



Guarded by Atlas (Steel Rebels MC #6)

Author: *Cassi Hart*

Category: Romance

Description: Marie

With my job as a nurse in a senior living facility, my life is rewarding, if a bit boring.

All I want to do after a long day is go home and curl up on my couch with a bottle of wine and some trashy reality TV.

The last thing I ever expected to happen is to be kidnapped in a case of mistaken identity.

They thought I was the daughter of a notorious gang leader, a woman who sometimes visits my favorite resident.

They're furious when they realize their mistake, but I've seen their faces, so I'm a liability.

Tied up alone in a dark, dirty room with no means of escape, I'm on the brink of losing hope when a giant of a man bursts in, promising me rescue and protection.

When I realize he's a member of the Steel Rebels—the equally notorious motorcycle gang and my kidnappers' greatest rivals—I decide to trust him.

The Steel Rebels welcome me with open arms and promises of protection and vengeance.

But the more time I spend at the clubhouse, the more I'm drawn to the quiet, enigmatic man who rescued me.

His unwavering attention makes me feel safe.

But I want more than his gaze.

I want his touch.

I want his everything.

Atlas

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Marie

No one in nursing school warns you of the chaos that exists within the walls of a nursing home.

They teach on topics from anatomy and physiology, patient care, and medical administration, but fail to mention the hours upon hours of panicked, one-sided hide-and-seek with the residents, pranks pulled on unsuspecting nurses, and more drama than a middle school cafeteria.

Barely anyone mentions the secret love affairs or catfights that happen between octogenarians. Or the constant chaos with a population that is supposedly harboring aching joints and failing eyesight but is shockingly spry when there's pie on the line.

And no one told me that I would spend a Friday evening in a room with a stubborn eighty-five-year-old resident who won't take her meds because the man she's been flirting with started talking to another woman—one who is supposedly my patient's arch nemesis.

"That old wind bag!" I lift my face from my palms and stare at my fuming patient.

Her stunning snow-white hair falls just above her shoulders in heavy curls that frame a delicate, regal face.

Her red painted lips are puckered in a pout, and her furious brown eyes are locked on the door across the hall.

“I hope his teeth fall out while they’re kissing, and her oxygen tank runs low.

Linda has been jealous of me since we were teenagers.

Always trying to steal the spotlight from me, that hussy! ”

With a sigh, I drop my face back to my palms. I’ve been hearing about this love triangle for months, and it shows no sign of cooling off.

To be fair, the residents here don’t really need a reason for the crazy things they do, and half of their reasons are made up anyway.

I guess when people are bored and trapped in close quarters, they’ll do anything for entertainment.

And no, I don’t hate my job. Quite the opposite. Between the amazing stories of people who’ve made it through nine decades to knockdown fights over whose grandkids are more successful, there is never a dull moment within the walls of this nursing home.

I’d always wanted to be a nurse. I was ten when my parents brought me to visit my grandfather at this very nursing home.

At that age, I was terrified of hospitals, so when my parents led me down the clean, brightly lit halls of the nursing home which smelled strongly of antiseptic, I’d wanted to run.

But then I saw her.

An angel dressed in blue with a smile so bright it could light up a room.

She was tending to my grandfather, patting his shoulder as she spoke softly to him, and in that moment, I realized that I wanted to be her.

I vowed to overcome my fear of hospitals and worked my butt off in nursing school to be top of my class, so I too could become an angel who helped people.

Back then, I had no idea what happened within these walls when residents didn't have to be on their best behavior in front of their families.

Sometimes, I feel more like a preschool teacher than a nurse.

"Debbie," I say with a sigh, brushing stray strands from my face as I turn to look at my brooding patient. "If you're going to win Earl back, don't you think it's important to be in your best health for that? You need your meds so you have the energy to put Linda in her place."

She sniffs and turns away, smacking her lips when she speaks, "Those meds make me feel awful and tired. Besides, I don't want that toothless geezer back. I've moved on!" She yells the last part, clearly hoping it will reach across the hall.

"Debbie—"

She turns back to face me, grappling to take my hand.

"I'm prettier than she is, right?" she shamelessly asks, blinking up at me as the anger in her eyes vanishes, and in its place appears a vulnerability that startles me.

The kind that reminds me how fast moods change around here.

"Everyone says I'm the prettiest around here.

They're always complementing my hair and skin.

Jack says I look no older than sixty-five. ”

“And humble too,” I deadpan, to which I am rewarded with an eyeroll.

“You want to know what I think?” She nods, her grip surprisingly strong when she tightens her hand on me.

“I think I saw a certain seventy-five-year-old man watching you in the entertainment room tonight. He was trying to be discreet, but I caught him looking your way every five minutes or so. You, Miss Debbie, have been so focused on your two-timing beau that you completely missed the fact that you have a secret admirer.”

Her eyes light up with excitement, and I nearly laugh as her mouth stretches into a devious smile. “Who was it?”

“Nuh-uh.” I shake my head, reaching for her meds on the tray. “If you want me to spill, you have to take your meds first.”

“Oh, come on! That’s blackmail.”

I sigh. “It’s bribery, but I guess you’ll never know—”

She reaches for the meds and downs them one after the other, chasing each pill with a sip of water. She even sticks out her tongue to prove she did in fact take them—and just to be sassy—before leaning back against her pillows. “Okay, Nurse Marie, you got me to take the meds. Now spill.”

I shouldn’t...

I know better than to gossip with the residents, but I've always had a soft spot for Debbie.

She is my favorite resident, although I would never tell her that, knowing how she'd be bragging about it before the day is over.

She is way too energetic and mischievous for an eighty-five-year-old, giving all us nurses a hard time, but she is exactly who I want to be when I'm her age. Proud, confident, and lovable.

I gnaw my lip, briefly glancing at the open door of her room to make sure we're alone before leaning in to whisper. "Here's a clue for you. He has a thick mustache and a gruff demeanor from his days in the military—"

"Good God!" she gasps, her delicate hand going to cover her mouth. "Are you saying that brooding hunk with navy tattoos who barely ever says a word to anyone has a crush on me?"

"Looks that way," I say dramatically, lowering my voice to feed her more gossip. "And get this, I'm pretty sure I heard him asking Betsy about you."

Debbie giggles at my words, and we're both so invested in it that we miss the fact that we're not alone anymore.

"What are you two gossiping about?"

I jump, my heart in my throat as I bump into the woman standing behind me. "Ouch," she laughs, rubbing the spot under her jaw. My cheeks flush at the thought of being caught gossiping with a patient, but I relax when I see who it is. "Serves me right for sneaking up on you two. Hi, Marie."

“Chelsea!” Debbie beams when she sees her granddaughter. “Oh, honey, I wasn’t expecting you until tomorrow.”

Chelsea is a stunning woman with light brown, almost golden eyes and long curly hair that bounces when she moves. She smiles as she walks straight into her grandmother’s open arms. “I wanted to surprise you, Nonna.”

“And you did.”

“I missed you so much!” she says, pulling back to study her grandmother. “Are you eating well? What about your meds? You’re taking them, right? I heard you’ve been giving the nurses grief by playing pranks on them. Nonna, you need to stop stressing these poor nurses!”

Debbie tosses me an accusatory glance before smiling at her granddaughter. “Now calm down child and tell me how you and that handsome biker boyfriend of yours are doing.”

“Oh, Nonna, Hound is amazing. I have news for you and couldn’t wait to tell you.

” She giggles, her face glowing with excitement when she lifts her left hand, the light catching the stunning engagement ring on her finger.

It’s a breathtaking piece with a sparkling diamond that seems to dance in the glow of the room.

The band is delicate gold that perfectly complements her golden eyes. “He proposed, Nonna!”

I smile at the sheer delight in her eyes, something that sparks in her grandmother’s eyes as well.

I move back a step to give the two some space when I bump into yet another person.

. “Sorry,” I murmur, relaxing when I realize it’s one of Chelsea’s friends.

A beautiful woman with long midnight hair and hazel eyes.

“Oh, hey, Scarlett. I didn’t see you there. ”

“Hi, Marie,” the woman says with a smile that brightens her eyes. “How’s it going?”

“Oh, you know, just trying to keep my lovely patients from bringing this place down around our ears.”

She laughs, and we both turn to look at the two women preening over the engagement ring.

I’ve been Debbie’s nurse for a year and managed to form a friendship with her granddaughter.

Before Chelsea started dating her boyfriend, she often came to visit her grandmother alone or with her older brother, Ransom.

Back then, she looked tired to the bone.

Her visits always left Debbie worried, and she once confided in me that she felt like a burden to her grandchildren.

And then Chelsea met a biker, one with a buzzcut and fierce eyes. Turns out she didn’t just gain a boyfriend but a whole bunch of friends, more like a family. Lovely women who often tag along to visit her grandmother. She seems lively and content, which in turn, makes my patient happy.

Her life in the motorcycle club makes me curious, but despite being friendly with Chelsea, I never want to offend her by asking too many questions about that part of her life.

Even so, I often wonder what it's like to belong to such a notorious motorcycle club.

Probably more exciting than working at a nursing home, but likely far less entertaining.

I chuckle at my own train of thought before turning to the pair gushing over the engagement ring, and I figure I should probably make my leave now that Debbie has taken her meds. "Chelsea, congratulations on your engagement," I say when she looks up.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

“Thanks, Marie.” She beams. “Promise me you’ll come to the engagement party. It’ll be at the clubhouse, and you’ll get to meet the guys. Oh, maybe I can introduce you to someone special.” She stops, frowns. “You’re not dating anyone, are you?”

“I barely have time to breathe, let alone date,” I say, walking over to grab my coat, which I’d draped over a chair earlier. “But I would love to come to your engagement party.”

“Oh, you’ll make time for dating once you see the men at the clubhouse.” She chuckles, exchanging a knowing glance with Scarlett. “They are hot enough to tempt a nun.”

“I’ll have to take your word for it,” I say with a laugh, doubting anyone would tempt me into a relationship.

Not when my head is always spinning with thoughts of work and a hundred other things I need to take care of on a daily basis.

No, romance is the last thing on my mind.

In fact, I plan on spending one of my rare free weekends watching some trash TV and rotting on the couch with a bowl of ice cream.

The thought puts a smile on my face as I zip up my coat.

“Okay, what a crazy coincidence.” Chelsea chuckles, and when I look up, it’s to see her eyes shift from Scarlett to me. “Did the two of you plan this?”

“Huh?” My brows knit with confusion as I try to make sense of her words. “What do you mean?”

“You and Scarlett are wearing the same outfit.” She laughs, and I look down at my coat and then at the woman standing next to me.

Scarlett is wearing a bright red parka with a fluffy hood, and it looks exactly like the one I’m wearing.

I didn’t notice it at first since she left hers unzipped, but our outfits do look similar, down to her blue jeans which are the same color as my scrubs.

“You’re right, wow,” I say, a chuckle escaping my lips. We both start laughing and there are a few jokes exchanged on how we could trick people into thinking we’re twins, even if Scarlett and I look nothing alike. No one would be able to tell with our hoods raised.

Despite my plan to exit early, I find myself roped into more conversation about the engagement party and hot bikers before I’m finally able to leave.

I make a few more stops to chat with the nurses on the night shift, and it’s almost eight by the time I step out of the building.

Two hours past the time my shift was supposed to end.

The cool evening air hits me when I step onto the sidewalk, tugging my hood over my head to fight the chill stinging my ears.

I turn toward the L station and notice a plain white van slowly come up the nursing home’s drive, immediately dismissing it as a delivery van.

Those often have some kind of logo on them, but I don't pay it too much attention as I hurry to catch my train.

I'm about to turn the corner when I hear a sharp metallic sound that startles me. I turn around, my heart hammering in my chest when I realize the van is much closer than I thought and a figure emerges from the side door, his face obscured by a hood.

It takes me five seconds—entirely too long—for me to realize that he's moving toward me, and when it clicks, it's too late.

It all happens too fast.

The man reaches me before my brain can transmit the panic to my limbs.

My breath catches in my throat when I see the glint of metal in his hand—a knife, its blade gleaming in the dim light.

It's pressed against my neck before I can even react, and I know one move from the jittery man could prove to be fatal.

I don't want to die.

There is so much I have left to do. I know I told Chelsea that I have no time to date, but that doesn't mean I don't want to find love at some point. I've yet to kiss a man, and the awkward press of lips that happened when I was fourteen doesn't freaking count.

My parents. Oh God, this would kill them.

"Please," I whimper, conscious of the knife dangerously close to the vital parts of my throat. "Everything is in my purse. My money, credit cards, and phone. Take it!"

“Shut up!” he hisses, and I can hear the nerves in his voice as he grips my arm and pulls me toward the van. “Just shut the fuck up and get in the van.”

I try to tap into the lessons we were taught about how to de-escalate frenzied patients, but before I can think of anything to say, he pushes me toward the open door of the van.

I turn around and a chill runs down my spine when I am met with dark hateful eyes glaring at me, and I realize that there is nothing I could say to save myself from this situation.

With another shove, I stumble inside, the darkness engulfing me, the smell of stale air and metal filling my nostrils.

The door slams shut behind me, trapping me in a cage of steel and fear.

I’ve been kidnapped.

The thought sends me scrambling to my feet and pushing against the door, searching blindly for some mechanism to open it, but I come up empty.

I move to kick the door, but I’m thrown down when the van starts moving.

I wrap my arms around my head to brace for impact when the van takes rough turns, each one sliding me from one side to the other; there is nothing to grab to steady myself.

I’ve been kidnapped.

My heart thumps in panic as I close my eyes against the thought, even as another, equally terrifying one filters in.

What do they want?

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Atlas

Life begins at thirty, they say. Well, they clearly weren't talking about my life.

Christ, at thirty-six, I feel every bit of those years.

It's been a heck of a busy week, and I ought to join my MC brothers down in the bar and unwind with a bottle of beer and terrible music, but here I am, settled in my armchair, a well-worn copy of the Odyssey in my hand and my ginger cat draped across my lap.

Most of my MC brothers are downstairs getting drunk, which is a sensible thing to do on a Friday evening, but I'm locked in my apartment with a fucking book that barely anyone reads anymore. Fuck, this is the kind of shit those old fucks do.

I shift my eyes from my book to the window.

Outside, the world is a symphony of noise—the wail of sirens, the cackle of drunk teenagers carrying through the night and the car honks that seem to come from all around.

The chaos within Chicago is worlds apart from West Odessa with its endless flatlands and tumbleweeds.

I left the dust and silence ages ago for this concrete jungle.

Left the endless days of working on the oil rigs, the smell of crude clinging to clothes

and the grime under my fingernails.

I spent my whole life in the arid expanse, a world of endless horizon and deafening silence only broken when I rode my Harley along the dusty road, allowing myself small pleasures when I was done baking in the sun.

But I wanted more, a community, a family.

The Steel Rebels MC offered me that.

So I left the oil rig, the dust and the silence of West Odessa, and headed northeast.

Chicago is a different beast. It's loud and chaotic, it's alive. But every once in a while, the hermit in me that was raised in West Odessa reemerges, and then I find myself locked in my apartment with a book and a chubby ginger cat I named Rusty while listening to the world move all around me.

A faint sound drifts through the city's noise. My mind slowly surfaces from the past when I realize how out of place the sound is. The second my thoughts snap back to the present, I make out the insistent ringing of my phone.

Shit!

I snap the book closed and toss it on the table before lowering Rusty to the floor.

I get up and follow the noise to the bedroom where I left my jacket.

I quickly take it out and only sigh a little when I see the MC president's number flash over my screen.

Saint would not call me so soon after coming home from a job if it was not important,

so I take the call.

“Atlas, are you at the clubhouse?”

“Hmm,” I hum. “Got back a couple of hours ago. Need anything, Prez?”

“I need you to come down to Ransom’s office immediately.” The dark and slightly unnerved tone of his voice sends the hairs on the back of my neck standing straight. Saint is not a man who rattles easily, but before I can ask more, he quickly adds, “I’ll tell you everything when you get here.”

I’m already sliding into my jacket before he hangs up.

I walk to my closet and grab my gun from the locked compartment I had installed and check for bullets.

Rusty curves around my legs, mewling needily as I move for the door.

“I know, looks like you’re spending the evening alone,” I say, leaning down to rub his ginger head before heading out the door.

There is no telling whether the occasion Saint called me for will require a gun, but something in his voice suggested as much. Besides, as the club’s most experienced enforcer, there’s rarely ever a time when my presence doesn’t require the use of force.

Ransom’s office is on the ground floor. Despite being our newest member, Ransom is one of three men with an office at the club, Saint and the club’s VP, Knox, being the other two. It makes sense, seeing as Ransom is the club’s official hacker and money man.

The sight in Ransom's office is unexpected, and a wave of confusion washes over me when I spot some of my MC brothers and their partners crowded into the room. The atmosphere feels heavy, almost palpable as I take in the scene before me.

Saint is huddled with Ransom by his workstation, their voices low as they stare at a series of monitors.

At the far end of the room is his sister Chelsea.

She's burrowed in the arms of her fiancé, sobbing as Hound rubs her shoulders.

There are other two women sitting together on the small sofa, their shoulders shaking as they sob quietly, expressions twisted in distress.

"I will never forgive myself if something happens to her," cries one of them, who I recognize as Scarlett. "What if she's... Oh God! This is all my fault!"

"It's not your fault," Jade, Saint's wife whispers, patting Scarlett gently on the back. I can see tears streaming down her own face, glistening in the harsh fluorescent light of the office.

My first thought is that someone died or is about to. What else could explain this level of reaction and distress?

Fuck, it's no use speculating.

I approach Saint, but he stops me before I reach him. He motions to talk outside the office, and we both step out. There's something akin to concern in his eyes, and it puts me on edge.

He clears his throat, his voice strained when he speaks. "Someone's been kidnapped."

“Who?”

“Her name is Marie. She isn’t from the club.

She works at the nursing home where Chelsea and Ransom’s grandmother lives.

She was taken tonight after leaving work.

Since Chelsea and Scarlett were there visiting, and they said Marie and Scarlett were wearing the same coat, we suspect that Scarlett was the intended target and these assholes grabbed the wrong woman. ”

My mind reels for a moment, trying to keep up with Saint’s rushed explanation. “So who do you think is behind it?”

“The Chrome Vipers.”

I suppose it makes sense, but I’d thought there was nothing left of the Vipers but bad memories.

A few months ago, the Steel Rebels took down our rival motorcycle club after we had gotten evidence that they were involved in trafficking and auctioning girls.

Scarlett, whose father, Stone, was the president of the Chrome Vipers, helped a great deal in bringing them down.

Many of them weren’t killed in the final showdown were delivered to the authorities along with the evidence to put them away, and those who managed to escape, fled. Or so I’d assumed.

“What the fuck do they expect to achieve even if they’d gotten the right girl?” I ask,

confused by the news. “The Vipers don’t exist anymore.”

“Revenge,” he explains. “I suspect some Vipers have been watching our building for a while, and they must have seen Scarlett and Chelsea leave and followed them to the nursing home. Marie’s kidnapping was simply a case of mistaken identity.”

“How can we be sure? What proof do we have that it was the Vipers? What do we know about Marie?”

“Ransom was able to get some footage from outside the nursing home. He and Scarlett recognized the driver of the van.”

Fuck! The Vipers were well known for their lack of boundaries and propensity for violence. There’s no telling what they will do to her when they realize they got the wrong woman.”

He doesn’t respond, not that he needs to. Now I understand the concern I read in his eyes. The Vipers are literal vipers with no regard for human life.

“We need to find her fast.”

A loud curse sounds from the office, pulling Saint’s attention, and I follow when he walks back in. Ransom is seated in front of three monitors, typing frantically at his keyboard, but my eyes shift to the monitor replaying the surveillance footage of the kidnapping.

I watch as a woman in a red parka steps out of a building, tugging the hood over her light hair. It’s the same coat the sobbing Scarlett is still wearing on the sofa behind me. The woman spares a single glance at a white van slowly driving toward her before turning away.

It all happens in seconds.

I watch as a man in a dark hoodie slips out of the van and moves swiftly toward her.

She barely has time to react before he has a knife to her throat and then shoves her into the van before speeding off.

It's pure luck that they drove right past the camera, the driver's face clearly visible through the windshield.

Just as the van pulls out of the drive, a woman rushes out of the building, waving her arms and yelling at the van before rushing back inside.

"Give me some good news, Ransom," Saint tells our hacker, impatience clear in his voice. Everyone in this room knows that every second counts. Especially when the Vipers are involved.

"I'm trying my best," Ransom growls. "We have the make and the plate of the van, so I'm trying to hack into the BMV to get an address off the registration and match it with known Viper properties... Got you, son of a bitch!"

"You have it?"

"The van has been registered to two different addresses. It was previously registered as a commercial vehicle with the address of the Vipers' clubhouse, but right after we took them down, it was re-registered to a private individual. I don't recognize this second address..."

"Scarlett," Saint calls to her urgently. "Can you take a look and see if you recognize this address?"

Looking over my shoulder, I see Scarlett extract herself from Jade and stand.

Just then someone else bursts through the office door and rushes toward her.

I have barely a second to recognize Gray, another of my club brothers, pull her into his arms. Scarlett returns his embrace before pulling away to look at the monitor over Ransom's shoulder.

Gray's presence seems to have given her renewed strength.

"It's an apartment building. My dad owned it.

It's one of the few properties he didn't put in the club's name...

or mine. I haven't been there in years, but I remember it being a run-down dump. "

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

“We’ll split up.” Saint grabs the paper Ransom wrote the two addresses down on and tears it in half before turning me.

“Blaze is already waiting in the garage. You two take the apartment building. Hound and I will go to their old clubhouse,” he says, passing me the torn paper.

“It’s unlikely that they would go back there since Scarlett sold it, but we have to be sure.

Perhaps they’re hoping to make some kind of statement by bringing her to the place they think still belongs to them.

If you find her, call Doc; he’s on standby in case she is hurt. Let's go!”

We don’t waste time as we all rush to the underground parking lot where we find Blaze ready to roll out. There is no need for words as everyone climbs onto their bikes and the space fills with the roar of engines before we’re tearing out of the lot.

The cold night wind screams past my helmet as I try not to think about the woman in the grasp of monsters.

An innocent woman.

The memory of the girl in the red parka stepping out of that building, so trusting of her environment, has me pushing the bike to its limits and no doubt breaking a couple of traffic laws, but I can’t stop, and Blaze sticks with me.

Luckily for me, we make it to the address without being pulled over.

The building is as Scarlett described it.

A hulking, three-story shadow against the dark sky. Under the moonlight, it looks abandoned, decaying and forgotten, but something about it feels...off. We park down the road and cut our engines, watching keenly for any sign of life inside the derelict building.

Nothing.

It's quiet. The silence broken only by the faint hum of the city around us.

I knock down the kickstand before climbing off my bike.

My gun is in my hand as I approach the entrance, Blaze a shadow on my heels.

There's no need for words between us. An enforcer like me, Blaze is accustomed to situations like these, and we've always worked well together.

I motion for him to head around the back, and he nods in response before raising his gun and creeping around the side of the building on silent feet.

The lock on the front door is new, gleaming against the weathered wood, which means someone has been here recently.

Still, I hear no sound coming from within, but I won't take chances as I raise my Glock, ready to shoot as I kick the front door in, splintering the rotted wood of the door frame.

It gives away with a sickening crunch and the door swings open, revealing the

shadowy interior.

I instinctively move to the side in case someone is waiting to attack, but nothing happens.

Maybe our instincts were wrong, and there's no one in here. The fucking Vipers probably took her to their old clubhouse just as Saint thought.

Even so, we can't leave without giving the place a full sweep. I hear another crash from back of the building and assume Blaze has made a similar entry. I can't afford to make assumptions though, so I carefully make my way toward the source of the sound.

The darkness swallows me whole when I step inside, the only light coming from the sliver of moonlight filtering through what seems to be broken windows.

The air is thick and musty as I step deeper inside.

The main level is huge and empty, the floor covered in dust and debris.

It looks like it was once a common area of sorts, broken and rotted furniture scattered around the open space.

In the darkness, it's impossible to distinguish any signs that someone has been here recently.

Just as I turn toward a doorway leading to the back of the building, Blaze steps through.

I lower my gun and give him an inquisitive look.

He shakes his head, then gestures to a set of stairs to my right.

I nod, and we move toward it, taking the stairs to the second floor carefully so as not to make a noise or risk breaking through a broken board.

The stairs lead to a large hallway, doors to either side that must lead the apartments.

There are no windows up here, so we both take out our phones and turn on our flashlights.

Blaze heads left as I go right. The first door I come to is halfway ajar, so I slip inside the apartment easily.

It's a small studio with a kitchenette, bare of any furniture.

It doesn't take long to search the single room and bathroom—both empty.

I'm just about to step back out into the hall, when I hear a faint noise behind the open entry door.

I pull the door closed and notice another behind it, likely a closet.

I hear a shuffling noise from inside, and even though it's likely a rat, I have to check.

The door is locked, but the wood around it is just as rotten as everything else in the building, so I'm able to muscle it open.

“Help...”

I freeze for only for a second as I make out a small figure huddled on the floor, her strawberry blonde hair covering half her face, her hand raised to block the beam of

my flashlight.

My heart drums fast in my chest as I quickly holster my gun and drop to my knees in front of her, lowering my light just enough so it illuminates her face without blinding her.

She drops her hand and, finally, I see her face, pale and drawn, large blue eyes wide with fear.

I have a moment of uncertainty when I realize the girl is not wearing the red parka I saw on the surveillance video. Could she be someone else? Fuck, have those fucking Vipers been kidnapping girls off the streets?

God, what did they say her name was?

Mary...Maria... "Marie?" She chokes out a sob when I say the name.

"It's okay," I tell her hoarsely. Fury burns my throat when I realize her legs and hands are bound to a pipe running along the closet wall.

I grab the knife strapped to my boot to cut away the ropes before helping her to her feet.

"I'm...friends with Scarlett. I'm here to help you, I promise. "

"I... They..."

"You're okay. I've got you now," I assure her, stripping off my jacket when I notice she's shivering and draping it over her shoulders. Those fuckers must have taken her coat. "Let's get you out of here."

She stumbles when she tries to take a step, so I catch her, wrapping my arms around her waist and pulling her close before gently lifting her into my arms in a bridal carry.

She's light, almost too light, and I am surprised by the sudden protectiveness that fills my chest. The Steel Rebels have a dark reputation in the city, and we're always skirting the law, but we would never do anything like this.

They just left her locked in here, tied up and defenseless... Fuck!

With her safety assured, I welcome the rage. The tightness in my chest that sends every ragged breath heaving out and nostrils flaring. My jaw is clenched tight as I carry her into the hall.

She jolts suddenly and presses in tight to my side, her body shaking. I look up quickly to see what has caused such a reaction and see Blaze approaching us.

"Hey," I say gently, "it's okay. He's with me. We came here to find you. Do you know if anyone else is here?"

"This floor is clear," Blaze says.

"I-I don't think they're here. Only one of the men who grabbed me was here, but he got a phone call that made him really mad, and he left after locking me in the closet," Marie says.

"Let's get out of here, then," Blaze says. "I'll head out first to make sure the coast is clear and call the others to let them know. You got her?" he asks me. I nod, and he disappears down the stairs.

Turning back to Marie, I ask, "Did they hurt you?"

The flashlight bathes us in a soft glow, illuminating her features so I take a moment to really look at her.

Despite the dirt coating her cheeks, she's stunning.

Golden hair frames a face that is a mix of delicate features.

Her high cheekbones accentuate the soft curve of her jawline and the sexy cupid bow of her lips.

Her lashes, long and thick, frame her blue eyes, and God above, she's a masterpiece.

"I... Just my wrists." She sniffs, extending her hands to show the shadow of the bruising on her wrist. I take them, instinctively rubbing my thumbs lightly over the reddened skin. "It's not me they were after."

My head shoots up and lock on those impossibly blue eyes. "Why would you say that?"

"They wanted Scarlett," she whispers, her wary eyes shifting from mine and back to the bruises marring her skin. "They were going to kill her. They...were saying something about making her sign a deed or something, then killing her!"

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Marie

I had the weekend mapped out.

A plan that involved sleeping in, curling up on the couch with some ice cream as I caught up on my favorite shows, and then a hot bath with a glass of wine.

Maybe some of that herbal tea my mother bought me if it was too cold for wine.

Now none of that is going to play out how I imagined it. Not after what happened tonight.

The memory of the knife pressed against my throat, the cold steel threatening to end a life I'd only started living was going to stay with me for a very long time.

When they'd grabbed me, I was certain the men meant to kill me.

I could see it in their dark eyes when they finally stopped and pulled me out of the van...

I could see the hate in their expressions, and in that moment, I couldn't help but wonder what I'd done to deserve it.

Why had they taken me?

Then my hood fell, and the man who'd held the knife stood frozen, staring at me in shock.

“She’s blonde. Why is this bitch blonde?”

” he’d asked, his voice laced with disbelief before fumbling around his pockets and coming out with his phone.

I shut my eyes when he shined the flashlight on my face.

“You’ve both seen Stone’s daughter, right?”

” he called to the other men. “That bitch is not a fucking blonde!”

“Maybe she dyed her hair,” one of the other two men offered.

“Her hair was black when she walked into that fucking nursing home,” the other spoke as he came around the side of the van and stopping in front of me. “This isn’t Scarlett. Who the fuck is this?”

“You grabbed the wrong girl!”

“How the fuck was I supposed to know? They had the same fucking red coat on!”

Scarlett. My panic-riddled brain was able to make sense of the fact that I was never their target.

A part of me was hopeful they would let me go until the first guy spoke, snuffing out what little hope I’d been grasping.

“Doesn’t matter now. We can’t let her go, she’ll alert Scarlett,” he hissed.

“The Rebels can’t know that we’re looking for that little traitor. ”

“So what do we do with this one? Kill her?”

My heart dropped in that moment, but despite their words, it seemed none of them were willing to volunteer to do the job, so they settled for bringing me to a shitty, run-down apartment building and tying me up in a closet while they figured out their next steps.

I’d assumed one of them had stayed behind and it would only be a matter of time before they came back to finish what they’d started.

They didn’t get the chance.

My eyes find the man standing a few feet away from me speaking on the phone.

He’s a walking contradiction. All rough edges and calloused hands, yet there is a softness in his green eyes when he looks at me that makes my heart skip a beat.

For a man built like a mountain, there was a gentleness about him when he cut me free of my bindings.

He’s weathered, like a storm-battered shore, with a jagged scar that runs along his jaw.

It doesn’t do anything to take away from that strong, stoic face; in fact, it only adds to his rugged appeal.

His short, buzzed hair is black, and there are faint lines around his eyes.

He looks to be in his mid to late thirties if I had to guess.

My savior is handsome, but God, he’s huge!

The other man that had been with him was nearly as big and intimidating, but something about this man draws me in, makes me feel safe.

I'm grateful that it was him who found me.

Despite my assurances that I could walk, he'd insisted on carrying me out of that dirty building and down the street where the other man waited next to two motorcycles.

Atlas had helped me onto his bike, then brought me here, to the Steel Rebel clubhouse.

Now, as I sit on a couch in an upstairs lounge area, I find myself watching him.

The way he moves with quiet confidence, his broad shoulders and strong frame a picture of raw masculinity.

It shouldn't do anything for me, all things considered, but it has my stomach fluttering.

I guess Chelsea wasn't lying when she was talking about the hot bikers in the Steel Rebel MC.

I allow myself to look, take in every rugged inch of the giant dressed in blue jeans and a plain T-shirt. I focus on him, tune into the deep rumble of his voice as he speaks, anything to not think about what happened to me. To not think about those men with their angry eyes and dark hearts.

"No, don't think about it, Marie," I mutter, closing my eyes against the headache burning at the base of my skull.

I'd done my best to brace myself during the rough ride, but I'm pretty sure I hit my head a couple of times.

God, I'll be lucky if I don't have a bump the size of a golf ball and a concussion.

"Are you okay?"

My eyes shoot up at the deep voice, surprised to see that he's moved.

I didn't hear him, and God, he's so close to me.

So close I catch the soothing musk and woodsy scent clinging to him, stronger on him than on the jacket he draped over my shoulder.

"I'm fine," I whisper, brushing a hand through my hair.

"It's just a headache. Nothing a few painkillers can't help.

"I try to look at it positively. Tonight could have ended much worse for me.

I could've died.

"Where does it hurt?" the giant asks, stepping closer and crouching in front of me as he brings his hands to my head, gently massaging my temples.

A moan slips out before I can stop it, and I flush, mortified by the sound, but it doesn't stop him as he runs his large and surprisingly soothing hands over my head and neck.

I close my eyes as the touch soothes the ache.

“You have a bump here and another one...here. Did you hit your head?”

“Hmm,” I hum, my mouth parting on a sigh when his hand kneads the tension in my neck.

“Doc, our club physician, is on his way. He’ll check you out to make sure you don’t have a concussion, and then he’ll treat the marks on your wrists. The girls are fixing you something to eat. They’ll be down soon.”

“Okay,” I respond, not quite paying attention to his words, focusing instead on the deep hum of his voice and letting it soothe me.

The ache eases as his gifted hands work to relieve the tension, and I’m about to shamelessly suggest he moves lower to my knotted shoulders when he pulls back.

I bite back the disappointed whine that threatens to slip out.

“I’ll get you some water and see if I can find you some painkillers.”

I want to feel those strong hands on me once more, but more than anything, I want to curl up and sleep, hopefully forget the memories of tonight. “Okay.”

As if reading my mind, he instructs, “Don’t fall asleep, okay? Not until you see Doc.”

I know the drill. Head injuries are pretty common at the nursing home with our residents often falling.

I’ve dealt with my share of concussions, and even though I want to do nothing more than close my eyes and fade into oblivion, I know how dangerous it is to allow myself that small reprieve, so I simply nod at his words, dropping my head against the back of the couch and forcing my eyes to stay open. “I won’t fall asleep,” I

promise him.

“Good girl.”

My mind jolts at those words, but I force it away.

drifts and I barely register the deep rumble of the bike or the smooth vibration as we ride off.

I do my best to force my eyes to stay open, but now that I’m alone in the room, it’s a losing battle.

My eyelids grow heavy, and my head bobs just before I feel a touch on my shoulder.

My body stiffens, and I experience a moment of panic at being in a strange space, but the hand on my shoulder gives a reassuring squeeze.

“It’s okay,” my rescuer says. “You’re safe. This is probably the safest place you can be in the entire city. I promise you.”

I believe him.

After what happened tonight, Christ knows I need to be more cautious and self-aware, but everything in me trusts this mountain of a man with gentle eyes, and my body relaxes under his now-familiar touch.

He helps me sit up and presses a glass of water into my hand, helping guide it my lips.

Neither of us says a word when I’m finished drinking and he sets the glass aside, his eyes on me the entire time.

Before I met Chelsea, I knew of the Steel Rebel MC. Knew they existed, but that was about it. Having been born and raised in the wealthy north suburbs didn't expose me to the criminal gangs in the city, but I knew of them. Then I met Chelsea and her biker boyfriend, so I looked up the club.

They are criminals. All sources online labeled them as such.

My eyes shift to the man standing beside me. He doesn't look like a criminal. I'm sure his large frame and the tattoos on his arms garner plenty of looks; they'd certainly have my parents' neighbors clutching their pearls and purses at the sight of him, but...he doesn't scare me.

Not like those other men did.

"Marie!"

I tear my eyes from him and to the doorway to see Chelsea rush toward me with Scarlett following closely behind, and suddenly I'm engulfed in their arms. "Oh, I'm sorry! So sorry!"

There are tears, gut-wrenching sobs from women I've known less than a year. Their warmth, concern, and affection floors me.

"I'm so sorry," Scarlett sobs again, pushing into the embrace. "It's my fault. This should never have happened to you."

"It's not your fault," I say, returning their hugs and trying to ignore my pounding headache. "It's no one's fault but the men who took me."

It's clear Scarlett doesn't believe that, and I want to assure and comfort her in turn, but someone steps in, gently pulling the ladies away from me. "Let's get her checked

by Doc, first,” my savior says, and I glance thankfully at him.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

“Right,” Chelsea responds, pulling back. “Sorry, we were so worried. He’s in his clinic downstairs; we’ll take her to see him. Thank you.”

I find myself surrounded by the women and ferried away. I try to turn around and seek him out, but barely manage a glimpse before the elevator door closes between us. And all I can think as I am dragged away is...I didn’t even catch his name.

Atlas.

I learn from the girls that the man who rescued me is called Atlas. At thirty-six, he is one of the oldest members of the Steel Rebels and a club enforcer. They tell me so much about the man and the club that I am certain the public doesn’t know.

Christ, I’ve been cooped up at the clubhouse for four long days because everyone is scared that my kidnappers might come after me.

Chelsea and the other girls even advised me to ask for leave from work in case those men are watching the place.

They know my face, and I saw theirs. Those monsters know that I work at the nursing home and could easily find a way to sneak in and hurt me.

It’s not exactly the most secure facility, it’s safety measures intended to keep elderly patients in rather than locking anyone out.

To be honest, I wasn't completely opposed to the idea of staying at the clubhouse when the club's president suggested it. But I refused to take leave from work. I want to be with my patients; I love my job and the facility residents.

The other option was to move back in with my parents for a couple of days while the Rebels search for the kidnappers, but I didn't want my presence to endanger my parents' lives, so I stayed here.

Since getting the all-clear from Doc—a man who looked like no doctor I've ever met—Chelsea and Scarlett have been on a mission to pamper me.

Which is probably part of the reason I haven't been getting much sleep.

On the first night, I was too scared to sleep alone, and the girls kept me company for the night with gossip and stories about the MC and its men.

I turned down their company on the second and third nights, hoping the silence of the room would allow me to rest. No dice.

So here I am, sleepy wandering into the clubhouse kitchen in search of some tea to help me sleep.

“You're up.”

I jump at the deep voice, turning around so fast I nearly fall.

“Oh, you scared me,” I heave, placing a hand on my chest, feeling the hard pounding of my heart, but...

that isn't entirely due to being startled.

Some of it has to do with the man standing in the club's kitchen in gray sweatpants and a dark, sleeveless shirt.

The same man whose gaze I've felt on me around the clubhouse over the past couple of days, but it's the first time I've heard his voice since my arrival.

Every time I've seen him, I've been surrounded by people.

The clubhouse is like a hive, always buzzing.

There's no one else around now though.

It's just us two in the kitchen. The realization sends something swirling in my stomach. Something dangerously close to...arousal.

"It's half an hour past midnight," he says, leaning against the massive island, watching me. Shadows play in those green eyes, making them unreadable. "Are you okay?"

No. No, I'm not okay for several reasons, but I suppose that's not the response he wants to hear from me, so I force a winning smile and nod.

"I'm fine," I say. "Way better than I was when you found me." His expression is blank, and my smile falls a little.

"Actually, I've been meaning to thank you for that day.

I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't found me.

Well, I think I have a guess what might have happened if those men had returned, but you arrived before they did, and I owe you my life—"

“Breathe, sweetheart.”

A hand clasps my jaw, and I have no idea when he moved, but the next thing I know, he’s standing in front of me... touching me.

“I’m fine,” I pant.

“You’ve been saying that for days,” he says, those green eyes making my heart flutter.

“It’s true,” I insist.

“And yet here you are, alone in the kitchen at midnight.”

I look away. “I just came to grab something to drink.”

“There’s a fully stocked fridge and pantry in the apartment they put you in,” he counters, and I almost feed him more excuses, argue his point, but I realize I don’t want to.

He’s the only one who knows the state I was in tied up in that closet.

I haven’t been able to talk about it. With him, I know I don’t have to pretend to be okay, but I can’t find the words to express my feelings, conflicted as they are. “Marie—”

“I can’t sleep,” I choke out. “I keep hearing the sound of the van door opening and shutting in my face. I see the men in my dreams whenever I do manage to fall asleep. I’m scared to take the sleeping pills if it means being trapped in nightmares.”

“Hey, it’s okay,” he rasps, pulling me into his arms and hugging me close. I bury my

face in his chest and allow myself to be soothed by his scent, comforted by those strong arms. “You’re safe here.”

I sigh when Atlas rubs a hand up and down my back, dipping low and nearly touching my butt, but not quite.

A strong, sudden arousal grips me, and I burrow deeper into him, biting back a whimper when my nipples pebble painfully behind my nightgown.

I move a little, swallowing a gasp when the aching points rub against his chest.

Christ, what’s wrong with me?

This man is comforting me. I shouldn’t... No, it’s wrong to think of this moment as anything other than innocent, but my senses are sharply tuned to his warm body and that soothing scent that is unique to him, one I now associate with safety. His deep voice that silences the demons in my head.

I try to take my mind off my aching nipples and the pulsing spot between my legs. Focus on anything but these mortifying reactions of my body to a man’s touch. To his touch.

“Um...I’ve seen you around, but how come you never approached me to say anything?”

Atlas pulls back from the embrace, and I bite back a disappointed whine, doing my best to hide my beaded nipples by folding my arms over my chest.

“I didn’t want to scare you,” he says.

“Why would I be scared of you?”

“Most people are.” He chuckles at the confusion knitting my brows. “I’m a big guy with tattoos and scars on my face; it’s only natural that people would be afraid of me.”

Atlas laughs as he gestures to himself with his large, calloused hands, but despite how he looks, I don’t see violence in him.

The memory of those same hands picking me from that dirty closet floor and carrying me outside is a fond one.

I associate those huge, strong hands with safety and comfort.

The same things I felt while he was rubbing the tension from my head and neck...

Instinctively, I know those hands could bring me pleasure, could soothe this ache between my legs.

I’ve never had another man touch me, but I’m no stranger to my own body.

I can clearly imagine the ecstasy if those hands touched my breasts, pinched my nipples, and rubbed against the aching spot between my legs.

My breath grows shallow the longer I build scenarios in my head, and it’s not until Atlas lays a hand on my cheek that I realize that I zoned out. One look at those heated green eyes, and I know that I’m an open book. There’s no hiding what’s going on in my head right now.

“I...I’m not scared of you,” I pant, flustered by all these emotions.

By the way, my body heats up when he steps even closer.

For a long minute, we stand silently watching each other.

I can feel my breath backing up in my lungs with every passing second, my pulse racing.

Then he leans down, so close there's only an inch between my lips and his, the promise of a kiss heavy in the air.

I've never been kissed before, but it's not rocket science. I'm sure I can figure out how to navigate if he...only if he...

Atlas lowers his mouth down on mine, swallowing the needy whine that climbs up my throat.

Oh God.

God.

A storm of heat gathers fiercely in the pits of my stomach when his mouth moves over mine.

His mouth is soft, contrasting his rugged features, and his kiss is gentle...

seeking. His lips nibble mine, and before I know it, I'm opening up for him.

I whimper when his tongue slides over mine, his hand sliding to my nape and holding me firm as he fans the fire burning through my body with his lips.

I drown in him—his lips and that intoxicating scent that's unique to him. My sex clenches needily when he brings his free hand between us, sliding it over my aching breasts and fondling them through my nightgown. I push into his hand, whimpering

into the kiss at the heady sensation.

He seems to want this as much as I do—desperately—if the growl of pleasure escaping his throat is anything to go by. Which makes it confusing when he suddenly pulls back, his breath just as harsh as mine.

“Fuck, sweetheart,” he hisses, dropping his forehead against mine. The firm grip he has on my nape stops me from pushing up for another kiss. Christ, I want to feel his mouth on mine again. I want him...more of him. “You need sleep. Rest.”

“No, I don’t,” I counter needily. I don’t want to sleep. I want him...his hands touching me and bringing me pleasure.

“You do,” he says firmly enough to cut off any protests. “Why don’t I take you back to your room?”

Hmm... Maybe I can convince him to stay a while when we get to the room, so I don’t protest when he lifts me in his arms and carries me out of the kitchen.

We head to the apartment Chelsea and Scarlett set up for me, and Atlas puts me down so I can let us in.

He follows me inside straight to my bedroom and even climbs into bed with me after kicking off his shoes.

I try to be patient as I wait.

Wait for him to kiss me and take things further. But Atlas simply wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me to his chest. “Sleep,” he orders, brushing his lips over my temple. I mumble some protests against his chest, but feel my eyes grow heavier by the second.

“I don’t want to sleep.” I want him!

Despite my protests, I find myself lulled to sleep by his warm body and soothing scent.

“I’ll keep you safe, sweetheart,” he rasps, kissing my forehead, and it’s the last thing I feel before I slide into the quiet abyss of a dreamless sleep.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Atlas

The key scrapes in the lock, and the sound echoes through the silent apartment as I let myself in.

It's early, way too early, and the dim light of the hallway barely penetrates the gloom.

I ease the door shut behind me, trying to be as quiet as possible, but I know I've failed when a low growl rumbles from the depths of the sofa and I am met by a pair of emerald eyes narrowed in disapproval.

"Sorry, buddy," I tell my furry roommate as I walk inside. Rusty is none too pleased with me when I go to the windows and draw the curtains. He glares, those green eyes judging me, as if I don't already feel like shit for what I nearly did last night.

So close.

I'd been so close to shoving Marie against the kitchen island and taking everything she was offering me, but then I tasted the innocence on her lips, felt her inexperience as she eagerly surrendered to my touch.

I wanted to take and then take more. To tear down my sweatpants and yank up her nightgown before fucking her so hard, we'd wake everyone in the building.

I wanted more...still do.

With a sigh, I shuffle toward the kitchen and flip the light switch, flooding the room

with a harsh, unwelcome glow.

The idea is to make some coffee and hope the caffeine shocks my system into thinking reasonably.

Christ, everything in me wants to head back to that room and wake her with kisses, lick my way down her body, and suck those sexy nipples between my lips.

I would have her begging for my cock in seconds.

Fuck! Just the thought alone is enough to send my semi hardening to steel, but I ignore it, reaching for the coffee grounds. I grab the box just as Rusty joins me in the kitchen, loudly demanding an apology for my absence last night and the rude way in which I woke him this morning.

“Okay, alright,” I mutter with a smile, already reaching for the cat food. The familiar crinkle of the bag is enough to have him crying up a storm that would make anyone living on my floor think I starve the darn feline. “I heard you the first time, Rusty. Jesus Christ!”

I curse out when he swats my hand as I fill his bowl with the salmon-flavored kibble before attacking it hungrily. I fill up his water and put away the cat food before returning to my coffee.

I try not to think about her. Not to obsess over the could be and would be. Unsurprisingly, I fail, and she’s still on my mind when I pour the coffee and take it with me to the shower. She stays even as I clean up and get dressed.

An hour later, as I head downstairs, I find myself wondering how to react if I see her in the communal kitchen for breakfast. Will I be able to hide my affection for her?

The deep animalistic need to shove her against the wall and rail her like an animal, to fuck her so hard she'll be feeling me for days.

The thought gives me pause, and I wonder if it's even a good idea to see her at all, but a stronger part of me is concerned. I need to know that she slept well and see for myself if the dark circles I spied last night are gone.

The scent of pancakes and syrup is heavy in the air when I step into the kitchen.

Everyone who lives in the clubhouse has an apartment with a full kitchen, but barely anyone uses theirs to do more than make coffee.

We all gather here for breakfast, like a club family tradition, and it seems most everyone is already up and about, grabbing coffee and breakfast, but none of them are the woman I'm desperate to see.

I try to hide the disappointment I feel when I don't spot her, grabbing my breakfast and settling at a table with Hound. Neither of us says a word as we dig in, and I'm just about finished polishing off the eggs on my plate when she finally walks in.

She appears well-rested, I note. The dark circles under her eyes are gone, but I also notice something else.

The unhappy lines around her mouth and the sharp edge in her eyes.

She stops in the entrance, and I watch as her gaze sweeps the room before landing on mine, and if possible, the fury in her eyes deepens.

"Marie!" a voice calls, before I can speculate what might be wrong, and she turns around to face Chelsea, who's waving her over to the kitchen island where she and Jade are taking their turn at making breakfast this week, aided by one of our younger

prospects, Kyle.

I watch with surprise as a forced smile graces Marie's lips.

"I'll be right there," she tells Chelsea before moving to the counter where she starts to fix herself a plate.

Something's wrong.

Her face shows rest, but her body tells another story as she moves sluggishly, stacking her plate with pancakes before settling on one of the island's bar stools where she can chat with her friends as she eats and they cook.

She sits with her back to me, ramrod straight and tense.

No one else seems to notice her dark mood.

Not one of her friends seems aware of the tension in her shoulders or the clench of her fist next to her plate. Not even the way her eyes dart around the room, avoiding eye contact. A smile is there, plastered on, but it doesn't seem to reach her eyes.

"You know it's creepy, right?"

Hound's voice draws my attention to him. "What?"

"The way you've been watching her since you brought her here."

I shrug. "I just feel a little protective of her. You'd feel the same if you saw the way those fuckers left her."

"Maybe," he hums, waving his fork around. "Or maybe it goes beyond that. I don't

see Blaze stalking her with his eyes, and he was there too.”

“Blaze has a woman.”

“Exactly,” Hound says with a self-satisfied smirk.

I don’t respond. It does go beyond that, but I haven’t made sense of it myself yet, so I stay silent, turning back to watch her.

The women are chatting animatedly all around her, and despite the smile on her face, she doesn’t seem to engage them.

She sits, playing with her breakfast, and then without warning, turns her head and looks directly at me, and the smile falls away completely.

“Ouch.” Hound chuckles beside me, and Marie must notice she has more than just my attention because she quickly turns away. If there was any doubt before that I am the cause of the sour look on her face, then it’s all gone now. “What the hell did you do to her?”

“Beats me,” I mutter, feeling my own temper surface and simmer.

“You must have done something terrible. From what I heard from Chelsea, Marie is an even-tempered woman and very likable,” he says, leaning back in his seat with a smug look on his face. “I mean, considering where she comes from.”

Now he has me intrigued. “What do you mean?”

“You don’t know, do you?” he asks, laughing when I scowl impatiently.

“Fine, she’s the second child to a very wealthy couple.

Think...expensive private schools, multiple vacation homes in and out of the country, and a very fat trust fund she got from her grandfather.

The work she does at the nursing home, I imagine, is more of a passion than for money. ”

An entirely different life from the one I lived in West Odessa for the first thirty years of my life.

I remember the dust and waking up most nights as a teen from the wind howling through the cracked window of the trailer I lived in.

I left the trailer park when I got my first paycheck, but there was no escaping the barren landscape or the endless sun.

Marie could have easily had her parents ferry her away, but she mentioned not wanting to worry them or do anything that could put their lives in danger. Money doesn't always provide absolute protection, not from men like the Chrome Vipers.

Fuck, this only complicates matters. No sensible parent, wealthy or not, would want their daughter to be seen with a fucking beast like me.

One look, and they'd be running to shield their daughter, tossing about all kinds of threats to keep me away.

That is, if I could actually get someone like Marie to want me back for more than a night.

I ought to stay away from her. Watch her from a distance like I have been doing, but goddamnit!

I can't shake the look she tossed me earlier, so when she leaves the kitchen, I'm right behind her.

She barely has time to notice me before my hand is on her arm, and I'm pulling her down the hall to a quiet corner.

"Atlas, what—"

"You tell me," I say, dangerously calm, crowding her into the wall and doing my best to ignore the way her chest rises and falls, tits pushing up against me with every heaved breath.

Her lips are so close, and the memory of the previous night flashes through my mind.

How those lips had felt pillowy soft under mine.

Fuck, I am tempted to kiss her just to wipe the scowl off her mouth, so I force my eyes away from her lips and to her ocean blues.

"Why have you been glaring at me all morning?"

She drops her gaze, but I'm having none of it as I take her chin and force her gaze back on mine.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do."

Marie gnaws her lip for a second, and I watch anger and self-preservation battle in her eyes before she gives in to the former. She hisses, "Have you considered that maybe I wasn't glaring at you, and it's your own conscience eating at you?"

There's that too. Jesus, I tried not to touch her last night.

I did. The kiss wasn't meant to happen, but it felt like I would die if I didn't taste her.

I know I shouldn't have. I thought the feelings were mutual, but she probably thinks I took advantage of her when she was vulnerable and sleep deprived.

"I'm sorry."

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

The words seem to startle her, and the fury in her eyes is replaced by something else.

“You should be,” she whispers, hurt overtaking her beautiful face.

“It’s especially cruel to steal a girl’s first kiss and take her to bed only to sneak out when she’s asleep.

” She looks away. “If you didn’t want me, then you should have told me instead of just... leaving.”

My brows furrow at her words. “You think I don’t want you?” I ask, shocked as I rarely am.

“Well...you left, didn’t you?” she sniffs.

God, has it not been written on my face this entire time?

How can she not see the need in my expression that begs for me to slam her against any flat surface and ravage her like an animal?

It took considerable restraint last night to not fuck her in the kitchen and to keep my touch chaste in her room.

I barely caught a wink of sleep with that heart shaped butt pressed against my dick all night.

I thought I was doing the right fucking thing by leaving.

“Marie...” I stop when I notice a couple of my MC brothers coming down the hall, tossing curious looks our way. “Fuck!” I curse, taking her hand and pulling her toward the elevator.

“Wait, what are you doing?”

There is a need thrumming so close to my skin to take this girl where we stand, and it’ll take very little push me to the edge, and Marie must see this because she quickly goes silent.

No words are exchanged when the elevator opens on my floor and I walk us to my door, letting us into the apartment.

I tore off my boots, and she’s hardly taken off her shoes when I drag her deeper into the apartment, beelining for my bedroom. “Atlas... Wait, is that a cat?”

The bedroom door slams closed before she can get her answer, and I have her backed to the door in seconds. My cock straining hard against my fly, desperate for the girl who thinks I left her this morning because I wanted to and not because I had to.

“How can you think I don’t want you?” We stare at each other, and I question how she can’t see it on my face when I’m doing such a shit job at hiding it.

Her eyelids flutter when I lean in until there’s only a hair’s breadth between us, her breathing growing more labored by the second.

That sexy mouth parts on a gasp when I slide my hand around to her waist and yank her against me, feeling her soft breasts press against my chest. “I’m going to show you just how much I want you, sweetheart. Just how desperately.”

“Atlas—”

My mouth slams down on hers, swallowing her gasp. Her lips are soft as they part undermine, surrendering to the kiss with a low, needy whine. Need claws my chest as our tongues meet and I get to taste her, every sweet and intoxicating inch of that mouth.

She moans softly when I grind my dick against her stomach, sliding my hand under her sweater and up to her breast, cupping her gently. She pushes into my touch, tentatively bringing her arms around my shoulders and mewling needily as the kiss turns fervent.

“I left to stop myself from doing this,” I rasp into the kiss, rubbing my thumb over her nipple and feeling it pebble under my finger. “I left so I wouldn’t kiss every inch of this perfect body and wake you with my tongue buried in your wet pussy.”

“Really?”

“Now I realize that I made a mistake.” I pinch her nipple over her bra, tugging it between my thumb and index finger, causing her to cry out.

“I should have stayed. Sucked on your sexy nipples through that dangerously thin nightgown until you were moaning in your sleep. Have you wake up desperately aroused and begging for my cock instead of mad and worried that I didn’t want you!”

“I thought...”

“You thought wrong.” I tug down her bra, greedily fondling her naked breast with my hand.

She bucks against me with a cry when I squeeze her nipple hard between my fingers.

The need to taste her has me pushing up her sweater and leaning down to take her swollen nipple into my mouth.

She cries out again, her fingernails digging into my shoulder as I tease the bead with my teeth before soothing it with my tongue.

“Oh God,” she sobs when I shift my attention to other nipple, freeing it from her bra before sucking greedily at the pink bud, getting drunk off her taste and the smooth texture of her skin. “Atlas...what are you... Oh, God!”

“I’m just getting started, sweetheart,” I growl, slipping my hand under her skirt and between her thighs, pushing them apart as my fingers curl around her soft skin.

I want to take it slow, savor every delicate inch of that milky skin but whatever control I had last night is mere shreds now.

I can’t stop myself from moving my hand up her thigh to her panties.

A harsh growl leaps out when I press my finger over her covered pussy to find the fabric damp with her arousal.

Her nails dig into my shoulder when I rub my middle finger over her sex.

“Oh!” she whimpers, lifting her hips to rock against my hand, those beautiful eyes glazing over with every touch. “Atlas...feels... Oh!”

Impatient with the need to touch her, I hook my fingers into the waistband of her flimsy panties and yank them down before tearing them completely off.

With the obstructive piece out of the way, I slide my middle finger between her soft folds and feel her wetness slick my digit.

She's so fucking wet it has my aching cock jutting behind my zipper and begging for reprieve but I hold back, finding more pleasure in watching her react to my touch.

She looks so beautiful with her cheeks flushed, eyes glazed over, and that sexy mouth parted as she struggles to catch her breath.

I want to see her come apart, and just when she's about to recover, I'll send her right back to the edge. Then I'll sink my cock into her tight pussy and take her. Make her mine.

Mine , comes the unbidden thought, but I don't push it back.

No, I embrace it.

At least for the day, I'll allow myself to think that someone as gorgeous as this woman could be mine.

"You are so fucking wet, baby!" I grind out as I slide my fingers over the valley of her pussy, and she jerks hard against me when my finger finds her clit.

"Your desire is dripping all over my hand. You want me to help clean up the mess, don't you?"

" Her breath hitches when I press my finger gently over her entrance, shallowly thrusting it into her core.

"Lick you up until there isn't a drop left? "

Fuck, she's incredibly tight. I let out a groan of my own when her pussy clenches hotly around me, and I can tell she's close. Her breath is coming at a rapid pace, and it's only a matter of seconds before she falls.

Fuck this!

Marie whines in frustration when I pull my hand away.

I drop to my knees, yanking up her skirt before pushing her thighs apart to expose her pink heaven, glistening with arousal.

I don't give myself time to admire her as I lean in and inhale the sweet scent of her, my mouth watering for the taste I've been craving for days.

"Atlas..." She moans loudly when I press my mouth to her pussy, flicking my tongue between her wet feminine lips. I lose whatever control I was grasping onto as her hot flavors flood my tongue, and then I'm an animal seeking to brand their mate with my mouth and hands.

Mine.

She's mine, goddamnit!

I press my hand into her hip, groaning as I drag my tongue over the folds of her sex.

She cries out, combing her fingers through my hair and grabbing a fistful as she rolls her hips over my eager mouth.

"Oh God," she sobs when my tongue finds her clit and her pussy tightens against my lips when I flick the nub quickly. "Atlas...yes!"

I slide my hand up her body and pinch her nipple between my knuckles even as I wrap my mouth over her clit, sucking it softly between my lips.

Her breath hitches, and her grip in my hair tightens a second before her mouth parts

on a scream.

She tugs hard at my hair, grinding into me and the tongue flicking over her clit.

I lap up her juices, drawing out her climax and taking in every rough tremor that rolls through her body.

Mine!

The thought of another man touching her sends violent thoughts racing through my mind.

Only I will ever touch her... kiss her. Marie is mine to pleasure.

To claim. My thoughts turn dangerously possessive as her tremors die down and I climb to my feet.

Our gazes meet, and she must see something in mine because her eyes widen in surprise.

“Atlas—”

“I’m only getting started, sweetheart.” I growl, barely recognizing my own voice.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Marie

Something has changed.

It's almost like a switch has been flipped in those kind green eyes I met only days ago, and now, staring me down are eyes so dark they send a chill running down my spine. It doesn't scare me as much as it surprises me.

Okay, fine. It scares me a little. But not nearly as much as it excites me.

Suddenly, my quiet giant with gentle hands and kind eyes looks like a caged predator ready to break out and cause chaos. There is heat too, so strong it burns the spots in me that were beginning to cool, and God, how did I ever think that last night was a fluke?

There is no explaining the heartbreak I felt when I woke up to a cool empty spot next to me.

It felt like he'd waited for me to fall asleep before slipping out of bed.

Last night, I'd allowed myself a moment of vulnerability and exposed parts of myself I've always kept hidden from people.

To be fair, I was raised in an environment where I strived for perfection.

My family never pushed me to be perfect, but for some reason that only made me want to be.

I wanted them to feel proud when other parents bragged about their kids at the country club.

But last night, I let the shield drop.

I begged for his touch and was humiliated when he didn't just turn me down but walked away. I hated him for stealing my first kiss, but more than that, I hated that I was alone in these feelings. Now it seems that I was mistaken.

Oh, I was so wrong.

"Atlas," I whisper, my voice and knees a little shaky as I back away from the man. There is something in his eyes that sends an equal amount of fear and thrill coursing through my body. "W-what are you doing?"

"Strip," he growls, the sound nearly inhuman, but it's those eyes—magnetic, meadow green eyes that he runs over my rumpled clothes and exposed skin—that send fire cackling in my belly. "I want you naked. Now."

I flush at his words, my cheeks heating at the thought of stripping in front of this man. It's stupid. I'm not exactly a prude, far from it. As a nurse, I've seen nudity so many times, but not in a setting like this. Never before when I was faced with a man did I want to lick from head to toe.

Christ, what am I even thinking?

Atlas gives me an expectant look, and I jump back to the present.

"O-okay," I say, grabbing the hem of my sweater and tugging it over my shoulders.

I flush at the state my bra is in, but I push down my own nerves as I unclasp it and

slowly tug it off my shoulders.

I brave a look at the man when I let the bra fall, and if possible, his eyes seem to have darkened even further.

“Everything, Marie.”

I reach back and unzip my skirt before letting it pool at my feet.

I fight the urge to cover up, insecurity chewing at my insides.

Before this moment, I’ve never really thought much about my naked body, but now I find myself wondering if I should have found time in my busy schedule to join a gym or something.

Get a little toned and curved like some of those magazine models...

“Christ, you’re perfect.”

My head shoots up once more to find Atlas staring me with such undiluted need that it sends my heart fluttering with feminine pride, and I find that I want to see him too.

The parts of him I’ve only managed to touch and recreate in my head, but Atlas makes no move to undress as he’s already moving in.

I have a second to wonder how someone as massive as him moves so quickly and stealthily before his mouth is on mine.

I taste myself on his tongue.

I shouldn’t like it. No, something like this should do nothing for me, but it makes the

moment all too sinful. It makes my sex grow wetter and my nipples ache for more of his touch. Reminds me of the kind of power that mouth has over me. The heights it can bring me and...I want that again.

More than that, I want to give him just as much pleasure, and yet, I find my wrists trapped in his hand when I reach for him. "Let me touch you," I whine when we break apart from the kiss, struggling to release my hands, but he has a firm grip on them. "I want to touch you too."

"Not yet," he rasps, sliding his free hand between my breasts, fingers brushing softly at my aching nipples before trailing down to my stomach and between my thighs.

My head falls back with a groan, the spot pulsing fiercely despite the earth-shattering climax from earlier.

"You are going to let me explore you. Get this pussy all hot and ready for my cock." I bite back a moan when he circles my sensitive flesh, the ache nearly unbearable as he rubs circles over my clit.

He leans in and kisses my neck, his breath fanning my skin with every glide of his lips.

Christ, he's slowly dragging me into madness.

"Atlas...please."

"I know just what you need." A shiver runs down my spine when he gently slides his finger into my wet hole, thrusting shallowly as my pussy contracts around his thick digit. "And I'm going to give it to you, but you're not quite ready yet."

I whine when he pulls out his finger and backs me to the massive bed.

I barely have time to catch my breath when he gently pushes me down onto it, then follows, taking my lips in a long kiss.

He breaks it to trail his mouth down my neck, his hand firmly holding both mine to stop them from wandering.

I writhe restlessly under him as he kisses the path between my tits.

“I’m going to taste you again,” he rasps, grazing my nipple with his teeth before soothing the sting with his tongue.

“Work that pussy until it’s all wet and slick for my cock, then I’m going to fuck you.

” He slides his free hand back between my thighs and pushes them apart, revealing yet again intimate parts of myself I’ve never shown another man.

“And then I’ll do it over and over again until you can’t live without my cock. ”

I want to argue with his logic, remind him that I understand enough about human anatomy to know how near impossible that is, but he’s only touched me twice and I already want more. Is this how addicts are created? God, is he trying to turn me into one? At this rate, it won’t be difficult.

I have no words in me to respond when his sinful tongue settles between my folds. My head falls back against the pillow as he bends my knees and pushes them further apart, dipping his mouth back to my sex.

Unlike earlier when he went about bringing me to the edge fast, this time, he takes his sweet time.

Licking my slit, teasing my hole, and flicking my clit with his talented tongue, edging

me closer and closer to an orgasm before pulling back every time I'm about to erupt.

I thrash helplessly, aching painfully from arousal.

His mouth stays on my sex as he works me closer to yet another orgasm.

I rock forward, rubbing desperately against his mouth, and there it is... the promise of a blinding climax.

"Not yet," the cruel man says, pulling back once again. I sob, thrashing helplessly on the bed, and I realize that I might hate him.

"Please," I whimper, begging for relief, for him to end the sweet torture, and there's a smile in his eyes when they lock on mine.

"You look so fucking gorgeous, all flushed like this." He laughs, but it comes out strained. As if he's in as much pain as I am. Desperate for a nirvana only he can provide but chooses to deny us both. "I can't tell if you want to kill me or not."

"I do." I bet I could take him. He's at least six-five and built like a mountain lion with over a decade age-gap between us, but my frustration is enough to convince me that I could bring this man down.

He chuckles, thumbing my clit as his tongue licks my slit, stroking my oversensitive nerve endings.

He slides his middle finger into my hole, adding another to stretch me with more ease and less discomfort than there was the first time around.

The fingers inside me stroke something that sends my hips lifting off the mattress.

“Oh God!” I sob when his tongue centers on my clit. “Please... Please...”

I’ll die, I’m sure of it, if he doesn’t allow me this.

Every inch of my body feels overstimulated, nipples aching painfully and abdomen bracing for an explosion.

I’m panting when his hand reaches up and cups my breasts, pinching my nipples between his fingers even as his mouth closes over my clit once more.

A scream tears from my throat, and I go blind for a second.

I see nothing as rough tremors roll through my body, each harsher than the last. I jerk hard, toes curling and uncurling even as my fingers clench the sheets.

I’m sobbing as pleasure rolls through me with an intensity so strong, it overwhelms all my senses.

Tiny spasms travel through my body as I slowly come down.

I’ve barely resurfaced from whatever pit he pushed me into when I feel the press of his cock against my sex with no idea when he moved or stripped off his clothes.

“That’s it, sweetheart. Now you’re ready for my cock.

” My eyes find his, and there’s that feeling again.

The same one I had when he found me in that closet.

Safe.

And I'm glad it's him who gets to have this part of me. He didn't just save me. He held me close, and when I couldn't sleep, he chased away the lingering demons. For all of my firsts, I would choose him every time.

These feelings are dangerous. Pretty reckless of me to fall for a biker I barely know, but I don't have control over my heart.

It's him that makes my pulse race, my body thrum with pleasure, and my stomach flutter.

He's the only one that's ever and, I fear, will only ever make my heart beat as hard as it is right now.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

I bring my weak arms to his shoulders and hold tight as he positions the head of his shaft at my entrance, his eyes locked on mine as he presses forward. I wince at the intrusion. His cock is far bigger than his two fingers, but the prep has made the stretch easier to bear.

“Do it,” I whisper, when I notice his hesitation. “Take me.” Find pleasure in me as I’ve found in you. I don’t care if it hurts... Let me please you.

He must read the unspoken words in my expression because he pushes forward, sliding his cock further inside of me. “Fuck, baby, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t.” My hands slide up to his jaw, brushing the scar with my fingertips before pulling him down to kiss me, tasting myself on his lips. One of his hands sneaks between us and cups my sensitive breasts as he kisses me, and I moan, pleasure flooding my stomach.

“You’re so tight,” he growls against my lips as he starts thrusting shallowly before pulling out and then without warning slams inside of me, filling me with his manhood. “Fuuuck!”

“Oh!” I cry out. I feel him...everywhere. Filling spaces inside of me I did not know existed and with the sting is an entirely different kind of pain. One that goes beyond physical, that begs for more than just this man’s body. I want more of him, I realize.

I want his heart.

I want his everything .

“I’m sorry, baby,” he says, kissing my temple and giving me time to adjust to his massive girth. “If it hurts too much—”

“No,” I cut him off. “I want this...you.”

“Fuck, you’re killing me here, sweetheart.”

“Then don’t stop,” I plead, rolling my hips to test the pain, but it’s dulled to a throb. “I don’t want you to stop.”

His eyes are locked on mine as he withdraws, leaving only the tip of his cock before he slams back into me, robbing me of my breath.

I wrap my arms back around his shoulders and rock up to meet his thrust. He pulls back again, lifting my hip to his waist before slamming home, and my back arches off the bed as it sends him sinking impossibly deeper into me.

Whatever control he was holding snaps as he slides one arm beneath my ass before he starts hammering into me.

Pulling out and pounding back into me with the intensity of a beast in heat.

I cling to him, whimpering as his cock strokes that sensitive spot inside me with every slam.

I wrap both legs around his waist as his thrusts turn brutal, moaning as his cock grazes all the right spots with a blend of pain and pleasure.

“Oh God... Harder!” I beg despite myself as he fans the flames that threatens to ignite a forest fire. Taking every bit of his cock like it was made for me.

Like he was made for me.

His chest rubs against my tits, stoking the fire inside me until I can almost smell the smoke.

“Mine,” he grinds out, his voice harsh to my ears as he rocks into me fast, rubbing at my clit with the base of his cock with every thrust. “I’m going to make you mine.

Possess every inch of this pussy and make you scream until everyone in the clubhouse knows that you belong to me. This body...this pussy belongs to me!

“Yours,” I sob as a rough shudder takes over my body.

“Going to shoot in this pussy, mark you with my cum.”

“Yes,” I moan, holding him close to me. Christ, we’re having bare sex.

As a nurse, I know better than to do something this crazy with a stranger, but in the moment, I’ve never wanted anything more.

Just the idea sends me to the edge, nearly toppling me over.

“Do it. Want to feel your cum inside me.”

His hands dig into my skin as his tempo shifts, jackhammering so hard into me, my orgasm crashes over my body without any warning.

My back arches and mouth parts on a scream as wave after wave rolls through my system.

My muscles lock hard around his shaft before releasing with rough tremors.

He pounds into me through the orgasm, pistoning in and out of me like a madman, faster and harder...

“Fuck!” he roars, pushing deep into me as his cock swells inside of me, jerking before he fills me with spurt after spurt of his seed, thrusting shallowly into my still trembling sex. “Goddamn, baby,” he pants as he rocks into me, his body twitching with mine as he pours everything inside me.

Until I’ve taken everything.

Then and only then, does he let go. We both lie in silence, limp and sated. I knew sex is supposed to feel good, or else there wouldn’t be so many people in the world having it, but I never dreamed up anything close to this. Or maybe it’s only like this because it’s him.

The man who rescued me then proceeded to steal my heart. Then rocked my body and overwhelmed every one of my senses.

“Are you okay?” he asks, his voice deep and so close to my ear that it sends goosebumps erupting over my skin.

“I’m fine,” I say. Well, he’s cutting off circulation to my arms and legs, but his body is like a furnace and I like the way he feels against me. “I’m more than fine, actually.”

“Good,” he says, pushing back, and I immediately miss his weight.

He climbs off the bed, and with the lust haze faded, I allow myself to really look at him and all that delicious muscle covered in tattoos, and my eyes widen when I get a good look at his cock.

God, I can't believe that monster was inside of me!

Now that I think about it, I am starting to feel a little sore. "You'll feel better after a hot bath."

I blush at the thought that he might've read my mind. "Yeah," I say, taking his hand and letting him lead me into the bathroom when a sudden thought occurs. "Wait, do you have a cat?"

He laughs, and he must read genuine confusion on my face as he guffaws, turning on the water and pulling me under the hot spray. I let him wash me, all the while wondering if I was hallucinating.

I could have sworn I saw a cat earlier. Do notoriously dangerous motorcycle gangs even keep pets?

Atlas

No one questions it when Marie moves out of the guest apartment and into mine. But hell, maybe if I knew I would have to fight with my feline roommate for her attention, I would have reconsidered having her move in here.

It's stupid to be jealous of a cat of all things, but Lord above, I am only a man.

Rusty is nestled in the crook of her arm, purring like a tiny engine as she strokes his fur, her fingers gently kneading his back.

I would purr too if she touched me like that.

I've spent a considerable time staring at those soft delicate fingers petting the cat, wishing they were on me instead.

Her face is relaxed, devoid of the worries it used to carry during her first few days at the clubhouse.

It's a Friday evening, and in the true fashion of a man without a social life, I'd planned to be read, but the book lies on the coffee table, its pages untouched.

My gaze keeps drifting to her, admiring the way the light catches the curve of her cheek to the way her eyelashes cast delicate shadows on her milky skin.

I find that I want to reach out, to touch her, but I also don't want to break the spell.

Besides, my hand still stings from where Rusty swiped me earlier when I tried to touch Marie.

Ungrateful brat. I've housed, fed, and cared for the cat for months, but he shifts his loyalty in the presence of a pretty woman. Well, I can hardly fault him when I want her for myself. When I called her mine, I hadn't meant to speak those words out loud, but now, she feels every bit mine.

Heat gathers like fireballs in my gut as all blood floods to my cock, turning my semi into a full erection.

Christ, it's been days since Marie and I first slept together; the urge to jump her like a sex-starved maniac shouldn't still be so strong, and yet, it is.

Heck, she's dressed in a sweatshirt she borrowed from my closet and some long sleep pants, nothing overtly sexual, but she's the sexiest thing I've ever seen in my entire life.

She doesn't have to do a thing to have blood roaring in my head.

It's unnerving.

Before Marie, there was no one. I had sex, sure, but it was impersonal and perfunctory. Women tend to be equally attracted to and terrified of me. Once the sex part was done with and the lust sated, they were all eager to leave quickly.

Marie hasn't left.

A part of me is waiting for her to. For Marie to look at me and realize I am not what she wants, but for now, I allow myself to bask in her presence.

“You are doing it again.”

Her voice snaps me out of my thoughts, and I frown when I realize that she’s indeed talking to me even with her eyes glued to the TV. “Doing what?”

“Staring at me,” she says, and this time, she turns to look at me. “I can always feel it. Even when we’re in different corners of the room. I can always feel your eyes on me.”

“Does it bother you?” Scare you?

“I like it.” Rusty protests when Maire picks him up and gently lays him on the couch as she sits up. He tosses me a glare as if it’s my fault before settling down. “It makes me feel safe.”

“What?”

“If you’re watching me, then no one can get to me without you noticing,” she says, brushing hair from her face.

“I’ll admit that a part of me is scared those men will somehow get to me.

Even here, there’s always an urge to keep looking around and stay more conscious of my environment so I don’t get caught off guard.

But then...I feel your gaze.” She blushes, her cheeks picking up a beautiful rosy hue in the light of the lamp.

“It sounds a little dramatic, doesn’t it?

That I would immediately relax after sensing you watching me, but I mean, if you

are, then I don't have to be on guard all the time, right? ”

A long silence follows her words, and I realize I've never wanted anything or anyone as much as I want her. Christ, how can she be so perfect?

“Come here.”

“What?” She laughs but climbs to her feet, careful not to disturb Rusty as she does so.

I watch as she makes her way to me and wait until she's within arm's reach before snagging her waist and pulling her onto my lap.

She giggles, her hands landing on my chest as she settles down to straddle me.

The laughter in her eyes shifts to something else when she feels my erection pressed against her ass. “Oh.”

I lean down and nuzzle her neck, inhaling the soft flowery scent that clings to her skin, and I kiss the sensitive spot. “I'll always protect you,” I speak into her skin.

“Always?”

If she expects me to backtrack, I don't. “Always.”

“Hmm,” she hums, tilting her head back to allow me access as I nibble at her throat, my hands sliding under the sweatshirt to cup her naked breasts. “We can't have sex again, Atlas. There's no way this is healthy.”

“Do you want me to stop?”

Her hands tighten around my neck as she shakes her head frantically. “Don't you

dare,” she threatens, making me chuckle, but she’s right. I have no idea if there’s such a thing as too much sex, but what we’re doing must close to it, and yet, I can’t get enough of her.

Of her taste and scent.

The way she fits against my body is like she was made for me.

A puzzle coming together, and fuck if that doesn’t send an ache spreading through my chest. “I want you,” I grind out, tugging up the sweatshirt before fastening my mouth on her left breast. She moans, her back arching as I kiss the soft skin, rolling my tongue over her beaded nipple and getting drunk on the taste of her.

“Atlas... Oh, God,” she cries out when I graze the sensitive skin with my teeth, soothing the sting with my tongue before shifting my attention to the other. Her hips roll over my erection, rocking needily as I tease her tits. “Touch me, please.”

I don’t need to ask what she means as I slide my hand into the sleep pants and between her legs, groaning when I find her slick with arousal.

Her mouth parts with a gasp when I slide my middle finger into her wetness, a growl climbing up my throat when her sex pulses hard around it.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” I say, pushing up to take her lips with mine, groaning at the taste of her.

She rocks her hips forward, riding my finger and kissing me back with feral need.

“Oh, God,” she cries out into the kiss, rolling her hips faster and faster I can feel her teeter close to an orgasm. “Oh...Atlas.”

“Come for me, sweetheart.”

I bite her lower lip, and she cries out in pleasure as her sex cinches hard around my finger, releasing and contracting as she sobs, rolling her hips over mine and riding the wave.

I kiss her through it, swallowing her pleased whimpers before pulling out.

My cock is aching in my sweats, begging for reprieve, and I’m about to carry her to the bedroom to finish what we started when a knock sounds on the door.

“Fuck!” I consider ignoring it and carrying my woman to bed instead, but that’s not how things work here.

No one in the clubhouse comes to my door just to invite me for a cigarette.

“I’ll go see what they want,” I say, brushing my lips over her temple before putting her down as I climb to my feet.

“You better be in bed naked and ready for me when I get back.”

I smack her butt as she staggers toward the bedroom, making sure to tug my T-shirt over my hardon before walking to the door.

Standing on the other side of the door is Kyle, a club prospect.

He is one of the youngest in the MC, but well on his way to becoming a fully patched member.

Now, however, I want to rage at the dark-haired kid for interrupting the moment between Marie and me. “What is it, Kyle?” I ask impatiently.

“Oh, uh...Prez sent me to get you. He’s been trying to call you, but couldn’t reach you.”

I immediately go on alert at his words. “Is anything the matter?”

“They found the men.”

“What men?”

“You know, those Vipers that wanted to kidnap Scarlett. Saint and a couple others are getting ready to head out and—”

“Tell them I’ll be right down,” I say firmly, boiling with blood lust. This is admittedly the only thing that could pull me away from Marie right now.

I promised to protect her, and the best way to do so right now is by eliminating the men who’d hurt her, who still terrorize her in her nightmares.

“Thank you, Kyle. I’m right behind you.”

He nods and turns to leave just as I shut the door.

I walk to the bedroom to change out of the sweatpants and see her lying on the bed naked just as I’d asked, and Jesus Christ, she looks like an angel.

Every inch of her is perfection, and for a hot second, I consider staying.

My cock, which had begun softening from the interruption hardens to full mast as I stare at the golden angel lying in my bed.

Her tits are flushed and nipples pink, contrasting her milky skin, and her thighs

slightly parted in invitation to a heaven I have tasted but still thirst for.

And those eyes, Christ, those soft blue eyes are locked on mine in invitation it would take a saint to resist.

Fuck!

I'm not feeling very saintly right now. And for a shameless moment, I question if I have time to climb into bed and give in to my baser needs, but just as quickly as the lust floods in, the memory of her tied up on that dirty floor with terrified eyes overtakes it.

Those fuckers need to pay. I need to keep my promise, and only then can I touch her. Only then can she trust my vow to protect her to my last breath.

She sits up, tilting her head to the side when she notices me simply standing there. "You have to go," she says, tugging the sheet over her nude body to cover herself, and I mourn the loss, even as I silently thank her for allowing me reprieve. "Is that why they came looking for you?"

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

“Yeah, they need me to deal with something,” I say, unwilling to disclose where I am going and leave her worried or disappoint her if we fail to catch the men. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” she says with a smile. “I’ll be waiting here for you when you get back.” The words make my gut clench as she reaches for the sweatshirt and slides it on. “I guess I’ll just have to settle for cuddling Rusty until you get back.”

She laughs when my eyes flare like she knew they would, and she settles down to watch me change.

I don’t miss the lust that flashes in her eyes when I strip, her eyes running hungrily over my body, and once again, I’m tempted to stay.

She doesn’t comment when I grab my Glock and secure it before grabbing my leather jacket and sliding it on.

“I’ll try to not be gone long,” I promise her, walking toward the bed.

I slide my hand to her nape before slamming my mouth down on hers with a hard kiss. “You are mine, remember that.”

And as such, I’m going to wipe out all threats to her life.

My blood is boiling for action when I finally make it to Saint’s office to find few other MC brothers already in the room, most of whom are club officers.

“Good, you’re here,” Saint says, waving me in.

“With the help of Scarlett and Gray, we identified one of the men caught in the surveillance footage kidnapping Marie. Ransom was able to hack into his phone, and we’ve been tracking him.

We finally found out where the fuckers have been holed up.

” He looks around the room, meeting everyone’s hard eyes before carrying on.

“Tonight, we are going wipe out what’s left of the Chrome Vipers, get rid of them once and for all.

Trigger has worked out a plan of attack for us,” he finishes, gesturing to the club’s weapons expert, a former Marine sniper.

We disperse once Ransom tells us the location and Trigger has filled us in on the plan.

I nearly groaned when I realized that they’re at an abandoned motel just outside the city.

Gray did some surveillance, but wasn’t able get close enough to narrow down their location to room numbers, only that they seem to be congregated in the center of the single-story building.

I’m just grateful the motel is abandoned so there is less chance of eyewitnesses or collateral deaths in the event this devolves into a gun fight.

There is a quiet rage simmering in the air around us as everyone heads for their bikes.

The rumble of engines fills the underground parking garage as we tear out of the lot and into the streets.

The thought of finally putting an end to all this has me gripping the handlebars tightly, knuckles turning white.

This time a week ago, I was riding this same road to find a woman I had no idea would come to mean everything to me, and now, I want the blood of the people who took her.

Especially the fucker who had a knife pressed against her throat.

Despite the hood, I saw his face for a split second, and it's ingrained in my head.

I want him dead!

We pass the apartment building several minutes later, and I tune out memories of Marie tied and helpless in that fucking closet.

After another ten minutes, I skid to a halt outside the motel, tires screeching against the asphalt.

The others have stopped in different spots as we form a defensive arc at the edge of the narrow parking lot where overgrown hedges and brush provide us some cover.

The motel is a small, run-down structure that's clearly been out of use for years.

It's growing dark now, and there's no one around this desolate area beyond the city limits.

It's clear why the Vipers chose this place to hole up.

But that decision will also be their undoing.

I kill the engine and swing off my bike, the cold air hitting my face when I take off my helmet.

I scan our surroundings even as I draw out my gun.

Several doors face the road, and before I can process what is happening, one swings open, and someone emerges a second before a shot rings out, shattering the silence.

I see Saint dive for cover behind a nearby tree, barely evading another shot.

He's pinned down, unable to return fire from that position without risking being hit.

Movement at the far end of the lot beyond him catches my attention, and I watch as Gray slinks silently along the edge of the parking lot toward the motel, his dark shape barely distinguishable against the hedge wall.

On my other side, I notice Hound has taken cover behind an old dumpster.

I nod at him, then point to myself and gesture in the opposite direction, indicating that I intend to approach the motel from the other side.

He nods his understanding and gets into a position to provide cover for us.

I crouch down and move as silently as possible along the edge of the parking lot toward the far corner of the motel.

I go as quickly as possible to match my arrival with Gray's, who has a head start.

It's too dark to tell if he's noticed me, but knowing Gray and his skills, he knows exactly where everyone is.

My suspicion is confirmed when I hit the side of the building and peek around the corner to see Gray at the other end, already looking at me. He points toward the still-open motel room door and then holds up three fingers. Three men inside the room.

I move back around the side of the building where it won't be seen and turn on the flashlight app on my phone.

Using my hand to cover the beam, I point it at the ground, uncovering it three times to signal the information to Hound and Saint.

It's the signal we'd decided on before leaving the clubhouse, so I don't worry whether they understood the message.

Then I look around the corner again and lock eyes with Gray once more.

I signal for him to hold still until Hound opens fire on the motel room door, drawing attention just as we'd hoped it would.

I watch as a man leans around the doorframe, gun raised to return fire.

Without taking a moment to think, I lift my own gun and squeeze the trigger.

The sickening yell that rings out a moment later proves my bullet found its mark.

Everything happens in a blur after that.

Gray and I move in on the room as Hound and Saint provide cover for us.

One of their shots finds its target, and we're able to get right up to the doorway and take out the other man with an immobilizing shot.

Gray and I enter the motel room to find three Vipers writhing on the floor, guns discarded.

I quickly clear the rest of the room of any threats as Gray secures their guns and verifies with one of them that there are no other Vipers lurking nearby.

Once we are certain we are in the clear, I signal to Saint and Hound to join us.

The Vipers stood no chance, really. The four of us were more than capable of handling this showdown on our own. While I would have liked to have had Trigger with us, it was better he stayed behind in case of any run-ins with the police. Already being on parole, that's not a risk Trigger can take.

I step over the men on the floor, looking at each face, and when I don't spot the one I'm looking for, I question if perhaps I don't remember him as well as I thought.

To be fair, the faces were grainy, and yet, despite having apprehended all three kidnappers, I find myself dissatisfied.

Perhaps I'll feel better once we get them back to the clubhouse and into the basement where we can really take our time exacting our revenge.

"Everyone okay?" Saint calls out, and once he receives confirmation from everyone, turns to the three men groaning in pain, each nursing a gunshot wound somewhere on their body.

"I want all of you to remember that not killing you was intentional. Anyone of the Rebels could have shot you in the head and ended your pathetic life, but we didn't.

But we aren't done with you yet. When we are, you'll wish that's exactly what we'd done. "

As if he'd timed it that way, the sound of a vehicle pulling up outside the room reaches us, and I look out the doorway to see our VP, Knox, arrive with an unmarked white van.

I smile at what is clearly his attempt at a joke—we are essentially kidnapping the kidnappers in a van just like the one they'd used to take Marie.

Despite having apprehended all three Vipers, I can't shake the feeling in my gut that this isn't over. Maybe it is, and I'm simply looking for a reason to hold on to Marie longer. She has no reason to stay with me now. Fuck, I am not ready to let her go just yet.

But what could a man like me really have to offer a woman with her background and upbringing beyond a few nights of fun?

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Marie

My palms slide down the wet shower tile, a sob tearing out of my throat as a fire licks through my body with the intensity of lightning.

I'm going to be late for work. Good God, I'm going to be so late they'll probably fire me.

As if taking a week off wasn't bad enough, now I'm going to miss the start of my shift because I didn't have the will in me to push Atlas out of the bathroom when he followed me in.

It's my fault. It's my own darn fault for assuming what we shared in bed when we woke up would be enough for either of us.

It wasn't.

His lips were on mine before the water turned hot.

My hands were on his body, wanting and seeking.

Gripping his erection and stroking it as a fire he'd only sated a few minutes ago grew with such intensity.

I'd then dropped to my knees, licking his massive girth before taking him in my mouth.

He was too big and I kept choking, but I managed to get him all hot and bothered before I found my face pressed against the tile.

I shouldn't want this—him—as much as I do.

God, I'll probably need to talk to someone about this.

Maybe a doctor or a therapist, someone who'll advise me on how to overcome this addiction I have for Atlas.

How the heck can I go back to living a life where I don't feel the strength of this man as he pressed against me, inhale his warm scent and lose myself in the feel of him.

I can't live without this.

"Oh, God!" I sob when he starts pressing into me, stretching me with his massive cock. Christ, he's so big. It's a new experience every time I take him. An intense, delicious feeling that never fades. "I'm going to be so late for work."

"No, you won't," he says into my wet hair, pushing it aside to kiss my neck. "I'll give you a ride. Faster than the L."

His words give me pause. "You are giving me a ride to work?" I ask, my words morphing into a moan when he starts moving in and out of me.

He grabs my hips to hold me steady, pulling back before sliding back inside of me.

I whimper as I feel my feminine lips slide against his shaft with every slow thrust.

"I'll give you a ride and then stay a few hours just to be safe."

His words barely penetrate my fogged-up brain. "I thought... You said... Oh, God!" I sob when he releases his grip on my hips and snakes a hand up to rub my tits. I cry out when he pinches and tugs my wet, sensitive nipple between his knuckles. "Atlas!"

"We got the men who took you; don't worry." He breathes into my skin as one hand leaves my tit and he grips my hip again, thrusting into my sex harder this time, my ass slapping wetly against his front. "I'm just being cautious. You'll feel safer with me there."

He's right, and I should tell him as much, but my spinning head can barely grasp onto the words long enough to voice them.

My fingers slide down the fogged-up glass as I try to anchor myself in the storm he's creating inside of me.

"Close," I sob as he slams his manhood harder and faster into me, his fingers gripping tight as he brings me closer and closer to the peak of a high only he can give me.

Only he ever will.

"Mine," he growls, dropping his hand down between my legs to rub on my clit, and that triggers my climax.

My back bows as a scream tears out of my throat, waves of pleasure rocking through me with every slam, every touch, and reduces me to a whimpering mess.

He slams into me twice before I feel him tense and his cock swell impossibly larger before he pours himself into me with a harsh grunt, violent shudders rocking through his system as I milk him to the last drop.

My first instinct is to slide to the floor and just lie there, but his grip keeps me upright

until my legs are steady enough on their own.

I move away from him, cleaning up fast before exiting the shower in a rush.

“Careful, sweetheart.” His chuckle follows me as I run out to get dressed.

He is only in there for a couple more minutes before he walks out too, laughing when he finds me half dressed.

I allow myself a few seconds to ogle his body, slapping my cheeks to focus when I realize I’m staring.

The dangerous glint in his eyes has me grabbing the rest of my clothes to get dressed on the opposite side of the room.

“Don’t come any closer to me,” I warn him. “I have less than an hour to get to work. I love working there and don’t want to give them a reason to fire me.”

There’s a contemplative look on his face as he slides into a pair of jeans. “Why do you work?”

“What do you mean?”

“Your parents are wealthy,” he says, surprising me by mentioning my parents' wealth for the first time since I came here. “You could live a comfortable life, traveling the world and doing whatever you want.”

His sentiments are not new. I’ve heard this all my life.

From my friends who weren’t as lucky to come from the wealth my parents and grandparents provided.

“I wanted to do all that when I was younger,” I tell him.

“Funny thing, my parents would have let me. They don’t care what I do as long as I’m happy and fulfilled.

But that’s exactly the problem. A life like that wouldn’t have satisfied me. ”

“And nursing does?”

“I’ve always loved taking care of people, feeling needed for more than my money. I fell in love with nursing, especially taking care of the elderly, and when you fall in love with something,”— or someone, as I have fallen hopelessly in love with you —“it’s for life.”

“Huh.”

“Isn’t it the same for you with the MC?” I ask, tugging the towel from my hair. “Isn’t that why you left a life you knew and moved to an entirely different city? Because you fell in love with riding and wanted to do so with like-minded people?”

“I didn’t leave much behind in West Odessa.”

I chuckle. “And you think I left something behind?” I muse. “Maybe you coming to work with me is a good idea, and then you’ll see that I am not really missing out on anything. I would pick my lovely senior citizens over any exotic trip. Trust me, it’s an adventure on its own.”

There’s doubt in his eyes, but I don’t bother explaining it to him, figuring it’s something he’s going to have to see for himself.

Oh, I can’t wait until he gets a load of Debbie, and I am excited when an hour later

we both walk into the nursing home.

I clock in for my shift as he takes in the place, and I try to look at it from the perspective of someone who, by his own admission, has never been to a nursing home before.

The walls are painted a soft beige and the floors are shiny linoleum that reflects the dim light.

We walk down the hallway, past one of the entertainment rooms where several of the residents are sitting in armchairs, watching some kind of gameshow on a large flat-screen TV, the sound turned on low.

Each open door we walk past reveals an entirely different story, and the hallway is decorated with both art and smiling pictures of retired staff.

I lead him to the main lounge, and my eyes fall on the large grand piano my parents donated to the nursing home.

The piano was a treasured gift from my grandfather, and when he passed away in this very nursing home, they felt it only right to leave a piece of him in a place that had taken such excellent care of him in the last precious moments of life.

“Marie!”

We both turn at the voice, and I smile when I spot Debbie walking toward us. I feel a sense of guilt when I notice the tired lines around her eyes and mouth. “Debbie, you’ve not been sleeping well,” I say as I step forward, but she simply brushes off my concerns.

“If you were worried about me, why haven’t you been here? You left me to deal with

an intern who doesn't appreciate my jokes," she says, narrowing her eyes on me before she spots something over my shoulders that grabs her attention. "And who is this?"

I flush at the smirk and the devilish look that widens her eyes as she looks from Atlas to me.

"Debbie, this is Atlas," I say, reaching back to grasp his arm and pull the gentle giant to my side.

"Atlas, this is the resident I was telling you about. You know, the one who likes to keep the nurses on their toes. Mrs. Debbie Hawkes in the flesh. She is Chelsea's grandmother. "

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Hawkes."

"Please, call me Debbie. Hawkes was my husband, poor bastard left me at the tender age of seventy. God rest his soul," she says with a smile, taking his hand when he offers it.

"Now, are you the one who's been keeping my nurse away from work?"

" Her head tilts to the side as she runs her eyes over his frame, humming in appreciation as she does so.

"It makes a lot more sense now why she was late to work. Marie is never late!"

I don't have to look at a mirror to know that my face is as red as a tomato. The memories of what happened this morning are still fresh on my mind. "Debbie," I reprimand, placing an arm on her shoulder and steering her away from the man before she scares him off. "You can't say that to him."

“He looks like a snack. You have a good eye, I’ll give you that,” she says as I lead her back to her room, hoping she’ll let me convince her to rest. “He reminds me of my husband.” My brows wing up at her words, which makes her laugh.

I’ve seen the pictures of her late husband; even in his prime, he looked nothing like Atlas. “Not his physical appearance.”

Debbie must’ve really missed me, or maybe she’s just distracted by the man standing by her door as she doesn’t fuss as much when I do a quick assessment on her. “What do you mean that he reminds you of your husband?”

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

“It’s the eyes,” she says, letting me take her temperature. “He had kind eyes too. My John was built like a stick pole and the biggest muscle on him was that kind and generous heart of his. Fifty years of marriage, and I still remember the first time I saw him.”

“When was that?” I ask absently, humming when I note her temperature is just slightly above normal. I’ve heard this story a million times, and I imagine she’s not telling it to me but the man standing by the door, faced turned away but ears tuned in.

“He was a small thing when we were younger, and the boys in my neighborhood would pick on him a lot. Until one day, at eight, I jumped one of them and scratched his face, yelling for them to bully someone their own size. I lost a tooth that day and my daddy whooped my ass for fighting, but I gained a best friend, and twelve years later, he became my husband,” she muses, with a dreamy look in her eyes.

“I spent my entire youth loving the man, through the good and the bad. I can flirt all I want with these old geezers here because what else does an old lady like me have to do? However, none of them can or will ever replace my John.”

“That’s a lovely story, Debbie,” Atlas says, and I turn to look at him. He’s leaning against the door, staring into the hallway and seems to be deep in thought. There is something about his stance that has my brows furrowing.

Atlas seems distracted, and he remains that way for the rest of my shift.

He manages to get himself pulled into a game of cards, then later into some conversations on politics by another group, and before the end of the day, he’s made

his rounds in the nursing home, pulled in all directions.

Everyone seems to love him and won't let him leave until he promises to come back again.

But despite it all, he still has that thoughtful look on his face when he hands me the helmet at the end of the day.

"Are you okay?" I ask, concerned when he climbs onto the bike without a word.

"The seniors didn't say anything to offend you, did they?"

Sometimes they get like that, but don't take it to heart. "

"No, I enjoyed my time there," he says quietly, and I want to push, but I don't say anything as I climb on to the back behind him. I decide I'll bring it up later when we're not in public.

Atlas tears out of the parking lot, and fifteen minutes later, we're arriving outside my building.

I find I appreciate the speed. It normally takes me half an hour or so to get home when I have to take public transit.

A little less if I order a ride, but nowhere near as fast as Atlas's bike got us here.

I find myself already missing the clubhouse.

There is something about staying there that feels like an entirely different world, and leaving kind of snaps a person away from it.

I find myself desperate to keep some parts of what I had there, turning to Atlas and hoping he'll follow me up to my apartment, but he doesn't climb off the bike when I do.

I try to hide my disappointment when I speak, but it seeps through to my voice. "You're not coming up?"

"Not tonight," he says, those green eyes unreadable when they meet mine. "I figure you are tired after everything that's happened this week. You'll need to rest."

We can rest together, is what my breaking heart wants to say, but I push it down. "Okay," I say instead, passing him the helmet and trying to keep a cheerful air, but I fail. There is a sense of finality in this moment that makes my heart clench painfully.

"You don't have to worry about your safety here," he says, staring up at the brick and glass that is the place I consider home—or used to. "We got the men who kidnapped you. Ransom is keeping an eye on the building's surveillance, but we're confident you're safe."

"Sure, thanks for the ride."

Feeling rejected and unwilling to let him see the effect it has on me, I turn around and walk to the entrance without once glancing back at him.

I embrace the anger, but it lasts only until I get to the bank of elevators before my mood sinks into depression.

This morning, I was convinced that he wanted me.

It seems I was wrong.

My head hangs low and swirls so wildly with thoughts of the man who turned away from me that I don't notice the one standing outside my door until I'm only a few steps away from him.

I notice the bright glint of the knife first before my wide eyes look up and lock with a familiar face.

The knife is pressed against my throat before I can open up my mouth to scream.

"Open the fucking door!" the man hisses, his voice fierce.

So much for being safe. As I reach into my purse for my keys, my heart cracks at the thought of this being the end. It bleeds for my parents who might lose their only daughter, my big brother who'll not have a little sister to spoil anymore, and my patients who need me.

I let the tears fall as the biggest ache comes from regret. Deep crushing regret that Atlas will never know just how much I love him.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Atlas

The old lady's words still buzz in my ears, a relentless echo in my head. No, it's not the words she spoke but how she said them that got to me. There was sadness and longing, something so heart-wrenching it shook me to the core.

I saw myself in her.

I had a vision of myself seated in the clubhouse as I reminisced about memories of a girl I had fallen in love with.

Someone whose life was too far removed from mine.

She is over a decade younger than me, has a whole life ahead of her to explore her options, date other people, travel the world and do a shit ton of things.

What will become of me when I fall so deep that I can't pull myself out? What happens when she becomes the most important person in my life, but to her, I am merely the obsessive fucker that won't leave her alone?

I haven't been able to shake the thoughts all day, letting them fester until I had myself convinced that I am no good for Marie. It's tempting to go after her, tie her to me forever, and never let her go, but such thoughts would probably scare her.

I twist the throttle, the engine roaring to life as I pull away from the apartment building. The familiar vibration of the bike often brings me peace, but today it only intensifies the headache brewing. The road stretches ahead of me, and I push forward

just to get home.

Home.

One that does not have Marie in it. An apartment I will no longer walk into to find the woman I've allowed myself to fall for lying on the couch cuddled with Rusty as they watch some boring film, a beautiful smile playing on her lips and hand extended for me to join her.

We'd fallen into a routine over the past week, and I don't know how to go back to my life before Marie.

Goddamnit!

With a sharp jerk, I initiate a U-turn, the bike's rear end fishtailing slightly as I fight for control and almost losing it as I recklessly make the illegal turn.

A car honks at me, but I don't look back as I fly back toward her apartment.

The city lights blur into streaks of color and the scent of exhaust fumes fills my nostrils, but the image of her face, the hurt in her eyes, flashes before me.

And it's the only thing that has me pushing down my earlier thoughts and fears.

She's mine, goddamnit.

If this doesn't work, then she'll have to be the one to put an end to it. At some point in the future, if she decides she doesn't want me anymore, then... No, I'll spend the rest of my life making sure there isn't a day she doubts the fact that she's the most important person in my life.

The ride back seems long somehow, and it feels like forever before I am parking outside her building. The bike screeches to a halt, the engine sputtering as I kill the ignition. My boots hit the pavement, and I'm already moving. The need to get to her and fix whatever I broke is insistent.

I luck out as I reach the locked entrance and catch the door just as someone comes out. I look around to get my bearings in the lobby, scanning the mailboxes for her name and apartment number before heading to the elevator.

I'm just stepping out of the car onto her floor when I hear it. A scream, a raw piercing sound that tears through the quiet of the hallway. I recognize that voice. My heart leaps into my throat, every muscle tensing up, but only for a moment.

Suddenly I'm a man possessed, like a beast recognizing its mate's cry of distress and intent on tearing apart anything that would cause it. My vision tunnels, world narrowing to a single purpose.

To get to her.

God help anyone who stands in the way of that!

I pause for a second when I spot her purse on the left side of an open door at the far end of the hall.

I don't waste a second as I sprint toward her apartment kicking the door open just as it's closing, splintering the wood.

I crash into the doorway, and I see it first—the knife pressed against the delicate skin I so adore.

And then I see those beautiful blue eyes, wide with terror, a hand clutching her

mouth. My vision turns red.

I let out a roar, a sound so primal it could be confused for a mountain lion.

The man takes a surprised step back, and it's just enough space for Marie to drop to the floor and throw herself away from him.

With her out of the way, I launch myself forward, colliding with the man and gripping the sharp end of the knife I knock the man to the floor.

I ignore the sting of the blade biting into my skin as we grapple for control of the knife before I manage to yank it away from him and toss it aside.

He swings, the blow landing on my jaw, but the pain only serves to fuel the rage blinding me.

He punches blindly, missing this time as my hand finds his throat.

There is rage written in those dark eyes, but more than that, there's fear. He has every right to be afraid.

"Atlas!" Someone calls my name, but it sounds muted. "Oh my God, you're going to kill him!"

He deserves to die. The fucker put his hands on Marie, held a knife to the woman I love. He does not deserve to live. I will not let him live!

The man thrashes, arms flailing to pull my hands away from him, but I push him back, jaw set and intent on seeing him leave him without a whisper of air in his lungs, or a fucking heartbeat.

There are voices and hands grabbing me to pull me away from the man, but I am a mountain, unwilling to move until the fucker is dead.

“Atlas...you have to stop!”

A pair of hands close around my forearm, and the familiar scent has the red haze fading to reveal the man quickly losing color. I pull my hands away, turning around to look at Marie, surprised to realize that she’s not alone. There are other people in her apartment, all staring at me in horror.

“I’ll...um, call the cops,” someone says, but my attention is on the woman staring at me in shock. Her eyes shift from me to the man who now lies unconscious on her floor. He’s not dead—yet. Another minute, and he would have been.

Fuck, if I needed to give Marie a reason to be afraid of me, this is it right here, but I couldn’t stop. I couldn’t control the blinding rage, and somewhere in the back of my head, I didn’t want to. I wanted the man gone, only then would the woman I love feel safe.

My eyes drop to my hands. They are bloody, and it’s mine.

From the place where I cut my hand earlier when I grabbed the knife.

“You’ll need a tetanus shot,” a small voice whispers close to me, and I look up to find Marie staring at my hand before she looks up to meet my eyes.

“Let me see,” she says, reaching for the injured hand and examining it, silently asking me to move my hand to check for loss of sensation or function.

“Okay, it’s deep, but it’s not as bad as it could be.

Any deeper, and we'd need to visit the ER to make sure you didn't damage a nerve or tendon. ”

“Marie...”

“Let's get this cleaned up,” she says, avoiding my eyes and the people filing into her apartment as she leads me down a short hall and into her bathroom, shutting the door behind us.

She guides my hand under the sink to wash off the blood.

I watch her gently wash it off before guiding me to sit on the toilet.

She turns her back on me as she begins opening drawers and closing them, taking one thing after another and laying them on the counter. Once she has everything, she kneels in front of me and begins cleaning the wound with antiseptic wipes.

“Marie—”

“This might sting a bit, but it's important to prevent infection,” she cuts me off, avoiding my gaze as she tends to the cut.

I watch her bandage it once she's done, her touch gentler than anyone else's I've ever had on me.

Working at the oil rig exposed me to many injuries, and those who treated them weren't always as gentle as she is now.

They didn't look at my injury with such concern, and it didn't stress them as much as it does the woman kneeling at my feet.

“Thank you,” I say, and those seem to be the magic words that finally pull her gaze from the injury to my eyes. My gut clenches at the tears I see in her beautiful ocean blues, but before I can reach out and touch her, we both catch a commotion coming from the other side of the door.

“That must be the police,” she says, rising to her feet and busying herself by putting everything away. “We should go talk to them.”

“Marie.” I reach out and grasp her hand before she can leave.

“I’m sorry about what happened today. We thought we had eliminated all the Vipers.

” There is so much to regret. I should never have ignored the instinct that there were more of them, and worse, I never should have allowed her to come up here alone.

“I promised to keep you safe, and tonight...”

Christ, I didn’t just ignore her safety by letting her come up here, but I scared her by almost killing that bastard.

How did the fucker even find her address?

To be fair, it wouldn’t be so hard to do if he knew her identity.

He already knew where she worked, and once he had her full name, I bet the rest was easy.

Perhaps he’s been waiting here every night for her to return, and maybe that’s why we missed catching him during the motel raid.

The fucker was already waiting for her. I shudder at the thought of what would have

happened if I hadn't returned.

"It's not your fault," Marie whispers, tugging her hand from mine. "This is no one's fault, but the man lying on my living room floor. You saved me, Atlas. Again."

"Marie..."

"The cops," she says, turning the door knob to open the door. "Let's not keep them waiting. I need to get rid of all these people in my apartment, then we can talk."

She's not asking me to leave—not that I would be able to. I'd probably camp outside her door, intent on protecting her from anyone else who dared come after her, but she doesn't kick me out, which I take as a good sign.

I can still fix this!

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Marie

I try to keep my eyes from drifting to him, but it's impossible.

I can't take my eyes off him long enough to focus on the cop taking my statement.

Atlas is standing at the far end of the room giving his own statement, and a part of me wants to walk over there and shield him from the cop.

Protect him from whatever judgment these men and some of my neighbors have formed of my gentle giant.

Atlas would never hurt anyone.

Well, he nearly choked a man to death, but that's because said man had a knife pressed against my throat.

For the second time. It could be argued that the first was a case of mistaken identity, but this time around, he knew fully well whose throat it was he was dangerously close to slicing.

Of course Atlas would take offense to that.

He looks up, and when his eyes lock with mine, I consider calling my parents for help. I never ask them for anything, but for the first time since moving out to live on my own, I want to call them so they can get Atlas the best lawyer money can buy before these people send him to jail.

“Miss Hale,” the officer speaks, his voice pulling my eyes from Atlas and back to him. “Tell me what happened after the man pressed the knife to your throat.”

“He...” My voice trails off when I realize there’s surveillance in the hallway. “The camera in the hall must have caught it. You can’t arrest Atlas when you see why he did what he did.”

“I need to take your statement,” the cop says patiently. “What happened?”

Right.

“He grabbed me and forced me to pull my keys from my purse and unlock the door,” I say, recalling how I hadn’t made a sound, frozen in place, worried that even the slightest move would startle the man into making a mistake and hurting me.

Then I realized how dumb my thought process was.

The man was dragging me into my apartment where hardly anyone would hear me once the door was closed.

“He said he was going to make me pay for associating with the Reb—”

My mouth clams shut, unsure how much I am supposed to reveal to the cop. “We’re well aware of the troubles between the Steel Rebels and the Chrome Vipers.”

Right.

“Okay, so, uh, he was angry that I was associating with the Rebels and said he’d make me pay.

” A delusional thought that would have made me laugh if the man hadn’t been

threatening to hurt me.

“I knew he was going to kill me, and I didn’t want to go quietly, so I’d screamed, hoping the neighbors would hear me and before he could shut the door. Atlas heard and...stopped him.”

“We know by his jacket he’s a Rebel. Is he a neighbor?”

“No, he’s a...um... We’re close,” I finish lamely, unsure of how to label our relationship when I don’t understand it myself.

One second the man was pushing me away and creating space between us, and the next, he was a vicious wolf, tearing at the man who tried to hurt me.

“You can’t arrest Atlas. He was only trying to protect me. ”

“It looks like he did more than that.”

“He was trying to protect me,” I say again, more firmly this time. “When he walked in, there was a man with a knife to my throat threatening to take the life of a person he cares about. If he’d hesitated even for a moment, this would be a different kind of investigation.”

The cop nods, noting something down before looking up to meet my eyes. “Alright then, Miss Hale, we’ll call you to the station to record your statement again.”

“He’s not under arrest, is he?”

The cop turns around to his colleague, and they exchange a look. “We’ll investigate the incident and keep you updated on the case.”

He asks a few more questions, and it feels like hours before everyone finally clears out of my apartment, taking with them my assailant and his weapon.

It all feels surprisingly anticlimactic.

Atlas and I find ourselves staring at each other from across the room, and despite the urge to go to him and lean into his warmth, I keep my distance.

“Are you okay?” he asks, taking a step forward, but stops when I wrap my arms protectively around myself.

“I’m fine,” I say, inching closer to the sofa and lowering myself down to it. “How’s your hand? If it hurts I can—”

“It doesn’t.”

The air is awkwardly painful, but there’s no ignoring the elephant in the room. “What do you want from me, Atlas?”

“Nothing, I just want you—”

“If you did, then you wouldn’t have left.” I wince at the hurt that flashes in his expression before he carefully pulls it back. It’s not that I blame him for not being here with me when I was attacked, but it stings that he created the distance between us in the first place.

“I’m sorry—”

“Why?”

“I thought it was the best thing to do, Marie,” he says, those moss green eyes locking

on mine when he speaks.

“For Christ’s sake, you’re young, with a whole lot of life ahead of you.

Selfishly, I want to tie you to me, lock you away from the world so that no other man dares look your way.

Hell, I wanted to tear that man into pieces, and I would have if you hadn’t stopped me.

Doesn’t it scare you that I wouldn’t regret it if I killed him or anyone else who dared touch you?

” His eyes flash. “At twenty-four, I don’t imagine you want to spend your weekends at home watching TV or reading some boring book or walking around town with an obsessed lover who doesn’t trust other men around you. ”

“I... You...”

He laughs. “Even the thought of it terrifies you, doesn’t it? You can look at me.”

It should. God knows what Atlas is describing is nightmare in the making, so why does it turn me on to think of him so obsessed over me that he would go to such extreme lengths? There’s clearly a loose wire somewhere in my brain.

“Do you know what terrifies me the most?” I ask, climbing to my feet and taking slow steps toward the man. I stop in front of him, fingers itching to reach out and touch, but I keep my hands by my sides. “Thinking of a moment when you don’t want me.”

“That would never happen—”

“Please, let me get this out,” I say, giving in to the need to touch him as I bring my hands to his chest, trailing the hard lines of his torso.

“The first time they kidnapped me, I was scared out of my mind, but a part of me accepted that it was the end. I didn’t want to die, no, but I tried to accept that I would.

” My hands pause on his pecs, firm and powerful.

“This time, I had so much regret, and I didn’t want to just accept it.

I regretted that I hadn’t pushed you off that bike when you wanted to leave me alone.

” It does my heart good to spy the smile that graces his mouth.

“I regretted that I could have done a hundred things in our last moments together, and what I chose to do was walk away.”

“You were angry.”

“I was.” I smile. “But I was also hurt. Then just as I was sure it was over, you bellowed through the doors like a raging bull on steroids, grabbed the knife, and rescued me from a monster.”

“I will let you shove me off the bike next time to make up for what happened today.”

I chuckle, sliding my hands up his neck and locking them on his nape as I meet his gaze, flushing deeply at the heat I read in them. “I can think of other ways you can make it up to me.”

His brow wings up and those eyes darken with lust. “Do you want to tell me, or should I guess?”

“I’ll let you figure it out on your own,” I say, pushing up until our lips are only a breath apart. “It won’t be easy though. You hurt my feelings, and it’ll take a lot to—”

His mouth crashes down on mine, hard, and then we’re kissing.

His hand drops to my waist and then down to my butt, pulling me against him and to the press of his erection.

My mind goes blissfully blank as our tongues search around one another.

I whimper against his mouth as my sex pulses with need, the hand massaging my ass only fanning the fire.

The kiss is hot and dirty, nearly obscene, but I can’t get enough of the man as I comb a hand through his hair, crying out when he breaks the kiss to trail his mouth down my throat.

“God, you’re perfect,” he rasps into my skin, sliding his left hand up and under my top, tugging down my bra and palming my breasts.

My back arches with a sob when he pinches my pebbling nipple between his fingers, rolling the bud until it’s aching and sensitive.

“I must’ve been out of my goddamned mind to think I could even go on for more than a few hours without you.

” He pushes back to look at me, his eyes heated as he grabs the top and yanks it over my shoulders.

“I’ll be a selfish bastard now and allow myself to have you.

So fucking perfect, but mine!” He reaches back and unclasps my bra before sliding it off my shoulders.

I shiver at the evening chill that brushes my nipples, but it doesn’t last as Atlas bends down to lick them.

I cry out when he takes one into his mouth and suckles so gently, it has a tremble racking my body and my sex flooding with arousal. I grip his hair, holding him in place as his tongue flicks over my nipples.

I could have been robbed of this, died without quite living or experiencing his sinful touch. Without touching him and giving him as much pleasure as he gives me.

“I want to feel you,” I tell him, pulling him up by the hair to kiss him.

My hands drop to his shoulders and tug desperately at his jacket before attacking his T-shirt with the need to feel the press of his naked skin against mine.

To feel his heartbeat against mine and remind me that he made sure I still have one.

My eyes drop to his crotch, and I can see the massive bulge, his erection pushing hard against his jeans. My sex pulses at the thought of having him inside me, his massive girth stretching me deliciously. I want this—him. I don’t imagine there will ever be a time in my life when I won’t.

“Fuck, sweetheart,” he growls, and I pull my eyes back to his to find them locked on me. “I want to take it slow, earn my forgiveness, but the way you’re staring at me tears at my control. I want to make love to you, baby, not rut you against the wall like some mindless beast.”

“Yes,” I whimper, my brain going hazy with need, body trembling with the urgency

to sate every pulsing nerve.

“I want that. God, I really, really want that!” To prove it, my hands drop to his jeans, tugging down the zipper and pulling them open.

I swallow hard when his cock bobs out, hard and angry.

He groans when I stroke him, running my fingers up and down his length, feeling him grow impossibly bigger in my grip.

“Marie—”

“Take me,” I beg, my sex trembling with need, wanting to feel every inch of him inside of me, then his cum when he comes apart. “I don’t want slow. And I don’t want gentle!”

“Fuck!” he growls, nudging my hand away before yanking my pants down.

I find myself backed to the wall the second I’ve stepped out of them, and a hand lifts my left leg to his hip.

He uses his free hand to guide his cock to my entrance, rubbing it up and down my slit.

“Is this what you want? To see me lose control and pound your creamy little pussy?”

“God, yes.”

“You are so fucking wet, sweetheart, dripping all over my cock, and I haven’t even fucked you yet.

” I whimper when he nudges his cock against my entrance, spreading and stretching me with his fat shaft.

“Going to make you scream, baby, you better hang on tight because I’m not stopping until I’ve filled this pussy with my cum. ”

His words have barely registered before he slams forward, forcing a shudder down my body as he fills me with his massive cock.

I cry out, my back bowing when he begins thrusting in and out, barely giving me a chance to adjust to his girth before he’s taking me, hammering his cock in a vicious rhythm.

“Oh, God... Oh!”

I bury my face in his shoulder and bite hard at his skin to mute the sounds.

The walls are mostly soundproof, but there is a threat of alerting the neighbors who are probably more sensitive to noises after what happened.

From the dangerous glint I see in his eyes, I don’t trust Atlas to stop if someone comes knocking.

God, I asked for this, practically begged him for it, and now I can hardly breathe through the ecstasy.

“You are mine!” he growls, pulling out before slamming back in and making me sob as he brushes against that sweet spot inside me.

Atlas drops the hand holding my hips up and puts one arm around my waist and the other beneath my ass before hoisting me up to the wall.

I cry out as the move sends him deeper into me, wrapping my legs around his waist to hold steady, and then his hips are moving again, his cock slamming in and out of my pussy, flesh sliding against flesh, and our lungs sharing the air between us.

It's as hot as it is intimate. And I revel in every second, loving the feel of his firm muscles against my soft and meeting every fevered thrust. Every assault on my senses as his cock brushes all the right spots makes me teeter dangerously close to the edge only he has ever brought me to.

"Harder, want it harder, baby," I plead, and I feel his grip tighten on me to the point of pain, and his breathing turns heavy as he gives what I want, his body slapping against mine so hard and fast, he makes me scream like only he can.

My body stills and my sex locks around him for a hot second before releasing in violent shudders.

He presses harder into me, thrusting as a wave of pleasure rolls in, robbing me of my breath and sight.

And then I feel him start to shudder as his thrusts become jerky, and he slams hard into me one last time, pushing deep before going still against me.

A whimper slips out as I feel him swell, and with a growl, he fills me with his cum, pumping his cock in and out of my pulsing sex until I've milked him of every drop.

Atlas goes slack against me, his breathing just as heavy as mine. I drop my head to his shoulder as my body goes limp, every muscle deliciously sated. "I'm glad you came back," I whisper, kissing his damp skin.

"Me too."

“If you leave again, I’ll...I will...I’ll have Debbie deal with you.”

He chuckles. “As terrifying as that sounds, she won’t have to, because I am not going anywhere, sweetheart.”

I sigh, feeling happy in the moment as I nuzzle his skin. “I could fall asleep right where we stand.”

“Hmm, I’m not done with you just yet,” he says, tightening his grip on me and carrying me to the couch. And then he makes love to me all over again.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Atlas

I hear her scream, a sound so raw it claws at my insides, but this time, there is no way to get to her. It's almost like I am stuck in a dark room with the sound coming from all directions. My calls go unanswered, and I keep hitting a wall at every turn.

There is no way to get her, so I punch the walls until my hands are bloody, clawing at it as I yell for her to stay calm, vowing to find a way out of this maze I'm stuck in to save her. Every part of me is shaking with fear and rage.

God. He can't hurt her! I need to get to her before she gets hurt!

I'm jolted out of the dream by a choked cry, and for a full second, I think that the sound is simply an echo of the nightmare until I turn to her.

Beside me, Marie is thrashing, flailing beneath the covers, her face contorted in a mask of pure terror.

It's been happening every night for a week.

The memories of that day have found their way to her dreams.

"Please...don't... No!"

Her breath hitches, a ragged gasp that tears at my heart.

"Shhh, it's okay," I murmur, gently smoothing the hair from her damp face and

wiping away the sweat that slicks her forehead.

Her body is tense and every muscle is coiled in fear.

Christ, is there anything that could bring a man to his knees faster than seeing the woman he loves suffering?

I want to kill him so bad. Raid the jail they are keeping him at and make sure he doesn't have a pulse when I walk out. It's been a week since the attack, and even moving Marie into my apartment hasn't stopped the nightmares that plague her most nights.

My jaw is clenched with anger as I gently gather her in my arms, pulling her against my chest. "It's okay, baby.

He can't get to you." Her body trembles, and the sobs come again, muffled against my shirt.

Rocking her gently, I whisper soothing nothings, words and comfort that I hope will chase away whatever's been plaguing her dreams all week.

Slowly, the tremors begin to fade. Her breathing deepens, and the ragged gasps even out.

Her grip on my shirt loosens, her body softening against mine.

The nightmare, it seems, is beginning to recede, but I don't let go of her.

No, I hold her all night, for her comfort as well as for my peace of mind.

I stay that way, holding her. The nightmare seems to be held at bay by my touch, and

a part of me never wants to let go. It eats at my insides that I can't go into her dreams and kill whatever the hell is chasing her there. I would give anything to take the pain away from her.

Marie wakes up a little past nine, her eyes locking on mine first thing when she opens them. "I had another nightmare, didn't I?" she asks when she notices the position she's in. "I'm sorry I woke you—"

"I want you to see someone, talk to someone who can help."

Her mouth set in a frown. "What about you?"

"Sweetheart, I'm not the one who got kidnapped and held at knifepoint twice."

"Fair enough," she says, trying to pull away from the embrace, but my hands tighten around her, keeping her in place. "Atlas, you can't make me believe this is any easier for you. The stress of everything that's happened and trying to cope with how it's affecting me... I know you blame yourself..."

There is no amount of talking or punching a bag in the gym that will take that away. She wouldn't be going through any of this if I hadn't left that day. I would have stopped the fucker before he got to her, saving her all this pain. Of course I blame myself.

"...but I don't blame you," she continues, reaching up to cup my jaw, her fingers rubbing against my scruff.

"Have you ever thought that we probably never would have met if I hadn't been kidnapped the first time around?"

And the second time... Well, that was just unfortunate, but I got to see you in action.

” She chuckles, trailing her hand down my chest, and my cock perks up as her curious fingers explore.

“You said you would protect me, and for most people, that’s just a figure of speech.

I witnessed what those words meant when you put yourself between me and danger.

You saved me—again. Heck, you keep saving me even in my dreams.”

She always knows the perfect thing to say. Who the hell needs a therapist when my gorgeous nurse heals all my wounds, even those she can’t see?

“You’ll talk to someone,” I say, leaning in and brushing my lips over her temple as I grab the hand that’s moved dangerously close to my erection. “For now, however, you need to put that hand away before I’m late for Church and the cookout after.”

“Right, I promised to help set up the terrace for the cookout. What time is it?” Her eyes cross to the clock on the bedside table, and she gasps in alarm. “Nine! Why didn’t you wake me up? Atlas, it’s nine freaking AM!”

The same reason I didn’t wake her when she had another nightmare. “You’ve been working tirelessly this week,” I say, gently nudging her to the side before climbing out of bed. “You needed the sleep.”

“God, I should have set the alarm. I promised the girls I would join them at nine-thirty, and—shit, I have less than half an hour to get ready.”

“Why don’t we shower together?”

“No!” she hisses, scrambling out of bed, her feet tangling in the sheet and falling off the bed before I can catch her. “I don’t want you anywhere near me. Every time we

shower together, I always end up being late. Don't come any closer, Atlas, I'm warning you."

I smirk. "Is that a challenge?"

"No!" she shrieks, running fast toward the bathroom, but I'm faster and catch her before she slams the door closed.

My mouth is on hers, and that seems to melt her protest, her arms winding around mine as she whimpers into the kiss.

One that turns into love making in the bathroom, her hands gripping the sink and her nightgown bunched up at her waist as I take her hard and fast, sending us both tumbling over the edge with pleased groans.

"You are bad for me," she sighs, but the dazed eyes that meet mine in the mirror tell a different story. "Remind me not to challenge you next time."

I laugh, slapping her butt as I walk away, leaving her to get ready first and heading to the kitchen to make coffee.

Rusty lets out a loud yowl when I walk out of the bedroom, twirling around my feet and looking up at me expectantly as I open the shelves.

I glare at him when he swipes at my hand, scratching it as I pour cat food into his bowl.

"You never give Marie this treatment when she's feeding you."

He ignores me as he attacks the food. With a sigh, I get back to preparing coffee and decide I might as well fix breakfast. I'm just about done when Marie comes flying out

of the room, sliding into her coat as she goes.

“I’m so late! You made me so late!” she cries, hopping as she tries to put on a shoe.

“If the girls scold me, I’m blaming it on you. ”

Then she’s gone before I can offer her a cup of coffee. I chuckle, carrying my mug to the bathroom to get ready for the day.

“You’re in a good mood today,” Doc tells me as Church—the club’s weekly meeting—ends, but it seems I’m not the only one in a good mood.

The atmosphere at the meeting was especially light today as most of the talk revolved around the Chrome Vipers and how we cleaned the streets off those scum bags. Finally.

It doesn’t hurt that by ending the Vipers, we now control their territory as well.

“The Vipers are gone; it’s a good reason as any to be in a good mood.”

The man hums as we head for the elevator. “Are you sure it has nothing to do with the woman you follow around like you’re her personal bodyguard?” He smirks. “I’d be surprised if you didn’t have a tracker on her.”

“Oh, fuck off!” I say, showing teeth. Of course I have a tracker installed on her phone, but I don’t tell the fucker that. Judging from his smirk, he’s figured that out already. “Just wait until you find a girl of your own then come back and talk to me about following her around.”

His smirk falls, and he quickly looks away, but I don't miss the look that crosses his eyes. It seems I've touched a sour subject, because he goes stiff as a flagpole. "Perhaps you're right," he says, and I can tell the conversation is over.

Like most of my MC brothers, much of Doc's past remains a mystery.

I know he was locked up for four years after being found guilty of involuntary manslaughter, and although he never talks about it, I've always suspected that there is more to the story than him getting into a fight with an old neighbor.

Before going to prison, he'd been in the military as a combat medic, but even that part of his life is a gray area.

Doc has always been a quiet man, and I don't imagine he'll want to talk about it.

Rarely does anyone in this place want discuss their lives before coming to the club, including me.

That's what the gym is for. We have an entire floor in the building fully equipped with all kinds of equipment dedicated to letting out pent-up rage.

The elevator doors open on the terrace, which is a hive of activity.

The smell of food hits, and I start to head toward it when a small hand closes over mine.

Doc stops to see what's holding me back, smiling when he spots Marie.

"I need to talk to you about something," she whispers, her voice tight, which makes my brows furrow in concern.

“I guess I’ll see you later,” Doc says, walking away.

“What’s the matter?” I ask, looking around as if expecting to see some kind of threat, but this is the freaking Steel Rebel clubhouse. Trouble doesn’t just walk in.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

“Not here,” she says, pulling me toward the bathroom.

Barely anyone notices us sneak away, and it’s not until we’re somewhere private that Marie pushes me against the closed door.

For a second, I’m stunned when she leans in and presses her lips against mine, her hands roaming my chest, and my cock stiffens in an instant.

Christ, all she has to do is touch me to send need burning through my veins and all blood rushing south.

I grab her arms and push her back gently to study her eyes, surprised to find them clouded with lust. “Baby, what’s happening here?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m trying to seduce you.”

“And you pick now? Here?” I chuckle, but it morphs into a groan when her hands drop to the bulge growing in my jeans and rubs at my erection.

“Yes, here,” she says, moving her hand up and down my covered shaft. “And now.”

“Fuuuck!”

She smiles, leaning in to brush her lips over mine, and I groan again when I feel the press of her breasts against my chest. I take control of the kiss, bringing my hand to her nape and spinning around so that her back is to the wall.

The kiss turns fervent, and I slide my hand under her T-shirt and cup her breasts.

She moans into the kiss when I pinch her nipples over her bra, ready to tear the thing off and lick at the peaking beads.

“Nuh-huh.” She chuckles, sounding drunk, but I don’t smell or taste any alcohol on her. She giggles as she slightly pushes me back. “I’m the one seducing you, remember?”

“Consider me seduced,” I say, leaning back in to kiss her, but she keeps the hand between us.

“I had something else in mind,” she counters, biting into her lip she lowers her hand back to my crotch, palming my dick over my jeans.

“I want to do this.” Her other hand drops as well, and she starts working on the button of my jeans before gripping the zipper and easing it down.

Her eyes are on mine as she tugs my boxers down, and I hiss as her warm hands close around my shaft when it springs free. “You’ll like this, I promise.”

Before I can ask what she means, I watch her drop to her knees, heat flashing through me when she holds the base of my shaft in one hand and leans in to take me in her mouth.

I groan at the incredible sensation when her lips wrap around my cock and her wet tongue brushes against the underside of my cock as she takes me deeper.

“Fuuuck!” I growl, sliding my hand through her hair as she works me into her mouth before slowly sliding back off.

Her eyes lift to mine as she brushes her tongue over the crown, smiling when I hiss at the jolt of pleasure that rolls up my spine from the move.

“I knew you’d like it.”

There is a wicked look in her eyes I haven’t seen before as she takes me in deep again and pushes as far as she can go before pulling back again with a slight cough.

Her eyelids flutter when she starts bobbing her head, moaning as that beautiful mouth takes me in and wrecks me.

I realize that she’s enjoying this almost as much as I am, licking at my length like her favorite treat before taking me in once more.

Christ, she looks so fucking beautiful, strawberry blond hair tight in my grip with a mouth made for sin wrapped around my cock.

“Fuck, baby, I’m so close,” I pant, tugging her away from my cock and grabbing her arm to help her up.

I press her against the sink as my mouth slams down on hers, hand sneaking under her skirt and between her legs.

“If I’m coming anywhere, it’s going to be inside of you.

” My voice is thick with need and my hands impatient as I hook my fingers in the waistband of her panties and yank them down.

“Oh, God,” she cries out when I drag my fingers over her slit then tease her clit with my middle one.

She wraps her arms around my shoulders, anchoring herself against me as I rub my finger fiercely over the bud, feeling her sex grow slick.

Her muscles tighten around me when I slide my finger into her pussy, and my cock jerks in response.

“I need to be inside you now.”

“Yes, please,” she whimpers, her grip tightening around me when I withdraw my finger to replace it with my cock. My eyes are locked on hers as I glide slowly into her, drinking her up when she throws her head back and her mouth parts on a cry as I stretch her tight, wet pussy. Oh... God...!”

And that’s all the control I have before I begin pounding into her.

I slide my hand under her T-shirt, pinching her nipples hard over her bra, and she cries out, rocking forward to meet my thrust. The sound of our love making fills the bathroom, and I swallow her cries with my lips on hers when they grow pitched.

Mine.

I knew Marie would be important to me from the second I saw her, but I never guessed just how much she would come to matter. She’s everything. Marie Hale wormed her way into my heart and became my entire life.

“I love you,” I say into the kiss, noting how her eyes widen in surprise. “I’m in love with you. Only you.”

“Atlas...”

“Need to feel you come, sweetheart,” I rasp, as the pressure on my spine increases.

“I’m so close, I want you to come with me.”

“Close,” she pants, crying out when I lean in to take her swollen nipple into my mouth, suckling hard at the bead, and that sends her over the edge.

She climaxes with a sob, her nails digging into my shoulders with the same intensity her pussy locks around my cock, muscles rippling around my shaft and sending me over the edge.

Our bodies move together, cock jerking as I fill her womb with my seed, creaming her intimate walls with spurt after spurt of my cum.

I kiss her through the orgasm, swallowing her pleased cries until we’re both heaving and limp against each other.

I hold her close to me, mostly so she doesn’t slide down to the floor, but also because I absolutely love the feel of her body against mine.

It’s like a puzzle coming together.

“I love you,” she says, nuzzling into my neck. “I fell in love with you the moment I met you in that apartment building. Now that I think about it, maybe we should keep that last bit between us when people ask how we met.”

“For me, it happened way before that.”

My words give her pause as she pulls back to look at me. “It did? When was that?”

“When I saw the surveillance footage of the kidnapping.” I laugh when she groans at my words. “You were gorgeous and so brave. I couldn’t believe it when I found out that you were single, not to mention being a virgin. Speaking of which, where did you

learn to do that?”

I don't need to explain what I mean for her to understand. It's not like Marie hasn't given me a blowjob before, but while it was enthusiastic and one of the best experiences of my life, her inexperience had made it a touch awkward. This was...different.

She smirks at my question. “Just a few tips from my friends,” she says with a laugh. “Now we'd better get back to the others before they start clueing in on what we're doing.”

“Hey, what other tips did you get?”

She straightens her clothes and turns to the mirror to fix her hair. “Maybe I'll tell you, or maybe...” her eyes meet mine on the mirror, “...I'll show you after the cookout.”

Suddenly, I can't wait for the day to be over.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:35 am

Two Years Later

Marie

I spot the van just as I'm stepping outside the nursing home, and the smile on my face freezes, as does the rest of me.

A low rumble vibrates through the pavement, and my breath hitches when I realize that it's headed my way.

My hands instinctively tighten on the strap of my purse and my knuckles turn white.

It's approaching the curb, its shape instantly triggering a wave of icy fear that washes over me. The world narrows and the sounds of the city fade as I stare at the one object capable of arousing such fear in me.

A white van.

My eyes dart around, searching for a way to escape as the van slows down. I should turn around and run back into the nursing home and call my husband. He won't let anyone take me. I just know Atlas will lose his mind if someone dares to lay a hand on me.

And yet, I'm frozen in place. I grip my purse tighter, the leather cool and slick against my clammy palms. I can't scream, my throat feels like it's been constricted by an invisible hand.

Then the van stops. The side door opens with a mechanical hiss, but no hooded figures jump out.

Two people step out wearing matching uniforms, and for the first time, I notice the words stamped on the side of the white van.

“Elite Furniture Delivery.” Relief floods through me, making my legs weak, and I would have fallen to the ground if a pair of arms hadn’t caught me.

“Hey, it’s okay, sweetheart,” rasps a familiar deep voice before I feel the press of lips against my temple.

“I’m fine,” I assure him even as I wrap my arms around him, burying my face into his neck and inhaling his scent, letting it soothe me. “I’m okay, I promise you.”

And the truth is, I’ve been okay for a while.

Atlas bullied, bribed, and cajoled me into talking to someone, and despite my reluctance, it worked.

I haven’t had a single nightmare of the kidnappings in over a year, and I even manage to sleep well in our bed alone when he has to work out of town.

The van today was unexpected. My therapist did warn me that something could always trigger the memories.

“I’m here,” Atlas whispers into my hair, running a soothing hand down my back until the tremors fade. “I’m always watching you, okay? Just remember that.”

I nod, feeling steady on my feet again as I push from the embrace to look at him.

Christ, he looks so freaking handsome with his dark, buzzed hair and vibrant green

eyes so beautiful they send my heart racing.

“Well, that was a little dramatic, wasn’t it?

” I chuckle. “Anyway, I’m more than ready to go home.

I just got my leave approved and will be free for the next fifteen days.

I know you’re busy, but maybe you’ll have some free time and we could do something fun together.

” Atlas takes my hand, and we walk to the parking lot.

I look around for his bike but don’t spot it.

“You didn’t bring your bike today?” I ask.

“No, I drove,” he says, walking me to a sleek black SUV and opening the door for me.

The first thing I spot is the flowers on the seat with a card.

For a panicked minute, I’m terrified that I forgot a birthday or an anniversary.

His birthday is not until next month, but our first wedding anniversary is coming up ...

God, what month are we in? Did I really forget?

“Honey, I...”

He must read the panic in my eyes because he breaks out laughing; the sound so

warm, it makes my heart swell with affection. “Relax, sweetheart. The flowers are to celebrate the day we first met.”

I blink at the man. “You mean the day I was kidnapped and you rescued me?”

“Considering what happened just now, I’m starting to think of it as poor timing,” he says, looking sheepishly at me.

“I would say it’s rather poetic,” I respond as I reach for the bouquet of red roses and bring them to my nose. “Irony, but poetic nonetheless. Thank you for the flowers. Now every time I think about vans, I’ll think of flowers instead of closets.”

“There’s a card too.”

“I didn’t know Hallmark made cards for such occasions,” I tease, reaching to grab it and expecting to read something cheesy and romantic when I see two airline tickets tucked inside. My jaw drops as I look from them to my husband. “W-what’s this?”

“Our honeymoon trip,” he says, brushing back my hair when it blows into my face. “Well, it’s a belated honeymoon trip since we’ve been married for almost a year now, but we never had a chance to go on an extended trip. I know you’ve always wanted to visit Barcelona.”

“We’re going to Spain?” I gasp, my jaw dropping at his words. “Really? Wait, what about... the club, Rusty?”

“Everything’s been taken care of, Sweetheart,” he assures me, cupping my jaw and leaning in to kiss me.

“Rusty will stay with Chelsea while we’re away for the next two weeks.

The girls have already packed for you, so all you need to do is change out of those

scrubs, and we'll be on our way to the airport. ”

My eyes well up at all the effort he put into this, how he thought and timed it, and I try to stop the tears but they fall. “You always know just what I need.”

“You could say that I learned it from you,” my gentle giant whispers, brushing his finger over my wet cheeks. “Now, sweetheart, how about we get started on our belated honeymoon?”

“Yes, please.” I nod with a teary smile, climbing into the car, cradling the bouquet in my arms, and burying my nose in it. We make it to the clubhouse, and I have just enough time to grab a shower and change, thank the girls, and kiss Rusty goodbye before we're driving toward the airport.

Three and a half hours later, we are finally seated in our first-class cabin.

I let out a happy sigh as I sink into the plush, oversized seat, the soft leather molding to my form.

I'm going to miss Debbie and the other patients, but I've been working without a break for months, so this is very much needed and deserved.

The flight attendants, impeccably dressed and with kind smiles, move through cabins, offering pre-departure drinks, so I wave one over, requesting two glasses of chilled champagne, intent on enjoying the ride with a bit of a buzz, and ten minutes later, I can already feel it take effect.

My gaze drifts to my husband and a fond smile touches my lips. I reach for his hand, interlacing it with mine. When the seatbelt sign turns off, I smile as the idea occurs to me. Atlas's brows knit when I release his hand and get up. He grabs my arm before I can leave. “Hey, where are you going?”

“The bathroom,” I say with an innocent smile, and he lets me go.

I walk into one and wait, knowing fully well it won’t take him long to come looking for me, and just as I expected, I hear him outside.

I open the door a little, make sure it’s him before reaching out to grab my husband’s arm and pulling him in.

It’s a tight fit for someone as huge as my husband, but fortunately, the first-class bathrooms on luxury airlines are bigger. “I knew you’d come.”

He smirks, “Let’s just say I’ve gotten better at getting a read on you.”

“Lucky me,” I giggle, wrapping my arms around his shoulders as need floods my stomach.

Being close to him always does this to me.

“I’ve always wanted to join the mile high club.

” I trail a hand down his chest, watching heat flood those eyes as I reach the massive bulge in his pants.

I lean in and brush my lips over his, tasting the champagne on his mouth and getting drunk off it.

“Maybe you can help make that fantasy come true.”

“Maybe I can,” he says, flipping us and pushing me against the door so that my breasts are pressed against it.

I gasp when he forces my legs open with his knee, and then there’s that hand, strong

and calloused, sliding under my dress and trailing up my thighs.

“You have to promise me to be real quiet, sweetheart,” he rasps, using his other hand to push my hair to the side.

I jolt hard when I feel his lips touch the back of my neck just as his hand reaches around and strokes my breasts.

He stops when I whimper. “Shh, no sound, okay?” I nod, biting hard into my lip to stop a moan when he rubs at my nipples over my dress.

I jerk against him when the hand between my legs grazes my sex, teasing me over my panties.

“God, you’re so hot. How is it that I want you more every day?

” he growls into my neck, tugging down my panties and slipping a finger between my wet folds.

“When I think I know your body and couldn’t possibly want you more than I already do, I’m proven wrong.

” I barely stop the cry that threatens to slip out when he finds my clit and rubs at the swollen bud.

“I want you, more than it’s healthy for one person to want another.

I whine when he pulls out his finger, but then when I turn around, it’s to catch him sinking to the floor.

He works around the tight place and reaches back under my dress to tear my panties the rest of the way down before nestling himself between my legs.

That is all the warning I get before I feel his tongue over my sex.

“Oh God,” I cry out, slapping my hand on my mouth as his tongue slides through the wet slit of my sex.

My knees turn weak and breath choppy when he starts licking my sex, sucking on my sensitive nub and sending wild flutters of pleasure through my system.

I jolt hard when he slips his finger into me again, licking wildly at my clit until all I can do is choke back my sobs, afraid they’ll carry to the cabin.

The orgasm tears through me with little warning.

I bite hard into my hand to stop the cry, my sex clenching around his finger as heat floods through my system.

The tongue on my clit stays, lapping me through the orgasm until I’m a trembling mess, jolting from every tremor that rolls through my body.

And then he pulls back. His hands are already on his pants, tugging at the button and zipper.

“My turn now, and I’m going to fuck that sweet pussy of yours, so promise me you’ll be good and not alert the crew,” he says as he lines himself up with my hole.

As if anticipating my scream, his palm covers my mouth seconds before he’s slamming into me.

“I’m going to take you hard and fast, sweetheart,” he whispers into my ear, pulling out before pounding back into me.

“Ride your creamy little pussy so hard, you’ll be feeling me the rest of the flight. ”

That is all the warning I get before he grabs my hips with his free hand and pulls me to him as he starts pounding, every thrust harder than the last. I sob behind his hand as pleasure floods my system, tiny fires lighting up in every corner of my body.

The bathroom fills with the wet sounds of our love making, flesh smacking together and making the obscenest of noises.

And I revel in every second of it.

The hand on my hip reaches around and strums my clit as he hammers into me, grunting into my neck as he grinds into me with the violence of a sex-starved maniac. My body trembles as my walls take his girth, allowing him to stretch and pleasure me in ways only he can.

“Mine,” he growls into my hair, his thrusts growing impossibly feral. “I’m going to fill this tight pussy with my cum and plant a baby in your womb!” His words send my pulse quickening, pleasure flooding my system, and I moan. “You like that, don’t you?”

I nod, pushing back to meet his thrust. Christ, I like that idea so much.

The thought of having a family with Atlas, kids that are a mix of him and me, is something I wanted from the moment I realized that I was in love with the man.

I wanted it so much, but we both agreed that I needed to first heal from my trauma, and now... God!

Euphoria overtakes my system at the idea of finally having what we’ve spent countless nights talking about, and I feel the climax building. Atlas rubs fast at my clit, rocking harder into me, and when I let go, he’s there to catch me. Falling right along with me.

“I love you,” he grunts, biting into my skin as he pours his seed into me, his thrusts becoming slow and deep, drawing out the orgasm until the small space is filled with our harsh breathing. “How was that for your fantasy?”

I smile when he nuzzles into my hair. “Perfect,” I whisper, trying to catch my own breath. “It was more than perfect, and if I conceive on this flight, we’re naming the baby Skye if it’s a girl and Jet if it’s a boy.”

He laughs as he helps me straighten my clothes. He’s laughing all over again many months later when we welcome both Skye and Jet.

~The End