, and she didn’t even know it.

Dressed in a pair of boot-cut jeans, I matched a thin black oversized off-the-shoulder long-sleeve shirt. I finished the outfit off with a pair of Chucks. I had high tops and low tops, all in different colors at home, but Chelsea was smart to bring my solid black ones and two other pairs. She also packed two pairs of heeled boots and one pair of stiletto point-toe heels. They were my favorite as well.

Dad’s eyes came to us first. My mom’s follow, both Marshall and Marla look over, and Grandma Ryan grins brightly.

“Now, how did I know it was going to be Griz that you would go for,” Grandma says cheerfully, coming forward and giving me a wink.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, furrowing my brow.

“Sweetheart, this is a small town, and I hear plenty of things. Even when I don’t go to town, I hear them. Old biddies sure do like to gossip.”

Oh, dear lord.

“How did you figure I’d get with Griz?”

“Because I knew he was just your type,” she says, straightening. “That being said, I’d have at least liked to have not gotten the call I did, however, it did get my daughter back home.”

“Mom,” my mom snaps. Looking at her, I don’t miss the frustrated expression on her face. “We’re not here to discuss that.”

“Oh, pish-posh.” Grandma waves a hand and rolls her eyes.

“Can we get on with things?” Dad grumbles, taking a step forward. Where Mom was looking at Grandma, Dad was looking at the way Griz was holding me to his side.

“Dad,” I murmur in greeting and look past him to Marshall and Marla. “I see you brought everyone with you.”

“Family meeting,” he mutters as he meets my gaze briefly and shifts toward Griz. “Mind lettin’ my daughter go so we can have that family meeting.”

“If it involves any of the shit she’s been through lately, then yeah, I mind, sir.”

Dad narrows his gaze on Griz and takes him in for a moment.

“You’re Gael Holland’s son, aren’t you?” my mom speaks up, coming up next to my dad.

“Yes, ma’am,” Griz confirms for Mom, surprising me with the way he answered this.

“Your mom, she’s . . .”

“Dad’s high school sweetheart, Erica Holland,” Griz finishes for her, and I don’t miss the pain in his voice when talking about his mom. “She passed away when I was ten.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I remember the two of them together. They were both a couple grades ahead of me, but you never saw one without the other.”

“That’s what my dad’s told me.”

“Does Gael’s brother, Dallion, still own the diner in town? I remember him and his wife bought it a long time ago.”

“Yeah, they’re still running it.”

“We’ll have to stop there to eat while we’re in town.”

“Again, can we get back on topic,” Dad demands.

“Michael, you need to calm down,” Mom tells him, swatting at his chest.

“I’ll calm the fuck down after I can assure myself my daughter isn’t hurt.”

“Dad, I’m fine,” I tell him, holding his gaze. “I would have told you that myself if I’d spoken to you.” I shoot Griz a knowing look as I say this. Turning back to Dad, I give him a smile I hope he doesn’t see through. “You didn’t have to come all the way here.”

“Yeah, we fuckin’ did,” Marshall snaps, stepping forward, glaring at me. “Why the fuck do you think we’re here for a goddamn family meeting, Marley? You had to bring up the damn past for Mom and Dad, and now here you are, nearly getting

blown up on us.”

“You need to step back and calm the fuck down,” Griz snarls, pushing me slightly behind him to face off with my big brother. “You’re not gonna come into my clubhouse and start in on your sister, who happens to be my woman, without thinking you can get away with it. Tellin’ you now, man, it ain’t gonna happen.”

My heart tumbles in my chest. I love my brother just as I love my sister. They’re amazing siblings, but like I told Griz before, we’re like oil and water.

“Marshall, calm down and take a seat,” Mom states firmly, using the mom voice we all knew to listen to or all hell would break loose. “All of my children sit down so we can get this over with.” Mom looks to Griz, hands going to her hips. “Since you’re with my daughter and adamant about her not being involved without you, then you sit your carcass down as well.”

I struggle not to laugh and nearly choke as my mom says this to Griz. The look he casts in my direction is one that I think I’ll never forget. I don’t think anyone has ever spoken to him that way. At least not since he’s been an adult.

Together, we move to a table, Blow and Nines joining in, along with Sniper and a few others.

“This is a family meeting,” Dad says.

“Yeah, Griz’s is our brother, we take his back on all things, including family meetings. Besides, Marley’s family, same as Grandma Ryan, means we’re sittin’ in on the meetin’,” Blow informs him, leaving no room for argument as he takes a seat.

Dad looks at me, his lip twitching, and shakes his head. “Swear, Lee-Lee, you’re a pain in my ass.”

“It’s not like that’s anything new, Dad,” Marla gripes, flopping back in a chair, eyes rolling. “I love you, Lee-Lee, but you’re constantly always getting into trouble.”

“No, I’m not,” I snap, stiffening and preparing myself not to launch across at my sister. I love her to death, but she’s a pain in my ass with her sarcastic remarks. “None of what’s going on is any of yours,” I indicate to my siblings and parents both, “business. It has nothing to do with y’all. We still haven’t had a chance to even get into it because it just flipping happened yesterday. I needed a day to recoup, for Christ’s sake, I don’t need the family to come barging in acting like I’m an infant needing my ass wiped .”

Okay, so the last part is a bit dramatic, but oh, flipping well.

“You don’t think we need to be here when we nearly lost you yesterday?” Marshall bites out through gritted teeth, glaring.

“No, I don’t,” I snap, glaring right back at him.

“Lee-Lee, you need to have your damn head examined then because there’s no way in fuck even as pissed as I am with you, that you think none of us need to be here. We nearly fuckin’ lost you yesterday.”

“Yeah, well, you didn’t.” I wasn’t going to back down on this.

“Marley,” Griz murmurs and pulls me into his side, enough for him to whisper in my ear. “Calm down. You need to think.”

“I am thinking,” I tell him, twisting enough to look in his direction. “Marshall wants to act like I’m a kid when he knows damn well I’m not.”

“No, but he’s your big brother. Think about how you’d feel if you got told one of

them had nearly been killed.”

I wouldn't like it.

Okay, so Griz makes sense. Still, I didn't need them coming in and throwing a shit fit about it. Acting like it was all my fault. Not when I don't even know what it is yet. I mean, I know that the other things are connected. I don't believe in coincidences.

Sighing heavily, I return my attention to my brother but don't say anything. He doesn't either. What he does is watch Griz and me a little more closer than before.

“If you two will stop the fighting, we can get this show on the road.” Dad grunts.

I look at him and see him pinching the bridge of his nose, his eyes closed.

“You shouldn't be surprised by the fighting, Dad. It's how we always act, and you know it.”

Dad casts a glare at me. “Yeah, I know, but I figure one of these days, you three will actually get the fuck along.”

“Michael,” Mom snaps. “Stop it. You're only going to egg Marley on. She will keep going to prove a point just as we all know she does.”

Yes, I would. I don't back down from arguments or proving my point. They all know it, but still, they all continue to think I won't. That I'll back down. It's not in me. It's not the way my dad raised me to be.

“How about we get to the fucking point of all this and save the bantering for a time when my woman doesn't have road rash all over her back and isn't sitting here in pain,” Griz remarks, annoyance filling his tone in a way I haven't heard before.

“I have something that will help with that,” Grandma Ryan says, opening her bag and digging through it. “I make this for Rain all the time when she asks for it. I just made a new batch and was going to give it to her yesterday but forgot.” Pulling out a jar, she slides it across the table. “It’s a salve you put on that will help with the pain and healing.”

“Damn, now I know where Rain gets that shit from.” I hear Nines mutter.

“Thanks, Grandma,” I say, catching the jar before it slides off the table. The last thing I need is to have to clean up a broken jar filled with whatever she’s made. “Now, Dad, what is it you need to share with the class?”

Dad glares at me for a second and lets out a heavy breath. “First up, you came to your mom and brought up shit the both of us have done our best to keep behind us.”

“I hadn’t meant to upset Mom, I simply wanted to know?—”

“We know you want to know what it was about, but you caught us both off guard,” he mutters, interrupting me. “We both know who the person was that was stalking your mom. Only we couldn’t do anything about it at the time, ‘cause who is going to believe a nineteen-year-old girl over a decorated officer?”

“You mean Mom’s stalker was a cop?”

Holy shit.

“Yes, and in keeping up with things, he’s still on the force, but now he’s got even more backing because of his rank. Cops are going to need some hellacious proof if they’re gonna believe someone accusing one of their own.”

“What’s the cop’s name?” Griz demands, his body tensing, and his arm around me

tightens.

“Deets,” Mom utters the name quietly.

“Fuck,” Griz snarls, bolting out of his seat. “Keys!”

“Already on it,” Keys shouts rushing from the room. “Give me ten, and I’ll have something for you.”

“Prez, think you should call Adams back in on this,” Nines suggests.

“What’s going on?” I demand, coming to my feet, hands on my hips.

Griz slowly turns to me. “Remember how we first met?”

I did and I find the fact he’s asking, confusing. “Yes, what about it?”

“The order was against Hattie Deets. Now, you tell me this isn’t a fucking coincidence?”

“I don’t believe in coincidences.” There’s something not right about all of this, though. “Why are you flipping out though? That’s what I don’t get?”

“Her dad is a cop. I overheard her talking to him on the phone. Ended it. She didn’t like it, so she tried that bullshit with the protective order.”

“Okay,” I draw out, not quite getting what his ex has to do with her dad. Unless . . .

“You think . . .”

“Don’t know, sweets, but we’re gonna find out.” He looks to Blow. “I agree with Nines. As much as I hate the idea of bringing cops into club business, Adams knows,

just as we do, that there are some shady cops on the force.”

“I’ll call him,” Blow nods and pulls his phone out as he steps away.

Throughout this, my parents and siblings all watch as the man I’ve fallen for and his brothers take over what’s going on. However, I’m not able to let them take this over without me being involved. I mean, this whole thing does happen to be my problem. Not theirs. I’ll do my part even if that means working in the background. It’s what I’m best at. Finding the information for them to be able to do what they gotta do.

It doesn’t matter to me they already have Keys on it. Where he can’t do something, I can.

For instance, I can go into police databases, I’m sure they know nothing about.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

GRIZ

“What the hell do you think you’re going to do that we’ve not been able to do?” Marley’s brother demands.

“Marshall, stop it.”

I gotta admit, Marley’s the spitting image of her mom. The only difference between the two of them is their age, and Marley’s got her dad’s eye color.

“Seriously, Mom, this is bullshit,” Marshall sneers. “You don’t need this shit, and neither does Dad.”

“Your sister doesn’t need it either,” I sneer, seriously not liking Marley’s brother. Since meeting him a bit ago, he’s done nothing but piss me off. I’d even taken his side earlier when he and Marley were arguing. “You think your parents have wanted to hold this secret to themselves for as fuckin’ long as they have,” I stretch an arm out in their direction, narrowing my gaze, “I sure as fuck don’t think they did. Your dad did what the hell he had to do to protect his woman, your mother. Just like I’ll be damned if I’m going to standby and do nothing to keep my own woman safe. Maybe if you got your head out your ass, you’d see it the way I’m seeing the situation.” I look toward Marley’s little sister and jerk my chin. “Same goes for you. Lose the bitchy attitude toward your sister and grow the fuck up.”

I didn’t have to be in Marla’s presence long to see that she’s the baby, so she likes to

use the fact to her advantage.

“If none of you can do anything to help, then get out,” I say and turn toward Michael. “You said on the phone for us not to touch the car ‘til you got here. Now, I want to know why?”

“Right before moving, Deets tried to kill Anna. Her car had been rigged to go off while she was driving. The fucked-up part of it was, Anna wasn’t driving the car that day. Her friend Beth was. Beth was killed, but there was no way to prove it was Deets who planted the explosive.”

“How do you know it was Deets stalking your wife?” Nines asks, brows drawn together.

“Deets didn’t hide the fact he wanted Anna for himself. Didn’t hide his hatred of me. More than once, he tried to use his position against me. Being in the military helped keep him off my case, but it didn’t stop him from harassing Anna every chance he got. The fact he didn’t hide his stalking only caused the problems to escalate. I had to ship out to my new station, and I took Anna with me. We got married and rarely came back here. It’s best to keep Deets from seeing my wife and the possibility of him picking up where he started.”

“That’s why you didn’t want me to move here and wanted Grandma to leave this place,” Marley notes. “Why not move on, and if he causes problems, take him on? It’s not like you don’t have your own firepower behind you now.”

“Trust me, Lee-Lee, there’s been plenty of times I thought about coming here and doing just that.”

“I wouldn’t let him,” Anna, Marley’s mom, speaks up, curling herself all the closer to her husband’s side.

It's strange to me that she not only knew my parents—especially my mom.

I remember my mom, not as much now as I have over the years, I have the memories, but there are certain things I can't recall anymore. It's those times I end up at my dad's, he and I'd talk about her. Hell, every year since I was ten, Dad and I've always gone on her birthday to her grave, where we'd lay flowers, release a balloon for her, and watch it float to the sky. Some people would think it's something that we shouldn't do, but it's our thing.

“You think because of the explosion it's Deets that's trying to get to me now?”

“I didn't believe it. Detective Deets knew who I was because of all the times I've been at the station, but he's not acted one way or the other toward me. More than that, he doesn't give me the vibes I usually pick up from those who are creepy, icky, straight-up bad guys, or those who hide the fact they're bad people. It just doesn't add up to me. There's no way Deets could be the one behind this now,” Marley rambles quietly, like she's talking to herself. “I seriously need to get on a computer and start looking more into this.”

“We need to go look at the car. That will be what tells me if it's Deets or not,” Michael remarks, having heard his daughter, though he seems to be ignoring what she's said. That or he might not have actually fully heard her, considering she did speak quietly.

“We'll go take a look at the car,” I tell him and look directly at Marley. “You want to find Keys, I'm sure he'll let you help him.”

Marley's head tilts back, eyes coming to mine. “That would be great.”

“Then go find him, sweets,” I murmur and lower my head to touch her lips. I keep it brief. I don't have the time to kiss her the way I want.

“Marley shouldn’t be looking into any of this,” I hear Marla gripe.

“Marla, that’s enough,” Anna snaps. “Your sister does this for a living. I love you, but Griz is right, you need to stop with the attitude.”

“Mom, if she hadn’t brought all this up and moved here, none of this would be happening right now. She might not have gone and gotten her car blown up.”

“Marla,” Michael gets there before I do, his tone harsh and terse. “Knock it the fuck off.”

That’s not what I’d have said to her, but it seems to work. If she keeps this shit up, I’m going to lose my shit on her, and it won’t be pleasant.

“You know, Marla, I’m getting really sick of your judgmental attitude. Get over yourself. I do what I love doing while you do what you do. You don’t, then I guess it’s time you and me, go our separate ways.” Marley doesn’t wait for anyone else to say anything. Instead, she stomps away, heading in the direction she’d seen Keys go. I’m sure she’ll find my brother soon enough.

I shoot a glare at Marla, not even going there. Marley would be pissed at me if I said further about where the fuck Marla can go with her bitchy attitude.

“Let’s go,” Blow calls out. “Adams is going to meet us at the garage. Says the forensic team is ready to get to work on it.”

Nodding, I give him a chin lift and head for the door. I don’t bother saying a word to any of Marley’s family. Seems the only one I like so far is her mom. Maybe her dad, but only because as soon as he got the call, he hauled his ass here. Granted, he could have left his asshole son and bitch of a daughter behind.

All that matters right now is finding out if it was indeed Deets who set the bomb on Marley's car. Once we know one way or the other, I'll know what my next step is going to be.

"It's not the same setup for the bomb, but damn sure close. The one that was planted in Anna's car back then had been hooked to the transmission," Michael says, straightening from under the hood of Marley's car.

The moment we got here, Michael went to work examining the car. Now, it was my turn. I wanted to know what I was dealing with, and I wasn't taking anyone's word on anything. That is unless you're one of my brothers, which Marley's dad isn't.

While I do my own assessment of the car from beneath it, I ignore the others and focus. The device was easy enough to find the remains of. There was also something else connected to the wires I knew had to be connected to the GPS system.

"Dad, I just got off the phone with Grail and Bash, they're pissed no one called to tell them about Marley," Marshall states gravely, sounding more than a little bit pissed.

"They'll get over it," I shout. "Torch, I need you down here. Shiner, can you grab my gear wrenches. The eighth and quarter inch ones." He'd know exactly which ones I'm talking about. They're the only two I have that are gear wrenches but also adjustable to be able to fit in tight spaces.

"What did you find?" Michael calls out.

"What's up?" Torch asks, joining me under the car.

"Here ya go, brother," Shiner says, tapping my leg with the wrenches.

I take them from Shiner before pointing out the wires to Torch. "You see what I see?"

With Torch being a trained firefighter, it doesn't matter if he's a volunteer or not, he's been trained to eye things like this by his dad, who's also the fire marshal/investigator.

"Fuck me, someone was tracking Marley," he mutters low enough for no one else to hear him.

"That's what I was thinking," I tell him, reaching up to disconnect the wires that were bolted in. "Hopefully, there will be something on this that will help Keys and Marley."

"Maybe, but with how severely charred it is, it'll be a crap shoot," Torch remarks.

"Crap shoot or not, it's something."

Who the hell knows, we might find something, something I'm not about to let the cops get their hands on. If this is Deets, I don't give a shit if Adams can do anything or not, I'll be killing the fucker.

Moments later, once I climb from under the car, I grab my wrenches and head for the garage to put them away. Torch already pocketed what I needed him to and will take it back to the clubhouse while I deal with Michael and Marshall.

"What did you find?" Adams asks, holding a hand up before I can deny anything. "Off the books questions, man, know you, know the club, you found something, gave it to Torch, what was it?"

"Go ahead and answer him," Blow states calmly.

Sighing, I walk over to my toolbox before I answer. "Found a device connected to the wires for her GPS. Torch confirmed. He's taking it to Keys and Marley."

Adams nods. “If there’s anything they find, I need to know. I get y’all gotta do your thing, but this is still my investigation. I need to know what I’m looking at. And if I need to be looking more into Deets on this.”

The last part he murmurs for only Blow and me to hear.

“We’ll let you know.” Blow nods, confirming what Adams is saying without saying more. Bringing his gaze to me, he jerks his chin. “Time for us to go. Let Adams’s boys handle things from here.”

Nodding, I head for my bike, ignoring both Michael and Marshall. Until they can prove themselves to me, more like until Marshall can prove himself, I’m not sharing shit with them about Marley.

Maybe it’s because I don’t know the relationship between them. Marley said they were all like oil and water when it came to each other, that they loved each other and would do anything for one another. This might be so, but they all need to find themselves in my good books before I let any of them alone with my woman. Not even her mom has been able to get to her since I left. Keys and Scorn were taking care of that. Mostly because Scorn was stationed outside the room where Keys and Marley were held up working together.

I’m sure I’ll hear from Marley about my actions later, but not before she knows the reasons behind the actions I took to keep her safe. When it comes to Marley, it seems I’ll walk the edge of all things to see her safe, not just physically but also emotionally.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

MARLEY

“Your boyfriend needs to butt out of our business,” Marla mutters sarcastically.

“Don’t even,” I snap, leveling a glare on her. I knew I should have stayed where I was and not bothered to come out for more coffee, but the stuff Keys has is horrible. It can’t even be classified as coffee. The man doesn’t know the meaning of heavy handed and makes it almost like mud. “I don’t have time to listen to your griping.”

“Griping?” Marla scoffs. “I’m not griping, Marley. I’m just tired of always getting called in these things. Can’t you just live a normal life?”

Squaring my shoulders, head high, I stare at my little sister. “You know what? I’m done with this shit. I didn’t even want all of this to begin with. You can leave and go back to your normal life. Don’t worry about me. In fact, forget you have a sister altogether since you seem to think it’s such a hardship having me as one.”

I stomp away, hearing her, but not. I need to get coffee and get back to work. Keys has a sweet setup, and it was even better after I installed several of the programs I use onto it. It wasn’t hard to find information on Deets. The tricky part was getting around being flagged digging doing it. We didn’t need him to find out someone was looking into him.

What I found interesting, however, is the intel I found on his daughter, Hattie Deets. She’s a year older than me. Beautiful in the pictures, but according to records, she’s

been diagnosed with bipolar and depression. She attempted to kill herself when she was only fifteen. I honestly feel a tad sorry for the woman. Something in my gut tells me to dig more into her, and that's the plan.

Still heated about my sister, I wasn't paying attention when two of the skanky clubwhores Storm and the others told me about step in my way.

"I don't want any trouble with you two," I tell them. I wasn't in the mood to deal with more bitchiness.

"We know the score already," the brunette with a heavy chest says, eyeing me up and down. I'm surprised she's actually got on more than the small amount of clothes she was wearing before, still she showed a lot of skin. "We just got back and found this outside on one of the cars where we park. It has your name on it."

My name?

"Thanks." I take the paper from them, and without a word, the two of them walk away. I'm honestly surprised they didn't try anything, considering the stories I'd heard in the past about how they act.

I opened the note and recognized the handwriting immediately.

You didn't get the hint the first time. You didn't listen the second. You lived through the third. No more chances. Since you don't want to leave, I'll take what I want, and you won't be able to stop me. He's mine, and you can't have him.

Is this person for real?

Reading it again, I know instantly by what it says who the person behind all that's been happening is.

It's a Deets, alright, but not the one they're all thinking it is.

I glance around the room and make a split-second decision. I wasn't waiting around. This is my fight. I wasn't going to let this woman scare me further. Nor am I going to let her intimidate me any longer. Blowing my car up was the last thing she'll ever do to me.

Quickly, I find a piece of paper, write a message of my own, and leave it on the bar top. Someone will see it. I'm sure Griz is gonna be plenty pissed with me when he finds out what I'm doing, but he'll get over it. If what we have is going to work, he'll have to.

No way is this bitch going to threaten what we have together.

Seeing the way Griz reacted to my brother and sister, and the way he wanted to protect me from the whole situation, it's all eye-opening. It's a reason for me to fall more and more for him.

Outside the clubhouse, I quickly move to one of the spare cars in the parking lot. I open the door to the first one I get to. I climb in the driver's seat, no keys in the ignition, but it's an older model without all the latest things and easy to hotwire. The wires aren't hard to get to, and in minutes, I have the car running. I'm sure someone will have something to say about me doing this later, but I don't have the time to worry about it now.

My focus is on finding Hattie Deets and ending this bullshit scare tactic once and for all. How cliché can the bitch be with the whole 'he's mine' tactic. I'm not an idiot, and I know going into this, I'm going to have to handle this situation calmly and not make things harder than they already will be.

I'm sure it wasn't smart of me to leave without telling anyone, but Griz will see the

note. I didn't hide anything in it. I just told him exactly who I was going after. He'll be able to figure the rest out.

It didn't take me long to pull into the driveway of the Deets home. There were two cars in the driveway. It didn't matter to me if anyone else was here. It might work out best that way.

I put the car in park, throw the door open, and climb out. With confident strides, I make my way to the front door of the house just as the front door opens to show Detective Deets standing in the doorway.

"What can I do for you, Miss Keys?" he asks, watching me closely.

"Is Hattie home?" I don't bother with pleasantries.

"Sorry to say, she just took off. Was heading out to the warehouse district. She rents one of the smaller buildings for her work."

I already knew this, considering she was someone who worked with her hands in creating art. I didn't know what that art was exactly, I hadn't gotten that far into my search.

"Okay, sorry to have bothered you," I tell him and step away.

"It was my daughter who blew your car up, wasn't it?"

I stop on the last step and twist to look back at Detective Deets. Did he really just ask that? "I'm sorry?"

Sighing, the older man shakes his head and steps out fully on the porch. "Made a lot of mistakes in my life. Thought a lot of things I shouldn't have. Did them too." He

nods and shoves his hands in his pockets. “I know who your momma is. Knew the minute you moved to town the past was coming to bite me on the ass.”

“Why are you sharing this with me?” I ask, completely caught off guard by his admission.

“Because I was an asshole who wanted something that wasn’t mine to have. Then, I found a woman who meant the world to me. She was taken from me far too soon, leaving me with a daughter who was more like her dad than anyone ever expected. Unfortunately, where I got the help I needed with my own problems, she didn’t.”

Wow.

I didn’t expect that.

Not in the least.

“My daughter needs help, mental help. She’s not a bad person, but she’s taking a sheet out of my book and doing things she shouldn’t be. You find my daughter; you do what you have to. I’m not gonna fight it.”

“Okay.” I nod.

That’s good. One less thing I’ll have to worry about.

“You should also know, and you can tell your folks, I’ve put in for my retirement, did this right after you moved to town, I’m leaving. Found me a place down in Florida. The wife and me were always gonna go down there after I retired. I’m doing what she would have wanted, not coming back to this place.”

Now, what was I supposed to do with this?

Detective Deets turns and walks back into the house after giving me a brief nod.

Surprised by all of this, I walk back to the car, climb in behind the wheel, and head for the warehouse district. I'll have to absorb all that Detective Deets shared with me later. Once I've taken care of the problem of his daughter. Only after she's dealt with will I figure out how to handle what the other man shared.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GRIZ

“Note left for you, brother,” Keys calls out from the bar before the door even closes behind me.

“What?” Cocking a brow, I head in his direction.

“Your woman wrote you a note and left another one with it,” Keys says, holding out a slip of paper. “And you should know she took off about fifteen minutes ago. Hotwired one of the spare cars, she went to your ex’s place.”

“The fuck?” I snarl, snatch the paper from him, and take a look for myself.

Griz,

Don’t be mad, okay, you will be, but I’m done with this mess. I’m going after Hattie myself. Come find me. Take a look at the note she wrote, and you’ll understand.

Short and to the point.

Reading the other one, I nearly see red. It wasn’t her father doing any of this. It was her. Hattie. She tried to kill my woman. She was behind everything else.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

All of this is fucked.

Now, my woman was out there, looking to find herself in a load of trouble.

“What’s going on?” Marshall asks, coming up behind me. “What’s Marley done now?”

“Your sister is doing what she always seems to do, go her own way,” I growl, crush the papers in my hand, and focus on Keys. “You said she was heading toward Hattie’s?”

“Yep.” He nods and lifts his tablet. “Looks like she’s on the move again.” He turns it and keeps talking. “Marley downloaded some sick-ass programs to add to mine I already have, and we were able to find some information on not just Deets but even more on Hattie. Including several other addresses. Looks like from the direction she’s going, your woman is heading toward the warehouse district.”

I nod, knowing exactly where he’s talking about. Hattie talked about it once. It’s where she does her work when she’s creating her art. Though I never saw a piece of art she’d done.

Tossing the tablet back to Keys, I spin on my heel and head back out. No way was my woman going to be facing off with this bitch without me having her back. Marley was right, it pisses me off that she’s doing this, especially after the fact she’s been hurt. No way was I taking this from her, though. However, I’ll be spanking her ass for going ahead without me.

Marley’s note, no matter how short, I already knew it word for word. It was simple and to the point, yet still, she’d been able to be sarcastic in it, telling me not to be mad though she knew I would be.

Fuck.

“Where you heading?” Blow asks as I step out the door, nearly running into him.

“Warehouse district,” I tell him, not stopping. “Marley’s going after Hattie.”

“Right behind you,” Blow and Nines call out together, changing directions, following me.

I don’t pay attention to anything else. I know my brothers will follow. None of us will leave another behind. You have to cross the club in a way that can’t be repairable to ever make one of us turn our backs on another.

Swinging a leg over my bike, I don’t waste time getting on the road. Hitting the throttle, I kick up rocks and handle my bike as I always have. Smooth and easy. Nothing is going to stop me from getting Marley. Fuck knows what she could be walking into.

Ten minutes later, into what should have been close to a twenty-minute ride, I’m riding into the warehouse district. Our town might not have much, but we have warehouses. It’s one of the few places you can work around here that doesn’t involve working on the pipeline out of town, being a farmer or first responder, and a few other similar things. A lot of people work in different distribution centers. One of the buildings we actually keep as well as a precaution that we might need it.

Moving through, I find the car Marley took parked next to Hattie’s. At the sight of her getting out, I released a breath I didn’t know I’d been holding.

Thank fuck.

I park right next to her and set the kickstand down. “The hell are you thinking coming

here without backup,” I snarl while getting off the back of my bike. Closing the short distance between us, I grip the back of her head, tilt her head back, and get right in her face. “You should have fuckin’ waited for me.”

“Well, you’re here now, so let’s get this over with.”

Fuck me if the defiance in her voice doesn’t have my cock stiffening. Leaning in, I run my nose along her cheek to her ear. “Later, when this shit is done, you can count your sweet ass fucked.”

There’s no missing the shiver that rushes through her, I felt it.

Letting her go, I step back and motion for her to go ahead. She wants to take care of this, that’s fine. She just wasn’t gonna be doing it without me.

Marley nods and moves for the door to the warehouse that I knew Hattie rented. She stops long enough to crack and listen. Not hearing anything, she inches the door open farther.

“If you’re coming in, don’t just linger in the doorway,” Hattie calls out. “I know you’re out there, Griz. Did you finally decide to come back to me?”

“You think I came here for you?” I ask, stepping around Marley and shielding her. If Hattie hasn’t seen her or knew she was there, then what comes to mind might work.

“Well, of course I do. Why else would you be here other than to come back to me?” Hattie says, turning her attention to me.

I step deeper into the space and realize exactly why I’d never seen any of her art. “What the fuck is all of this?”

In the middle of the room, there was a gurney with someone attached to it. The person looked like they'd been dead for a few days. To make it worse, the smell coming from it was horrendous. That and the fact it was missing half its skin. Off to the side of the room, not far from where the gurney is placed, it looks like she sculpted a body and used real flesh.

On the walls, one side was dedicated to pictures, all of them of me, me and my brothers, me and Marley. The ones with Marley, her face had been scratched out. The other walls were covered in paintings, all of them looking to be done with blood.

"What exactly do you call this shit?" I don't bother hiding my disgust.

"It's art, Griz. What does it look like?"

"Looks like some crazy ass shit."

"Her dad said that she wasn't getting the help she needed," Marley murmurs for only me to hear.

"Did you finally scrape off the whore?" Hattie demands. "You know I warned her. Weeks ago, I told her she needed to get out of town. Then I tried again. She refused to leave us alone. So, I decided to take further action. If she wouldn't leave, I'd make her."

"So, you tried to kill her?" I accuse.

"It would have worked. It should have. I did everything right."

"Marley's too smart to be taken out by some car bomb," I tell her, not giving a shit if she likes what I say or not. The woman needs to be in a fucking looney bin.

“If she’s so smart, then what are you doing here? Why not be with her?”

Her question doesn’t make sense to me, but still, I roll with it, feeling my brothers also start to fill the space behind me. All of them surrounding my woman.

“What do you want me to say? My woman took off this morning after seeing the latest note you left her. I just want to know what the fuck makes you think I’m yours. I broke up with you because I didn’t want some lying bitch in my bed.”

“Lying bitch? I didn’t lie to you, Griz, and you know it.”

“Not telling me your dad was a cop is the same as a lie in my books. My woman has to be loyal to me. To my brothers. To herself. Marley’s that woman, Hattie, not you.”

“She is not,” Hattie snaps, slamming some type of drill she was holding onto a table. “It’s supposed to be you and me. Always and forever. It’s me you love.”

“Love,” Marley scoffs.

Fuck.

Shoving past me, Marley moves to stand next to me.

“Bitch, you need your head examined if you think Griz could love some bat shit crazy nutcase like you.”

“Marley, don’t make things worse.” I’m surprised to hear Marshall right behind her.

“I’m not making things worse. I’m just saying it like it is.”

If I could shake her, I would. But this is Marley we're talking about. She's going to say and do whatever she wants. Fine with me. I didn't mind it in the least. So long as it doesn't get her killed in the end.

"How dare you," Hattie screeches, stepping forward, eyes darting between the two of us. Finally looking past me to the men filling the space behind me, her gaze grows wild as she looks back at me. "You're supposed to love me." She stomps and jerks up the drill, points it in her direction only to gasp, her eyes going wider, head jerking downward.

I follow her line of sight to see what she's done. She hit herself with the edge of the drill.

"Oh god." Marley moves, rushing forward, but no one was able to stop her.

I watch the way she grabs Hattie's wrist and pulls the tool from her hand.

"Get away from me, you whore," Hattie shouts.

"Bitch, shut up," Marley snaps. Shoving the tool in my direction, instead of it having a drill bit, I held a sharp rotatory blade that had cut into Hattie. "Take this and find me something to stop the bleeding. She's going to bleed out if we don't."

"Let the bitch bleed." Blow grunts.

"If we do, she can't be held accountable for this," Marley reasons, jerking her chin toward the dead person off to the side of the room and then to the other thing covered in skin. "Who the hell knows how many people she's killed for that."

"She's got a point," Nines remarks.

Marshall moves in next to his sister with what looks to be a medic bag. I didn't know what he was, but him having this surprises me. "I've got shit we can use to patch her up 'til cops can get here."

"I'll go call Adams then," Blow mutters. "Still think we let her bleed, but Marley's right."

"Griz," Hattie whimpers, "please don't leave me."

"Bitch, shut the hell up," Marley snaps. "He's not going anywhere, but it's not because of you. He's mine, and as you put it, you can't have him."

"We're meant to be together," Hattie cries out, her voice getting higher, face scrunching up with pain as Marshall applies gauze to her chest.

"No, Hattie, we weren't." I shake my head and look at Marley. "You need me, sweets, I'll be outside."

Marley nods and smiles at me. "Be out as soon as I can."

Nodding, I leave Marley with her brother and a few of mine. I couldn't stand to hear any more of the crazy bullshit. Here, with everything that's happened, never did I think it would be because of me, my woman would end up nearly dead.

I don't know how I'm going to make it up to Marley, but I'll find a way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MARLEY

“Gotta admit, Lee-Lee, I like your man,” Marshall mutters the minute the paramedics take over for the two of us.

Thankfully, he injected a sedative into Hattie, shutting her up. I didn’t know how much more I could take of her threatening me and telling me that Griz was hers. The whole situation is meant for some terrible nightmares.

“Seriously?” I ask, my lip curling slightly with the annoyance flooding through my veins. “It doesn’t matter if you do or not.” I had enough today when it comes to siblings, and now with this. All I wanted was to go home and have that flipping bath that I won’t get because my back is throbbing right now.

“Yeah, I know it doesn’t matter,” Marshall remarks, touching my upper arm just barely and sighs. “Look, I know I’m a fuckwad a lot of times when it comes to being your big brother. I come off as a total dick. I get that, but I don’t mean it. You’re my little Lee-Lee, and I don’t like hearing when something fucked up has happened to you. I also don’t like seeing the parentals upset.”

“I don’t like seeing them upset either, but I don’t come at you or Marla the way you both seem to always want to team up against me.” I shrug and start away from him to where Griz is standing by the exit.

“I get that, Marley, I’m trying to apologize here,”

That stops me, in all our fights, not once had either he or Marla apologized for anything unless Mom or Dad forced the issue. “And I should forgive you?” I shake my head and let out a heavy sigh. “Look, Marshall, I love you. You’re my big brother, I’ll always forgive you, but you need to know I won’t allow you guys to keep it up.”

“Don’t think your man will either.” Marshall smirks. “I like the fact you have someone that will always have your back, Lee-Lee, and will always stand in front of you while letting you be who you gotta be.”

Marshall moves past me through the doorway as Griz approaches me.

“You okay, baby?” he asks. One hand comes up to cup the side of my face, his thumb strokes along my cheek, and the other hand wraps low around my waist.

“I’m okay.” I give him a small smile and lean into his touch. “I’m just ready to go back to sleep and be done with this day.”

“Hate to tell you, sweets, but you can’t be done with the day just yet, Adams wants your statement. After that, your ass is mine.” His hand at my waist lowers, cups my bottom, and squeezes. “Adams can talk to you outside. You don’t need to be in this place any longer than you have been.”

This whole thing was fucked up. Everything from what Hattie had been doing to me down to what we found she’d been doing to other people. I’m sure I’ll have nightmares about it all.

Who kills someone just to take the skin and put it on a sculpture? It’s enough to give a person the heebie-jeebies for sure.

Griz ushers me out of there to a waiting Detective Adams and Detective Ratford.

I give them a rundown of everything, including the notes. Griz had the one I'd left with mine that he handed over to Adams. Adams's face grew more than a bit frustrated about what I hadn't shared. However, I explained to him how I had to deal with a stalker before, so he let it go. Ratford, on the other hand, told me that if something like this happens, I best get with the police about it. It didn't matter what it was I needed to tell them, if it involved any type of threat, it was best to bring it to them. He also threw in the fact that I was one of them because of my profession and that I couldn't go it alone. If I was going to skip trace and be a process server, then I needed to do things the right way—no going rogue on them.

Finally, they said we were good to go, and Griz took me straight to his bike.

“We're going to the clubhouse,” Griz shouts, telling the others.

“Meet you there,” Blow returns.

I wrap myself around Griz and hold tight to him. It's a beautiful feeling riding behind him, holding to him as if he were the one holding me back from falling over the edge. He's the person who keeps me safe, and I honestly like the thought.

The ride stops far too soon for me. I wish we could've kept on riding the rest of the day. Maybe another day, once I'm healed up, we can go out and spend the whole day out there riding.

Griz and I barely get off the back of his bike when the front doors fly open, and Marla storms out, face red,

Oh Lord, what now?

“What the hell were you thinking, Marley?” Marla screeches, my parents coming out behind her, much, much slower, eyes on me. “How could you be so stupid?”

“You need to back off, Marla,” Griz snarls, getting in front of me. “You nor anyone else is going to talk to Marley that way. You do, and you’re out on your ass. You hear me?”

“Marla, back off,” Marshall grunts, getting out of his car. “Knock it off with the attitude.”

Marla’s head swings toward our big brother. “Are you serious right now? Years you’ve bitched about what she does, and now you’re telling me?—”

“Enough, Marla,” Dad says, coming forward.

“I hadn’t ever seen Marley do what she does, still haven’t, but I saw today how she kept herself in check, unlike how you’re doing now.” Marshall grunts and looks to our dad. “Never seen it before today. Gotta admit, Dad, you’re right, and we shouldn’t have fought you on it.”

“I know my daughter.” Dad shrugs.

“Oh my God,” Marla snaps. “I can’t believe this.”

“I can,” Mom says, narrowing her gaze on my sister. “It seems your brother has finally clued in that he can’t dictate his sister’s life. Now, it’s time for you to grow up. I love you. Love all three of you, but bring a brat, and getting your way isn’t going to continue.”

“Marla, I already told you what I had to say. Now, I’m going to go inside, I want a shower and a nap. After that, Mom, Dad, I need to talk to you about something,” I say while taking Griz’s hand.

“Okay, Lee-Lee, how about you call us when you get up? We’ll do dinner at the diner

in town. How's that sound?"

"Sounds like a good plan, Dad," I agree and look at Griz. "Come on, I'm tired."

"Then let's get you to bed then," Griz remarks, guiding me away from my family toward the clubhouse.

I could still hear my family bickering, but I didn't care. I was done with drama to last me the next twenty years.

"Don't think you are going to sleep right away after your shower, Marley. I still owe you one hell of a spanking."

My body shivers in anticipation. "Looking forward to it."

"Fuck me, sweets, your pussy is going to be the death of me," Griz rasps.

"I think it's going to be the other way around. Maybe sex together will be the death of us both. Think what the death certificate would say, death by mind-blowing sex." I giggle.

Griz spent hours after starting in the shower pleasuring me. It was fully glorious. He'd given me the spanking he promised me and did so while he was planted fully inside me. He had me begging for more, and I wanted even more. Every last bit I could get from him.

"Once we get through the next part of the day, we're going away so we can have some fuckin' peace for more than a couple hours."

"Sounds good to me. Let's take the bike and just go away," I tell him. I didn't want to deal with anything else right now, still, I know there's more to handle.

“What do you gotta talk to your parents about?” Griz asks.

“Deets talked to me while I was there looking for Hattie. He admitted to it without admitting to what he did to my parents. Said he was moving to Florida and that he wasn’t coming back.”

I still couldn’t believe Deets had told me all that he did, but I wasn’t going to go into it. His daughter was in the custody of the police. She was going to be put away probably for the rest of her life, and I didn’t have anything else to worry about on that end. I was free and clear. The way Deets made it sound, so were my folks.

“He told you this so he could clear his guilt. I’m willing to bet he knew what his daughter was doing, and this is his way of getting himself out of Dodge at the same time.”

“Evidently, he put in for retirement after I came here.” Lifting up, I meet his gaze. “Can we not talk about this? Put it behind us?”

“Yeah, we can put it behind us, sweets. We can move forward and not worry about this shit anymore. I wouldn’t mind being able for us to spend time without the drama or anything else.”

“That would definitely be nice. I swear it feels like we’ve been riding the edge since meeting. Not being on the edge would be nice for a change.”

“Living on the edge is the way to go about life, baby. That’s life, and we’re gonna live it up ‘cause I’m not letting you go.”

“Even though that means dealing with my crazy family?” I grin and get a twitch in return.

“Yeah, even if it means dealin’ with your bat shit crazy sister. The rest aren’t so bad.” Griz brings his fingers up to stroke my cheek. “Doesn’t matter if they’re crazy, though, because they’re your family, and I know you’ll make it worth it.”

“How do you know that?”

“My dad told me all my life that when I find the one woman for me, I’d know it. She’d get under my skin, and I wouldn’t want to let her work out. That woman, baby, she’s you for me. And I’m a hundred percent I’m the man for you.”

“You are,” I whisper, nodding, leaning into his touch. “You definitely are, Graham.”

Lowering my head, I brush my lips against his. Griz’s fingers slide into my hair, he takes over the kiss and moves us into yet another round of mind-blowing sex. Only this time, it’s not fast or rough in any way. It’s slow and sweet, and I yearn for more with each stroke. With each touch, I find myself loving living on the edge right alongside him. So long as it’s always with him, I’ll never fear anything. Not that I would admit I’ve felt fear in the past. It’s just that he makes everything that much better in every way.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:27 am

KEYS

“What are you doing?” I ask, staring up at the woman coming toward me. “You know how much shit we can get into for you being in here?”

“It’s okay, Kyan ‘Keys’ Asham,” she murmurs, walking in my direction.

Turning away from the computer, I sit back in my chair and watch her make her way toward me. Seeing the lust filling her eyes.

“We get caught, and we’ll both be in trouble,” I tell her again. But I do it, watching as she strips her shirt off and throws it to the floor.

“Don’t you want me, Kyan?” she asks, her bottom lip poking out in a pout. “I want you. Can’t we just have what it seems to me that we both want?”

Coming to me, she straddles my lap, my hands going to her hips.

“I want you, Keys. I want all of you.” Leaning in, she presses her tits to my chest, her nose nuzzling my cheek. Her breath a whisper on my skin. “I dare you to be wild with me. Even if it’s for one night.”

“Baby, you don’t know what you’re asking for.” She didn’t know.

I’ve known this woman for years now. She’s been the woman who’s haunted my nights for years. Her voice has been all I’ve known, and seeing her now, touching her, knowing what could happen. We’re both fucked if it gets out.

Still, I want her.

“I know exactly what I’m asking for. It’s a matter of what are you going to do to take care of us both,” she asks and kisses the edge of my lip.

Hands going to her ass, I hold her to me, get to my feet, her legs going immediately around my waist. I take her the few short steps to my bed, lay her down, and grind myself against her.

“We do this, Marla, and you’re mine. No more hiding who you really are. You strip away the bitch and give me the woman I know you to be.”