



# Hawk (Sin City MC New Orleans Chapter)

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**Category:** Suspense Thriller

**Description:** When you're not looking for trouble, sometimes it finds you...

Gideon "Hawk" St. James has been teetering the line of his bad boy ways and staying out of trouble since being released from jail after serving eighteen months for being the lookout in a robbery. He's been out for one year now, running an auto repair shop out of his garage and laying low. The motorcycle club gives him the brotherhood he desires and an edge to his life.

But he's still missing something. His woman...

Ivy St. James left Gideon the same year he went to jail. Tired of his bad boy ways, she decided to find herself a good man, only he turned out to be NOT so good. While she's on the run from him, she runs into Gideon who can't help but stare at the little girl in her arms who has his same deep brown eyes and curly brown hair.

The members of Sin City never leave before all the cards are played.

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# Page 1

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Hawk

It was supposed to be an easy job my younger brother Gage had said when he planned this bank robbery with his two friends, one of which who had been nothing but trouble since they were in school together. The other – well, I don't know the guy, but he can't be no better than any of his other homeboys. The plan was supposed to be simple – they'd rush into the bank fifteen minutes after it opened, rob the joint for everything they could get, and take off with cold, hard stolen cash.

They would be in and out in less than a minute. No harm, no foul. Yeah, that's what Gage said.

What was my role in this? I volunteered to be on lookout and would radio them if anything popped off outside. And I took my job seriously. I sat on my Harley wearing a pair of polarized sunglasses, holding a walkie-talkie while the engine revved beneath me. Yeah, I had a walkie-talkie . We all did. How nineties of them to pull off a bank robbery using equipment from three decades ago.

I'm more pissed at myself for agreeing to this because, while I ain't no saint, I don't do stupid. I do stuff I know I'll get away with, but Gage – he operates on idiocracy. He already has two strikes. One more and he's up the creek.

So, while I would rather be hanging with my crew at the Sin City clubhouse throwing back beers while half-naked club snatches – Beauties – dance on the pool table, I'm here making sure Gage doesn't end up in the slammer.

The plan is going smoothly so far.

We arrive at the bank at 9:15. Gage is driving a beat-up black F150. I imagine it's stolen since he doesn't own a car, and neither does his co-conspirators. And they decided to boost a drop-top, cherry red Mustang.

Idiots!

Why would you drive something so flashy to a bank robbery?

At any rate, these imbeciles jump out of the Mustang with ski masks on. Gage follows them inside, sliding a mask over his face as he enters the lobby. I'm backed into a parking space, scanning the empty parking lot but mainly the street, watching cars whiz by. I see a cop car and nearly piss myself, but it keeps on by.

I turn back to look at the bank entrance. I see no movement, nor do I see three men running out with bags of cash. Now, my palms are getting sweaty. What the heck is taking them so long?

I press the side button on the walkie and asks, "What's going on in there? Let's go."

I know these banks have silent alarm systems. I also know they've probably already pressed the button by now. Again, what's taking so long? Brandon doesn't even radio back. Now, I'm beginning to feel like something's off.

The idiots finally come running out, hooting and hollering. The two Mustang dummies jump in the car with two backpacks. My brother comes running out with nothing but a gun in his hand, and is that blood on his shirt?

Crap!

Gage stuffs the glock in the back of his pants, and yells at me, "Let's go!"

He sounds like he's out of it. He looks frantic. I need to know what happened, but first, we have to get out of here and fast.

Brandon's peeling off in the truck, drawing a lot of unnecessary attention while I speed to keep up with him. His actions now have blue lights and sirens behind us.

My brother calls me on my cell. I answer with my Bluetooth earpiece and before I can say a word, he asks, "Where's your walkie, bro?"

"Walkie? I threw that piece of trash in the ditch, man. I tried to call you on it back there. What the heck is going on, Gage?"

"I'm trying to focus right now, Gideon."

"Focus? You need to start talking now! This was supposed to be easy, remember? Isn't that what you said? In and out? Now, we got the cops behind us."

"Oh, crap bro!" he says nervously. "We're going to jail! I can't go back to jail, Gideon. I can't—"

"Shut up and listen to me!"

"Okay! Okay! I'm listening."

"Tell me what happened in that bank."

"You know what happened. We robbed the joint!"

"That's not what I'm talking about! You have blood on your shirt. That's what I'm talking about!"

He must've looked down at his shirt because he starts freaking out and keeping all kinds of weird noises. He swerves off the road and nearly loses control. He says, "They were stalling...didn't want to give up the loot. Dennis told me to pop 'em, but I didn't want to do that, man. I'm no killer. I ain't never killed anybody."

"That still doesn't answer my question. Talk! We don't have much time!"

"Okay, okay, so, I hit the bank manager with the gun. That made them all move a little faster. Serves 'em right, but I ain't shoot nobody."

"Where are your partners?"

"I don't know, man. I don't know what's going on, Gideon. I can't go to jail! I can't go to jail, bro!"

"Calm down, Gage, and focus on driving. You ain't going to jail, and I need you to keep a straight head right now. Now, think—what's the plan? Where were you supposed to meet up with frick and frack? The Mustang is no longer in sight."

"Ah, man! They've gaining on us, Gideon."

Via the mirror, I count only one cop car behind us so far but I'm sure there will be more soon. I say, "I knew this was a bad idea. I knew it!" I glance at my side view again. I have to get Gage out of here before he's caught. It's funny that I'm the one in the motorcycle club that everyone in my family talks down about, yet he's the one with two strikes. I have one. I can take another charge, but do I want to? No, I don't. My life is pretty easy-breezy right now and this fool got me out here on a Friday morning being chased by cops. I know I can't let my brother strike out. His entire life would be wasted away behind bars.

"Ay, Gage, listen to me."

“I can’t go to jail, Gideon!” he squeals, sounding like he’s near tears and on the verge of desperation. When a man is desperate, he can’t think straight and Gage isn’t much of a thinker to start with, so there’s that.

“I can’t get locked up, man!” He’s straight wiggin’ out now.

“Gage, shut up and listen to me! Are you listening?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m—I’m listening,” he yelps, swerving all over the road.

“Turn up here on Magnolia Street. I’m going to distract the cops.”

“No! No way, man. We’re getting away together. I’m not going to leave you hanging, Gideon.”

“Gage, shut up and go! Go, now! Make the turn.” I hang up so I can focus, hoping he does what I’ve instructed him to do.

He does...

He bends the corner so hard, the truck is on two wheels before safely landing on all four again after he turns. I keep going straight, speeding away from him on my Harley like I have no respect for life.

The plan works.

The cops don’t follow Gage. They follow me. I’m sure they’ve radioed for backup to find Gage, but hopefully, he’ll do the smart thing, ditch the truck and boost another car to clear the area.

And now, it’s my turn to get away from the law. I bob and weave in and out of traffic,

gunning it, doing at least ninety in a forty-five. I'm a diversion for Gage, but I'm not trying to get caught either. I told my ol' lady she didn't have to worry about me getting caught doing anything. I didn't say I wouldn't get my hands dirty. I said I wouldn't get caught, and I haven't so far, and for good reasons. One, I didn't want to go back to jail. Been there, done that. Two, Ivy told me she would leave me if I ever found myself locked up again. The woman has me wrapped around her finger with her figure-eight body, plump lips, and long braids that hang to that ample rear end I love to smack. I can't risk losing her. She's top tier, got the body of a goddess and she's been my ol' lady for three years. No way, I'm losing her.

Now, Gage got me out here running for my friggin' life!

I glance in the sideview mirror. Now, I have two grizzlies on my tail.

"Crap, Gage!" I spat.

I hope he got away because something tells me my chances are slim to none. But one thing is for sure – I won't go down without a fight.

I jump on Interstate 10 where I really let loose and eat road.

"Woooo!" I proclaim when I look in the mirror and see that I've left them in the dust. I'm home free, heading to one of my favorite bars in NOLA – The Grotto, run by Wraith one of my Sin City brothers. Already deciding the route I'll take to get there, all I need to do now is shake them by getting more road behind me, but there's a problem. Traffic is slowing and nearly comes to a standstill.

"Crap!" I blurt out, gripping tightly to the handlebars.

Could this friggin' day get any worse?

I glance in the mirror again. People are clearing a path for the blue lights that encourage them to get out of the way for fear of penalty. It gives them easier access to me, but I have the advantage on the bike. I can maneuver between cars and find my way to freedom. That's what I do. I weave around vehicles and when I'm able, I move to the shoulder where I gun it again and get off on an exit – the same exit where a state police squad car is already posted.

Just my luck.

He hits the lights as soon as I whiz by him doing way more than the posted exit speed limit of forty-five. I blow through the stoplight and almost get creamed by an eighteen wheeler as I try to escape. I've temporarily slowed the trooper down with my near-death maneuver, so I hop back on I-10 and gun it once more. Traffic is still crawling, but the shoulder is clear, so I use it – getting up to ninety miles per hour in my desperate attempt to escape these cops. My adrenaline is pumping. When I'm like this, I do reckless things, but I can't stop myself this time. Getting locked up is not an option. It'll ruin my life and my life, the way it is now is perfect. I have my girl, the MC and my garage. There's no way I'm going to mess that up by getting caught out here.

I check my mirror again. I see blue lights behind me a ways and that's how I know I'm not quite ready to celebrate. I don't want to see anything behind me but road. I just want to be home free.

I crank it up to about a hundred miles per hour now. The last time I drove this fast, I was a dumb teenager, looking for a cheap thrill without the fear of injury or consequences. I should know better not to drive so recklessly, but it's my life I'm fighting for. My girl. My future. All those thoughts are running through my mind, clouding what I know I need to be doing – concentrating – but I'm thinking about all that while wondering at the same time if my brother was able to get away. I'm so lost in thought, I don't see the large piece of rubber from someone's blown-out tire until I



get right up on it. I jerk the handlebar to move out of the way and that's when it happens – I lose control. Speed and a sudden movement is a combination for disaster for riders. I know this, but desperation has caused me to make a mistake that proves fatal for most.

The front tire locks up and loses traction with the road. I go flying in the air, seemingly in slow motion as I see my life flash before my eyes. In quick succession, I see Ivy in a beautiful wedding gown. I see my mother and the memories I have of my father – one of those being when we used to cruise on our Harley's together. I see me and my brothers when we were young and a lot closer than we are now. And I see my MC brothers – us cracking skulls and sharing beers.

This is it for me. I know I'm going to die. I know it. Of all the insane things I've done, my life has never flashed before my eyes like this, and the messed up part about it is, I wasn't supposed to be involved in this nonsense.

I slam into the grass head first. The helmet took the brunt of the collision. I don't know how on earth I made it to grass and not the road, but I suppose that's a good thing because even though I'm injured, I'm still breathing. I'm in instant, excruciating pain. My right arm and shoulder hit hard too, and I know my collarbone is broken. I've probably cracked a rib or two as well. There's no getting up and running away. I wouldn't make it far even if I could get up.

The sirens are louder now, so I know the cops are here. They all converge upon me with weapons drawn, telling me to put my hands in the air like I'm capable. I'm too dizzy to hear their instructions. I'm in pain. My head is killing me and I JUST FLEW OFF OF A BIKE. I can't do anything but lie here.

One of the cops grabs me and says, "I said put your hands up."

"Ah!" I shriek. "Get off of me you prick! I can't move my right arm."

The jerk-of-a-cop loops the cuff around my left wrist and says, “You have the right to remain silent.”

“I broke my arm! I need help! Don’t put those cuffs on me, man!”

“Anything you say can and will be used against you—”

“Get off of me!”

“You have a right to an attorney—”

The pig keeps right on talking like he didn’t hear a word I said, and my right arm feels like it’s legit about to fall off. Yeah, the pain is starting to really set in, especially when they grab me.

“Stop resisting!

“I’m not resisting. My arm is broken!”

I screech in pain when he yanks my arm, and slaps on the cuffs. Three of them carry me to the squad car where they’re waiting for the ambulance. I hear it, but I don’t see it yet. I’m hoping the paramedics will be more sympathetic to my plight.

I shut my mouth so as not to incriminate myself and wait until they arrive. I wasn’t aware of my ripped jeans and right leg scraped to the flesh until the paramedics examined me. One said she was confident that my arm was broken and put me in a temporary sling. The other said I probably had a few cracked ribs and needed to be examined for a concussion as well.

I really screwed up this time.

Besides getting banged up pretty bad, I know I'm facing some time in the slammer. It's only a matter of time before the judge sends me to Club Fed.

And there goes my life. My MC crew solely relies on me to repair their bikes and cars, and now I'm about to be locked up. And then there's Ivy. She probably won't take a call from me when she finds out about this. She told me as much. I may be battered and about to face one of the toughest challenges of my life, but I can't lose my girl.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Hawk

“B out time they let you out of there for something you didn’t do,” Gage says with a chuckle like something’s funny. I look up to see him walking up the paved driveway at my house. It’s been two years since I’ve had my freedom, and he hasn’t matured any. He was twenty-three when he robbed that joint with dumb and dumber. Now, he’s twenty-five and he’s still the exact same idiot he was when I did the time for his crime.

“You know you gave your mom some extra gray hairs behind your foolishness,” my other brother, Brandon, says to Gage.

“Her hair has always been gray,” he spats. “And don’t act all holy like you’re a saint, Brandon, because you ain’t.”

“Shut up, Gage,” Brandon says pushing him.

Gage shoves him back.

I say, “Ay, I’, gon’ tighten both of yall up in a minute. Is this any way to welcome your brother home?”

“You’re right,” Brandon says. “My bad, man.”

Brandon is a mature thirty-five-year-old – has always been the smart, know-it-all type, even back when he was in his twenties. I guess it’s because he’s the oldest, and owns a trucking company that brings in over five million dollars a year. He’s the only

one of us siblings that got his stuff together.

I crack open a cold one and chug it down. Getting out of lockup feels like a rebirth – starting over again – but who wants to keep doing that? I’ve done it before. I hadn’t planned on doing it again. Now, I’m thirty and besides my house, I have nothing. I suppose I should be thankful that Brandon looked after it for me, especially after Ivy moved all her stuff out.

Yep, she left me and the only call she took of mine was the very first one after it all went down. That’s it. I was still in the hospital then, and she didn’t bother to come see me. Ivy didn’t visit me in prison, didn’t write or put money on my books– she was a ghost just like my brothers who also went AWOL. At least Brandon took care of the house and put some money on my books. Gage, the pain in my rear, didn’t do anything for me. He’s always been selfish, but after ruining my life, the least he could do was visit.

“You see Ma yet?” Gage asks, taking it upon himself to take a beer out of my cooler.

“I just got out yesterday. I haven’t seen anyone but you two knuckleheads.”

“Yeah, well, she’s been waiting to see you,” Brandon says.

“Ha—more like waiting to cuss you out!” Gage says.

If Gage wasn’t my brother, I’d been knocked his teeth out a long time ago. He really doesn’t think before he speaks, nor does he think about the consequences of his actions.

I say, “What have you been doing free for the last two years, Gage? You got a job yet, or are you the same moron you were back then, pissing in your pants trying to get away from the cops.”

He chuckles. “Well, at least I got away.”

I jump up from my seat – a piece of log that I use for a chair – and lunge at him. I grab his collar before Brandon plays referee and holds me back from beating Gage into a pulp. He’s been asking for it and I’m just the one to give it to him.

“The only reason I got caught you stupid bastard is because of you. I was making sure you got away, and you think this is funny?”

“Ay, man. Chill,” he says, smoothing out his shirt. “Can’t you take a joke anymore?”

“Get out of my driveway before you take a fist to your face!”

He puts his hands up and backs away. When he leaves in whatever piece of crap car he’s stolen this time, I tell Brandon, “I swear he has a couple of screws loose.”

Brandon shakes his head. “I hate to say it, Gideon, but you have to let him make his own mistakes.”

“Oh, I’ve learned that lesson while I sat in prison for two years for something he did, and he didn’t bother to come to visit, write or nothing.”

“I didn’t visit you either—”

“At least you kept an eye on things here,” I say, turning to look at my small light blue house with dark blue shutters. “It ain’t much, but at least I got somewhere to lay my head.”

“In these parts, that means you got a lot, brother.”

I grab two beers from a red cooler, offer him one, and crack open a second for

myself, and say, “I’ll drink to that.”

He takes a long, hearty swig and then asks, “So, what now, bro?”

I shrug. “I’m going to pick up where I left off. Gotta get my shop back up and running so I can make some money. I have a steady clientele.”

“Let me guess—those heathens at that motorcycle club.”

“Call them what you want, but they all came to visit me when I was in the slammer. They’re my family.”

“Oh, and I’m not.”

“Don’t put words in my mouth. I didn’t say that.”

Brandon kicks dirt and stares down the street when he says, “Now’s a good time to leave that life behind. If you truly want a fresh start, then make one. You can work at the trucking company if you—”

“I’m not working at your company, Brandon.”

“Okay, well work at any company—anything that will get you to let go of that gang life.”

“My association with the club is not the reason I got locked up. Granted, I’ve done plenty to get locked up for, but need I remind you it was our idiot brother who decided he was going to rob a bank!”

Brandon shakes his head. “You know they screwed him over.”

“What do you mean?”

“Gage never saw a dime of that money. The word around here is, one of ‘em fled to Mexico...don’t know what happened to the other one but wherever he is, he’s livin’ it up.”

All I can do is shake my head. “You better talk some sense into him, Brandon, because I’m done. Look at what he’s done to me.”

“I ain’t talking no sense into him. If he wants to be wild and free, that’s what he’ll be until he lands in more trouble.”

I stand up, stretch and take a look at the house. “This place has so many memories—just me and Ivy. It’s a simple house—nothing fancy about it, but the love we shared here is what made it home, you know.”

“Have you heard from her?”

“No, and I don’t expect to.”

“I hate that for you, man. You were crazy about her.”

I still am.

“Have you seen her around?” I ask.

“Uh...I last saw Ivy about six months ago.”

“Oh, yeah? She still looking good?”

“I’m not judging your lady, man.”



“Well, she ain’t mine no more, now, is she?”

Brandon sips beer and leaves my question in the air. “She has a daughter now, I think—at least I saw her with a little girl.”

“A daughter?”

“Yep.”

Damn .

I tell Brandon, “I used to sit in prison and dream we would get back together as soon as I got out, but hearing this means she’s moved on.”

“Maybe. That same day I saw her, she also had something else that was concerning.”

“What’s that?”

“A black eye.”

“A what?” I ask in disbelief because while we’re no longer together, I’m not about to let a man abuse her. Whoever he is, he’s as good as dead.

“I don’t know who she’s mixed up with, but the situation ain’t good.”

He leaves me to draw my own conclusion. I couldn’t imagine a man putting his hands on such a gentle, sweet woman. Sure, she could be a bit of a firecracker at times, but sweet nonetheless. I’ve always liked women with a bit of an edge and Ivy fit the bill perfectly. That’s why I married her. She’s five-six, thick in the hips, and has that chocolate skin that makes a man’s mouth water and other parts of his body stiff. She always wears her hair in braids, dresses nice, and smells like cocoa butter, vanilla and

sensuality.

While her looks are top-tier, her personality is even better. It offsets my ruggedness. She's soft and gentle. I'm hard and rough around the edges. We're the textbook definition of opposites attract . We were Bonnie and Clyde without the criminal activity – well, on her end at least.

Still, we worked.

To hear that she's possibly being abused rattles me to my core. I would like nothing other than to put my hands on whoever hurt her, even while knowing Ivy wants nothing to do with me. The last conversation we had, she told me she would be filing for divorce. While I know she's not the blame for the destruction of our marriage, I'm still pissed that she wouldn't at least hear me out. She cut me out of her life like the three years we were happy meant nothing.

Talk about a slap in the face.

“You will never know this, Brandon, but when a man is locked up and stripped of his dignity, he gets to thinking about a lot of things. I, for one, will not let anything or anyone take me down again. I'd made a promise to Ivy that I would stay out of trouble. I broke that promise. I'm not making any more promises to anyone but myself. From here on out, I'm putting me first over everything and everyone.”

As I speak those words, I hear revving motorcycles in the distance. I already know who they are. My brothers are coming to see me.

Sure enough, they pull up in formation and turn into the driveway. It's only two from the crew, but their visit is a welcomed one.

They turn off their engines and take off their helmets.

Brandon says, "Alright, man. I'm heading out."

I smirk and watch him walk off. He wants nothing to do with the MC since he says he doesn't like the character of people I chose as associates.

"Fellas," he says to them, nodding once as he walks to his truck.

Dragon, Vice President of Sin City, roughs me up and says, "You made it out of the slammer you dirty dog."

"I guess you can say that," I tell him.

"How does it feel to be home, man?" he asks.

"It feels good. It feels damn good."

"Woooo! My brother's home," Wraith proclaims, punching me on the shoulder. "I see your brother still got a stick up his butt."

"Nevermind him. Brandon is Brandon. You know how that goes. He's straight-laced and intends on staying that way. I ain't mad at that."

I lean over, flip the top off of the cooler and toss them both a beer.

They both pop it open. It sprays out the top as they toss 'em back. Wraith chugs the whole can and tosses it into the front yard.

"When are you coming to the clubhouse, man?" Wraith asks.

"Yeah," Dragon says. "We're ready to party and celebrate your release, brother!"

I'm not in a partying mood. After being locked up, I thought that was the first thing I wanted to do – go to the clubhouse, hang with the fellas, toss back some shots, entertain some company from a Beauty and pass out drunk with a naked woman on top of me. But that's far from what I want. I'm feeling real chill right now. I would like nothing other than to lay on my sofa, watch TV and drink my beer in peace and privacy.

But they want to party.

“Come on, Hawk. Prez has requested your presence. We all need to catch up, bro,” Dragon says.

I sigh. When Prez requests your presence, you just go and Loki has requested mine, so I guess I should show my face around there. It'll probably be good for me, anyway.

“I'll be down there tonight,” I drawl.

“That's what I'm talking about. It's about to be a party! Woo!!!” Wraith exclaims.

They head back to their motorcycles, slide their helmets on and drive off.

I wasn't prepared for this. I had no idea I'd feel this way after my release. And it's not like I want to shun the club. I'd never do that. It's the simple fact that I need some time to get myself together without booze and big tits in my face. My focus is to get my shop back up and running and rebuild my clientele. I don't have room for much else.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Ivy

When Gideon got locked up, I told myself I was going to do better. I needed to work on myself in order to attract the kind of man I was looking for – one who wouldn't lie to my face. A hard worker. A man who put nothing before his wife and family. A man who wasn't more concerned with hanging out with his motorcycle club buddies while I stayed home eating dinner alone, hoping that one day, he'd appreciate me.

Finding out I was pregnant right after he caught that charge threw a wrench in those plans. I had life growing inside of me – a life we created – so all of my time went to ensuring that I ate healthy and took my vitamins. I wanted to give my baby the best possible entrance into this world. I didn't care about anything else for those long, nine months – just my baby girl.

When Lilly arrived a healthy seven pounds, four ounces, it was only then that I felt like I could breathe. She was healthy. She was perfect. She was a happy baby. She's a year and three months old now, walking and definitely has her father's personality. And eyes. And nose. She looks just like him with that gorgeous creamy brown skin, resulting from our ethnicities.

She's my little angel. I thought I was doing her and myself a favor when I met Cash. I was waitressing—my second job—when he caught my eye. Knowing I wasn't in the market for love, I kept my professionalism intact and provided him with good customer service. He provided me with a one-hundred-dollar tip on a bill that was only twenty-eight bucks. On the receipt, he wrote his phone number. I called to thank him for his generosity, and what did I do that for? He asked me on a date and we were seeing each other for the better part of eight months.

Things were good with us for a while. He was generous – I never knew what he did for a living because he never told me, but with a name like Cash, I could take several guesses and probably be right. But what did I care? He took me to lavish dinners, bought Lilly clothes and shoes, paid the rent at my apartment and any other bills I asked him to chip in on. He was eager to do anything to help me. Everything was perfect...

Perfect, until he started hitting me. It began with name-calling, pushing and shoving. Then, I was supposedly cheating on him, so he punched me in the face. With that first lick behind him, it was easy all the other times that followed. And I stayed there – a victim – numb to the abuse.

Now, I'm running for my life and my baby's life to get away from him. Cash knows where I live, so I don't stay at my apartment anymore. I refuse to worry my parents about this, so I've been sleeping in my car with Lilly. If Child Protective Services knew this, I'd lose my daughter, so I kept it quiet.

Now, I can't anymore. She's not only my child. She's Gideon's, too. Doesn't he have some obligation to protect her now that he's able?

I start my silver Elantra while Lilly is still asleep and drive to where I know I'll find him – his motorcycle clubhouse. I don't want to go there, but I don't have any other choice at this point. When I pull up in front of the brick building, I see a gang of motorcycles parked out front. I brace myself for the rowdiness of it all. They stay partying – no one sleeps, it seems, and the environment is definitely not suitable for a one-year-old.

Here goes nothing.

I don't want to go inside and subject my baby to cigarette smoke, scantily clad women and men who look like they could crush your skull with their bare hands. I'm

currently on the run from one of those, and he's not even in a motorcycle club.

I take a deep breath, turn off the car and look in the backseat at my sleeping beauty – my most prized possession. My Lilly. I can't let her down – not this time.

“Ah'ight, girl. Do what you have to do for Lilly,” I coach myself.

I get out of the car and open the back door to unstrap Lilly. She's still sleeping at the moment, and I'm trying to keep it that way. It's tough carrying around a toddler when they're asleep. It feels like she's gained an extra five pounds simply because she's snoozing. I manage to hold her and my ten-pound purse while I walk to the entrance of this brick building I've only ever been to once in my life, and that was when me and Gideon were first dating.

Those were the days.

He was always wild and reckless. I was safe and mature. I wasn't what you would call innocent, but after a while, the charm of Gideon's bad boy ways wore off. I wanted something more in a man. Something that felt more stable and like home. I needed a law-abiding gentleman who wouldn't have me looking over my shoulders, waiting for the po-po's to show up with allegations of wrongdoing.

But getting back to the matter at hand...

I haven't stepped a foot inside and this place it's already intimidating. There's a sign on the door and a banner on the wall of the building that reads, Sin City Motorcycle Club, with a picture of a skull – the same image that's on the backs of their leather motorcycle jackets. And what's even more intimidating than that is, one of the members – I think they call him Wraith – is standing at the entrance with a beer bottle and a cigarette. He's wearing a red and black checkerboard shirt with the sleeves cut off, showcasing his arm tattoos. He has black studs in his ear. His eyes look menacing

like he's a trouble starter. His beard is so thick, he could hide contraband in it.

As I walk up to the door, he says, "You look a little lost there, sweetheart. This is a members-only club."

"I know, I just—"

"Then be on your way, darling. This ain't no place for a lady and a child."

"Wraith, is it?"

He looks dead at me, blows a puff of smoke in my face and asks, "How you know my name, gul?"

"Wraith, it's me – Ivy – Gideon's...I mean, Hawks, ex-wife...well wife."

"That's you, Ivy?"

I grin uncomfortably. Now, he recognizes me.

"Yeah, it's me."

"Well, why didn't you say so! Get your tail on up in here."

He opens the door. I follow him inside. There's a haze of smoke that makes the smoke he blew in my face look like nothing. I don't want to inhale, and I definitely don't want Lilly smelling these toxic fumes. I need to find Gideon and get out of here asap!

The place is packed to the brim. I hear a lot of cheering and hollering.



Wraith turns to me and says, “It’s a welcome home party for Hawk. That’s why the place is packed.”

A welcome home party...

Why welcome him home when he’ll be involved in activities that can send him right back? There’s really nothing to celebrate if you look at it in that respect.

I’m still following Wraith through the crowd when a woman near me says, “Oh em gee...who has a baby in here?”

She captures the attention of some blondes who giggle like teenagers when they look like they’re every bit of thirty – maybe even forty. Fake boobs are everywhere. Apparently, this place can be whatever it wants to be – a dance hall, a nightclub, a pub and a strip joint.

Two women are on the pool table dancing or wrestling. Yeah, maybe they’re wrestling. Thongs and implants – that’s what has this crowd stirred up. Hawk is still nowhere in sight.

Growing more uneasy but still thankful that Lilly is sleeping, I ask, “Do you know where he is?”

Instead of answering my question, he tosses his empty beer bottle behind the bar and immediately grabs another one. He puts his thumb on the top, shakes it then removes his thumb so it spews up in the air. Some land on me, but most on the ladies with the implants. They lick it off of each other.

What the heck? I have to get up out of here.

I gaze through the rowdiness and see Hawk at the back, standing in the entrance of a

back room. Based on what's going on in here, I do not want to know what's going on back there, but I have to talk to him.

I get away from Wraith and head in Hawk's direction. He doesn't yet see me and I use that time to study him. He still looks the same. He has that brown, curly hair that I loved to play in. It's similar to Lilly's. One of his biker friends must be good with razors and clippers because not only is his hair lined up well, but his mustache is impeccable. His dark eyes look menacing. His slender lips – gosh I miss kissing those. The sleeveless shirt he has on reveals that he didn't lose any muscle mass. He's still muscular and strong. And tall.

Dang!

Once upon a time, this was my white chocolate. My man. My everything. But he chose this life over me, so there's that.

A few more steps and now, his eyes connect with mine. He instantly frowns but he doesn't break eye contact with me. He doesn't move either. He just stands there. Time has stood eerily still.

My stomach does backflips. Seeing him again brings back old feelings that have never left and would probably never leave me. My head is spinning. My box is throbbing. I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm in it now.

“Hi, Gideon,” I say. I refuse to call him Hawk. I don't care where we are. He's Gideon to me and always will be.

He doesn't respond back, just stares – glares – at me.

“You're not going to say anything?” I ask.

He sucks his teeth. “Why would you bring a baby up in this fine establishment?”

“Um...I didn’t want to, but I need to talk to you?”

He hisses a grin. “Oh, now you need to talk to me. Ain’t that a —”

“Gideon...”

“When I got locked up, you said you had nothing else to say to me. So, I’ll ask you again. What are you doing here, Ivy?”

“I’m here because—I—”

“You what? Spit it out, Mrs . Independent.”

“I need help.”

His dark eyes narrow. “So, now that you need something from me, you seek me out.”

“Listen, I know I wasn’t there for you when you went to prison, but I told you I didn’t want that lifestyle anymore. And you promised me, Gideon. You promised me that you would stay out of trouble.”

“I’m not getting into this with you.”

He turns away from me and focuses on a group of women.

“Gideon?” I close my eyes briefly, take a breath and ask, “Is there somewhere we can talk that’s a little quieter?”

He releases an annoyed, exaggerated sigh and turns to walk without telling me where

he's going. I don't know if I'm reading his body language correctly, but I guess I'm about to find out because I follow him to the back of the building and out the back door. He walks to a back door, pushes it open and steps outside in the alley. I move Lilly to my other shoulder to give my arm a rest then look around, scoping out the place. It stinks back here. There are dumpsters, trash everywhere and a stream of something constantly oozing and it doesn't look like water.

"Make it quick," he says. "I have a celebration to get back to. Unlike you, those people in there are actually happy to see me."

"And you're happy about seeing people who have you constantly in and out of jail?"

"You don't know what you're—look...if you don't have nothing to say, I'll be on my way."

He heads back for the door and I blurt out, "I need help, Gideon."

He stops, turns to look at me and says, "Yeah, I heard that part. Help for what?"

"I need a place to stay. Me and Lilly have been sleeping in a car for a few months. I can't have her in a car."

"Lilly, huh?" he says and glances at her. Her face is still nestled into my neck at the moment. "That sounds like a problem you need to take up with her father. You made it clear you wanted nothing to do with me and for two years, you stuck to that. Now, that I'm out, all of a sudden you need my help. And why do you need somewhere to stay, Ivy? You let some man put his hands on you."

The look of shock on my face is unmistakable. How did he know?

He says, "Yeah, you've been seen around town with a black eye. Tell you what? Give

me the name of the bastard who did this to you, and I'll take care of him."

"No. I don't want to get you into any trouble, Gideon."

"I have my ways of finding out, darling, even if you keep those pretty lips of yours closed."

"You know what—forget it. That's not why I came here," I say, my eyes tearing up.

Lilly rouses and sits up and stretches her little arms in the air and starts whining and carrying on. She's a good sleeper, but when she's awake, she's awake. She's whimpering, rubbing her eyes before she looks at me and then she looks at Gideon.

Grimacing, he looks at me and then looks at her again.

"Ivy?" he questions after he's figured it out. I knew he would without me having to say a word. I gave birth to her, but she looks just like him.

"I wanted to tell you before, but—"

He backs away from me and kicks some trash on the ground out of sheer frustration and anger. Then he looks at me. "She's mine?"

"Ye-yes. She's yours."

He interlocks his fingers at the back of his head and just holds it there for a moment. He asks, "Did you drive here?"

"Yes."

"Walk around the building to the front and wait for me in your car. I don't want you

to take her back in there.”

“Okay.”

I begin walking around the building as he requests.

Lilly is still unsettled and rightly so. She has no idea where we are and for the last few weeks, she hasn't had a stable home due to my mistakes. I think that is what gets to me the most. I'm her mother. I should've never put her in this position. She deserves so much more.

“Shh. It's okay, Lilly. You'll be fine now,” I tell her as tears slide down my eyes.  
“You're going to be okay, baby girl.”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

I don't believe this, but I have no choice but to when that little girl looks just like me. I have a daughter. A friggin' daughter. I go back inside the clubhouse, looking for Loki, but when I see him thoroughly enjoying himself with the ladies, I decide to slide out of here without anyone noticing me.

When I step out front, I scan the area for Ivy's car then walk over to the driver's side and tell her to follow me.

I don't start the bike in front of the clubhouse so as not to alert anyone of my sudden departure. I push the bike down the road and when I feel like I'm far enough to start it without causing a ruckus, I hop on and begin the drive to my house.

I have a daughter.

And I have questions – all of which I'm going to get answers to as soon as I get to my place.

We pull up in the yard. I hop off the bike and unlock the front door, then stand there holding it while Ivy takes Lilly out of the car without the car seat. She finally comes up the steps, into the living room and sits on the sofa.

I close the door gently. I want to slam the crap out of it, but I don't want to irritate Lilly who's currently staring at me with her big brown eyes, same color as mine.

I have a freakin' daughter.

I look at Ivy and say through gritted teeth, “Start talking.”

“Um...I don’t know where to begin.”

“How about the part about you being pregnant with my child and not telling me? Start there!” I yell, letting my anger get the best of me.

Lilly’s little hands grip and squeeze onto her mother’s blouse. I’m scaring her. That’s not what I want to do, but my emotions are all over the place. I have a daughter and she’s beautiful and perfect. Am I wrong for being pissed at her mom right now?

“You should’ve told me. The whole time I was sitting in a cell rotting away—”

“Rotting away?” she intercepts. “Stop being dramatic.”

“Don’t tell me what I’m being when I was the one locked up. I had all kinds of crazy thoughts running through my mind. Knowing I had a daughter waiting for me would’ve been motivation for me—a push to do better and want to do better.”

“I wanted to tell you, Gideon, but I didn’t want to go through you denying that she was yours and all of that.”

“Denying her? Her ? How on earth can I deny her, Ivy?”

I stand up and pace the room, searching for my own answers because I’m too angry to ask her more questions. I step outside again, take a deep breath, and when I return, I notice she has lowered Lilly to the floor. Lilly’s sitting on her tush, staring up at me like the stranger I am to her.

“When did you find out you were pregnant?”



“About a month after you got locked up.”

“And when did you start seeing someone else?”

“A few months after Lilly was born.”

“That’s who you need help from, right? You’re running from him?”

“Yes. Look—I know you hate me. I wouldn’t have come to you unless it was absolutely necessary. I have nowhere else to go.”

“What has he done to you?”

“Um...he yells at me and Lilly. He’s hit me. Kicked me. Punched me.”

I shake my head, already deciding the best way to handle this. Nobody lays a hand on my ol’ lady. It doesn’t matter if we’re together or not. She’s still my property – still has my last name – and it’s murder for anyone who lays a hand on my seed.

“So, that’s the prince charming you thought was better than me? A man who abuses you? I’ve never laid a hand on you, Ivy.”

“I know. I—”

“And this man has been abusing you to the point that you need to hide from him?”

She sighs. “I can’t go to my apartment. He will sit in the parking lot until I get home, and that’s after I broke it off with him. He says there’s no end to us—that I’m his forever. Besides going to get a restraining order, I don’t know what else to do.”

I grin to myself. Restraining order...

She won't be needing one of those.

"Are you still working?"

"No, not at the moment. I lost my job behind this since he's been harassing me there, too."

I push all anger aside momentarily to ensure the protection of Lilly. I say, "Here's what we'll do. You and Lilly will stay here for now. I work out of the garage still—just like before, so I'll be here most of the time. What's this guy's name?"

"Cash Brooke."

"Is that his government?"

"Yes but listen, Gideon—I don't want you getting into any trouble behind this. I just needed a place to stay. I'll deal with Cash on my own."

"No. You came to me for help. You're getting help. I'll handle this douchebag in whatever way I see fit."

"I don't want you to end up back in prison."

"Trust me—some things are worth going to prison for. You can crash in the bedroom by the bathroom. You should know where it is."

"Yes, I remember."

"Also, you are to never leave this house without my permission. When I get this situation handled, you're free to do whatever you want, but until then, you do as I say. Understood?"

She sighs heavily.

“Don’t act like you didn’t hear me, girl.”

“I heard you, Gideon. I understand.”

Ivy scoops up my twin and goes to the bedroom.

Still in disbelief about this ordeal, I step outside and take a few steps down the street before calling Brandon. As soon as he answers, I say, “You could’ve told me the baby was mine.”

“What the heck are you talking about?”

“The little girl you saw with Ivy—she’s my daughter.”

“How do you know that?”

“They’re both in my friggin’ house as we speak.”

“Well, dang. That was quick. You didn’t waste any time getting your girl back, huh?”

“She’s not my girl anymore.”

“I can’t tell.”

“Look—that’s not what this is. She came to the clubhouse earlier to find me—said she needed help. Her ex has it out for her since she broke it off with him and she’s afraid for her life.”

“Oh, now it makes sense seeing her with a black eye. Dang, man. What kind of man

does that to a woman?”

“Don’t know, but I’m going to find out. You should’ve seen the look on her face the whole time she was talking to me. She looked terrified.”

“I bet. Ay, let me know when you find this dude. I don’t mind landing a few blows to his face.”

“Thanks for having my back, brother, but I don’t want you to get your hands dirty. You got a good thing going on over there. I’ll handle it.”

“Well, just know I’m here if you need me. Are you going to let Ivy crash there for a while?”

“I don’t want to, but what choice do I have? She has my daughter. I can’t subject her to danger.”

And if I’m being honest, I can’t subject Ivy to danger either. We’re still married. I haven’t signed any divorce papers which tells me she hasn’t filed, met with an attorney, or nothing. Does she want this marriage? Clearly, she doesn’t if she was so willing to move on after me. But seeing her brings back so many memories of the good times.

“So, you care nothing about Ivy?”

“Man...it’s confusing seeing her again. She’s still as beautiful as she was, but I’m angry at her for what she did to me. At the same time, I had to fight to take my eyes off of her lips.”

“Are you going to get a paternity test to make sure her daughter is yours?”

“Nah. Don’t need one. If you saw this girl up close, you’d already know. I just wish Ivy would’ve told me.”

“Well, all I can say is, you know now, brother. If a baby doesn’t get you to change your ways, I don’t know what else will. After all, that is what Ivy wanted in the first place.”

He’s right about that. Ivy wanted so much for me, but my problem with that was, she expected me to be who she wanted me to be. I’m no straight-laced businessman and don’t want to be. I’m an outlaw. A problem. Granted, I like law and order but only if I’m the law and the order.

And as for the MC...

It’s given me a safe place to express myself. To be myself. Ivy never understood that. In fact, after talking to her, she thinks it’s something I did with them that landed me in prison when it had nothing to do with the motorcycle. Nothing at all.

Brandon says, “Ay, while you’re visiting Mom, you may want to let her know that you have the first St. James grandchild.”

“The first? Are you sure about that? You and Gage ain’t been out here sewing your wild oats all over New Orleans?”

“Maybe Gage has, but I’m too busy building my business to be caught up right with a chick. Anyway, I’ll let you go since you’re a family man again.”

“I wouldn’t take it that far.”

“I would. You may not say it, but you love Ivy, and I don’t give a crap that she didn’t come to visit you when you were in the slammer. You still want her. Otherwise, you

wouldn't be protecting her.”

“Okay, you don't know how this works, Brandon. I'm in the MC. That means, she's somewhat in the MC. She's my girl. My property. It's my job to protect my property. It doesn't matter that she hates my guts, or vice versa.”

“Well, who knows? You're seeking a new beginning. She's running from what she thought was a new beginning. This just might be what you're looking for.”

“All I want to do is get my business back up and running like it was before. I have a daughter to think about now.”

“Yes, you do. I'll let you get to it.”

He hangs up. I stuff my phone in my shirt pocket and walk the street. Cars whiz by blaring different varieties of music from Hip Hop to Creole.

Which reminds me...

There's a party going on at the clubhouse in my honor and I'm not even there.

I walk back to my house, hop on my bike and head back over there. I spot Loki outside on the phone – looks like he's handling business. He's the president of the club and rightly so. He has a reputation inside and outside of this establishment. One just doesn't cross Loki and get away with it.

I walk up as he's ending his call. He says, “What the fuck, man? This is your party, and you wasn't even here.”

“My bad, Loki. I had to take care of some business.”

“What kind of business? Anything I can help with?”

I sigh, hesitant to get anyone else involved in my tangled mess.

“This must have something to do with Ivy, eh?” he says.

“How’d you know that?”

He says, “Yeah, I saw her come in earlier with Wraith. You know nothing slips pass me, brother. So, what’s the deal? Do we need to crack some skulls or what? I know y’all ain’t together or nothing, but she still your property, is she not?”

“She is.”

“Then tell me, Hawk—what’s going on?”

“I won’t know the full extent of it until I have another chat with her.”

“Alright. When you find out, let me know. We can discuss it at church. You catch my drift?”

“Got it.”

He lays his hand on my shoulder and says, “You’re a member of this club—means nothing that you don’t have an official rank. You’re a member and everybody here is important to the operation of this fine establishment. Got it?”

“Yeah, Prez. Got it.”

“Good. Now, get back in there, grab one of them Beauties, take her to the back room and drop your pants. After two years locked up, you deserve it.”

I step back inside, still not ready for any of the festivities. I sit at the bar, grab another beer and watch the ladies for a while. After being locked up for years, you'd think that's the first thing I want to do is slide between a pair of thighs, but there's much more pressing matters on my mind – like my daughter.

“Hawk, good to see you, brother. How does it feel to be a free man?” Sheol asks.

He came out of nowhere. I was in such deep thought, I hadn't noticed him. He's the club Chaplin and one of his jobs is to bless the bikes before we head out on a ride. He's a well-respected member of the club and owns a listening bar that plays the best jazz sounds in all of New Orleans.

“It feels good to be out, especially considering I never should've been in there in the first place.”

“Yeah, I know the feeling. Your brother is into some weird stuff, man. I mean, so are we, who am I to judge, but at least we know how to keep it discreet. Know what I mean?”

“Absolutely. I think he needs the discipline of an MC to get that through his head.”

He chuckles. “Prez would never let him join Sin City. He's too reckless.”

“I know. I just don't want him to end up in a street gang or something. He's going to mess around and get himself killed.”

Sheol grabs me by the shoulders and shake me up a bit. “It's good to have you back! You have to stop by Speak Easy one day next week.”

“You got it, brother. I'll make sure and do that.”



The Beauties are really baring it all now, bending and stretching their tight little bodies, performing a show. They have the new members hyped, but us seasoned vets are not all that thrilled. Most of us – not me, but them – have slept with the entertainment. These girls will do anything to get one of these members to make them their property. The new members are excited about having them around, but not necessarily to marry. They're fun. They're carefree and overly sexual. And meanwhile, I sit here at the bar thinking about Ivy and Lilly.

There's something about this lifestyle that rubs me the wrong way sometimes. It's not my brothers – it will never be them. I think it's the drive I have to get my life where it was before I was booked for a crime I didn't commit. I want that back. I want my old life back and it's going to require a level of commitment that'll take me away from this place.

And in addition to wanting my business back, I want Ivy.

Yeah, I said it. I want her, but she doesn't want me.

The only reason she's entertaining me now is for protection. And then there's this man she's running from...

Lion, the club secretary, punches me smack dab in the chest and says, "Long time, no see, fool."

"I know, I know. I'm back."

"For good, I hope. I'm the one that's supposed to be getting locked up. Not you, Hawk."

"Yeah. Wrong place, wrong time. Haven said it was best for me to take the plea deal, so that's what I did."

Haven Richardson is the club lawyer. She's gotten me out of a few jams, but some things you just can't avoid prison time for – like bank robbery .

“I hear ya.”

“I appreciate you seeing to it that my motorcycle was repaired while I was away. She still runs like a beauty, even after I crashed it.”

“You know I got you, brother. You'd do the same for me.”

I nod and cross my arms over my chest. “How have things been going around here?”

“Everything is everything. You know how that goes. Ay, you getting The Garage back up and running?”

“I am.”

“Good. I need you to look at my '69 Camaro before you get locked up again.” He grins, then says, “I'm just yanking your chain, man.”

“Trust me—there ain't going to be no more of that. I'm out for good and I'm not going back. Listen—let me open the garage, figure out where everything is and get it back up and running. I'll let you know when to bring the car by.”

“Will do, brother.”

For the next hour, I keep a seat at the bar warm and watch these girls dance, but as I sit here, it's like I'm seeing right through to them. Through it all. I'm fulfilling a duty – letting my brothers know I appreciate their gesture to welcome me home and show me a good time, but I'd rather be elsewhere.

“Hey, there,” one of the Beauties says walking up to me. She grabs my crotch and says, “I was told to come over here and give you a hard time.”

“Nah, I’m good.”

“Oh, come on,” she says, tugging my arm. “Follow me.”

Holding my hand, she pulls me into the back room then asks, “Now, where were we?” as she loosens my belt.

“Ay,” I say taking her by the wrists. “I’m good.”

She glances at the front of my pants and says, “It doesn’t appear that you’re good, but I can solve all that big boy.”

I say, “Solve somebody else’s problem,” then I leave out the back. It was time. This party’s over.

Heading home, I take the time to appreciate my bike. I even go for a longer ride, enjoying the thick, humid air that used to be a pain in my rear. Now, I’m embracing every part of it because it spells freedom in ways that people who haven’t had two years of their life taken away won’t appreciate. I appreciate the little things now. I hate to say this officially, but prison has indeed changed me.

When I get home, I step inside. It’s dark and quiet. I walk to the bedroom where Ivy and Lilly are crashing. When I open the door, I see Ivy stretched out on the bed wearing the same clothes she had on when I left. Lilly is beside her. They both look like this is the best sleep they’ve had in a very long time. I close the door quietly to let them be, then head down the hallway to my bedroom. I immediately get out of my clothes and step in the shower to wash the day off of me. It feels good to shower in privacy. It’s a luxury that shouldn’t be taken for granted. Which has me

thinking...why do we take so many things for granted, especially people and places we're familiar with? I'm guilty of taking Ivy for granted just like she's guilty of doing that to me. But does that mean we give up trying?

I dry off quickly then fall across the bed in the nude. It's been a day. I have a lot to deal with in the morning, but for now, I need to rest my mind to prepare myself to handle it.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

In the morning, I get dressed in a pair of jeans and black shirt. Ivy and Lilly are still sleeping. I feel like checking their pulse since they've been out for so long, but I can clearly see that they're both breathing.

I go ahead and drive to my mother's place in the Dodge Charger Scat. I'm anticipating seeing her lovely face as much as I know she wants to see me. We haven't always seen eye to eye, but we're in a good place now. I think...

I pull up in the yard and shut off the motor. Stepping up on the porch, I knock on the door and wait for her to answer. She opens the door and places a hand over her heart. My mother is shorter than her children. Even in her fifties, she's a sight to behold. She has her ash blonde hair cut. The last time I saw her, it was longer. She's wearing a white dress – looks like she was about to head out.

"Oh my word," she says, bringing her hands to her trembling lips.

"Hey, there, beautiful lady," I say, "And don't you start that crying nonsense." I pull her into my arms. "How have you been, Mother?"

"I'm good now," she says. "I'm real good. It's so good to see you, Gideon."

"You as well, Ma."

After she releases me, she sits down in one of the rocking chairs on her porch and invites me to take the other.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with your brother. Gage ain’t been nothing but trouble. I keep hoping, wishing and praying that he will get some kind of common sense, but so far, he ain’t got nothing. It always fall back to the company you keep, I reckon. And speaking of...you’re in that bike club nonsense...y’all trying to send me to an early grave, aren’t you?”

“Of course not. And, for the record, Gage was the reason I was locked up. It had nothing to do with the motorcycle club.”

“Yeah, but look at your affiliations, Gideon. I’m not so far removed that I don’t know some of what goes on in that club.”

“What do you think you know?”

“I know there’s some criminal activity.”

I grin and say, “I won’t confirm or deny that.”

“I also know y’all handle things.”

“I won’t confirm or deny that either. Listen—just be happy that I’m home. Are you happy that I’m home?”

“You know I am. Hey, I’m not trying to get all in your business, but do you have any plans to get back with Ivy because I thought you two were so good together. And she really loved you, Gideon.”

“Well, it’s interesting that you brought her up because she’s currently at my house as we speak.”

Her eyes lit up like the high beams on my car. “So, you’re back together?”

“I wouldn’t say that. She’s in trouble and needed a place to stay.”

“Oh, my. What’s happening?”

“Nothing I can’t take care of. I won’t worry you with the details. Oh, and fyi, I have a daughter.”

“What!” she asks, sitting up in her chair.

“I have a daughter. Apparently, Ivy was pregnant when I got locked up. She— we—have a little girl. Her name is Lilly.”

“And you’re sure she’s yours?”

“You sound like Brandon.”

“It’s a valid question. I mean, you were gone for two years. How old is this so-called daughter?”

“She’s a year and three months—I think that’s what Ivy said.”

“Ah, so nine months pregnant, plus a year and three...that’s about right. Oh my God! I have a grandbaby!”

“You do. I’ll bring her by here soon, but first I need to make sure they stay protected.”

“Tell me what’s going on, Gideon?”

I sigh and respond, “She was with someone after I got locked up and now she’s on the run from the guy.”

She places a hand on her heart and then says, “You can bring them over here.”

“No. I don’t want to put you in any danger, Ma.”

“Son, as long as I got that rifle under my bed, I’m not in any danger.”

I grin, though I know she’s serious. She’s a good shot, too. She used to take us to the range when we were teenagers. That’s how I got the nickname ‘Hawk’. I never miss.

“Well, you make sure you protect her, and my granddaughter. When are you bringing her by here?”

“Soon, Ma. Be patient.”

She sighs. “Okay. I guess I’ll just have to wait. It’s so good to see you.”

“You, too Ma.” I get up, walk over and kiss her on the temple. “I have to run, but I’ll be back in a few days.”

“I’ll be here waitin’ for ya...and my grandbaby.”

I jump on the bike and head back home. When I get there, I immediately notice that Ivy’s car is missing. I run into the house to confirm that she’s gone and she is. She and Lilly are nowhere to be found. She’s left clothes and baby items in the room, so I take it she’s coming back, but my specific instructions to her were to never leave the house. If this dude is really stalking her, every time she’s out in public, she’s a target.

Now, I’m pissed.

I have no way of knowing where she is. I can’t call her. I have a new cell phone with no contacts programmed, so I don’t know her number and have no way of contacting



her.

I kick the wall and hold my head out of frustration. Ivy has always been strong-willed and stubborn which is why I couldn't understand why she ran to me for help with this in the first place. Yet, when I ask her to stay put, she won't even listen. What gives?

I can't do a thing but wait for her to return, so to pass the time, I step out into the garage and try to organize my tools. I rip a paper bag and scribble the items I need to buy to get my shop back up and running. I need oil, steering fluids, antifreeze, drain pans, gloves, shop towels, and a new rubber mat. My tools are all intact.

I stand here and slide my hands into the pocket of my jeans as I envision opening a legit garage and not operating out of my home garage where my car is supposed to be parked. I was well on my way and—

I digress...

At any rate, I'm eager to get my shop up and running again. It will surely put me back in a place of peace, but so will getting my girl back.

Yeah, I still love her. I can't help but love her. How can I hate the woman who gave birth to my child?

I sigh again. "Ivy, where are you?"

I look up when I hear a car pulling into the driveway.

It's her.

I immediately walk to the car. She's taking Lilly out the back. I take deep breaths to temper my frustration right now because Lilly is around. I don't want her to develop

that sort of impression of me. Ever. My father was hard on me and my brothers like that. I want to treat my children better.

I tell Ivy, “Come back outside after you take her in the house.”

“Okay.”

I stand by the car and wait, noticing bags in the back seat. She quickly returns back outside and when she gets near the car, I snap.

“What the heck were you thinking!”

“What are you upset about?” she asks.

“What am I upset about? I told you not to step a foot out of this house!”

“There was no food in there, Gideon, and when I woke up, you were gone. What exactly did you expect me to do? I have no way to contact you. Jeez, I—” After a brief pause, she says, “It’s not like I don’t have enough to deal with. I just ran out for food. I’m sorry.”

I turn away from her, open the back door to get the bags and carry them all inside. I must be a changed man because I’m not one for pointless arguments at this stage in my life. I simply want to be left alone.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Ivy

I was trying my hardest to keep a level head. I realize the vulnerable position I'm in. I'm at his mercy. He doesn't have to take me in. He can leave me in the lurch just like I left him in prison, but he chose to help me. I'm sure that's largely because of Lilly.

Gideon places the bags on the kitchen counter. The place looks the same as it did two years ago – same dishes, same furniture – same everything. But it doesn't feel the same. The love that once permeated this place is gone. It's not warm and definitely not inviting. It doesn't feel like a cozy home. It feels tense. Yet, it still feels like a refuge from the storm that is currently my life. I suppose I should be grateful for that.

I haven't cooked in weeks. I'm actually looking forward to it, but Gideon is glaring at me like I'm doing something wrong. He's pissed that I left for groceries, but what else was I supposed to do? Me and babygirl needed sustenance.

I rinse out Lilly's sippy cup and pour in some apple juice. She walks to the living room and struggles to climb up on the sofa with those little legs of hers, but eventually, she pulls herself up. I go ahead and find cartoons to keep her occupied, then return to the kitchen and unpack groceries.

Gideon is still standing near the table with his arms crossed. This is an old school house – there's no island in this kitchen – only counters and a four-chair dinette – so there's really nothing to separate us.

I look at him and ask, "Is it okay if I cook breakfast? I haven't had a decent meal in some time."

“Neither have I.”

I grin.

He doesn’t.

I guess his answer was a confirmation that it was okay, so I find two pans – one for eggs, and the other for smoked sausage. I’m just now noticing there’s no toaster. I know there used to be one, but not sure what happened to it. Anyway, plain bread will have to do.

I whip the eggs in a bowl and scramble them to a perfect consistency. After I put the sausage in the skillet, Gideon finally breaks his silence by saying, “I’ll make sure you have my new number.”

“Okay.”

He whips out a chair at the table, sits and crosses his legs.

Crap! Now, I’m going to have to talk to him. And it’s not really the talking part that I’m worried about. It’s the looking him in the face while taking ownership of the fact that he’s not treating me the same way I treated him. I straight-up abandoned him. I had my reasons, but still, I left him when he needed me the most. Now, he’s rescuing me .

I fix him a plate and place it on the table in front of him. I say, “There’s not a toaster, so it’s just plain bread.”

“I don’t care anything about that. Bread is bread. Anything is better than what I had in the slammer.”

I take my plate and sit on the opposite side of the small table, opting for the adjacent seat instead of the one directly in front of him.

He starts eating. I glance up intermittently to watch him, but the last time I thought I'd sneak a glance, his eyes were beaming directly at me.

Busted!

"If you want to say something, just say it," he tells me.

"I—I wasn't going to say anything."

"Then why were you staring at me?"

"Sorry," I tell him. "It was a mistake."

"A mistake..." he tsks. "Then, I'll say something since I didn't get the opportunity to say it to you—you know, after you hung up on me."

"Gideon—"

"How about you let me talk now? Can you at least give me that much?"

Veins bulge at his temple as his chest moves in and out rapidly.

"Okay. Fine," I reply, because what else was I going to say?

He says, "I know you hate the MC, but they weren't the reason I went to prison. It was my brother."

"I know. I heard the story."

“From who?”

“From the streets. Everybody was talking about it.” I take a sip of coffee and say, “I just don’t understand why you would do something like that.”

“Because it was my brother. I was trying to watch his six.”

“I realize that, but you made a deal with me that you’d live the lifestyle you live and not get caught. I was planning for our future. You were living for the present.”

He clenches his jaw and asks, “And how’s planning for the future working out for you when you’re running from a man you thought was going to provide you with that? I am who I am, Ivy, but I never laid a hand on you!”

“You’re right,” I say. I have no defense. I sit here and eat, forcing this food down. I’m hungry and nervous all at the same time. The food doesn’t even taste good anymore.

“But, you know what? That’s neither here nor there, is it?” he fires.

He gets up from the table and tosses his ceramic plate into the sink so hard, it breaks. I instantly jump in my chair from the flashbacks of coming from an abusive situation. I’m still on edge for that. Apparently, I have two men angry with me now.

“The only reason you’re here—in my house—is because of Lilly. I don’t trust you and never will trust you to be the kind of woman to have my back even when I’ve done nothing but have yours!”

Tears fall from my eyes when he exits out the back door and slams that, too. I scramble to dry my eyes when I hear Lilly singing her ‘ma-ma’ song as she enters the kitchen.

This is downright awful. I don't even recognize who I am anymore. I was never this weak, crying woman, running scared from a man. I was strong. Powerful. I could do anything. Now, I don't even recognize myself.

I pick up Lilly and feed her a little apple sauce. After I mince up a piece of sausage, I feed her some of it as well. Going forward, I'll lay low, keep quiet and stay out of Gideon's way. I don't want to be out on the streets again, and I definitely don't want Gideon trying to take my daughter away from me while I'm in this state of transition.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

I had to get out of there.

I'm sitting at the bar at Speak Easy, listening to jazz that sounds more like the blues at this point. Perhaps I should've gone to the clubhouse where I could get all of this off of my mind, pull a Beauty in the backroom and relieve some pressure. That sounds good right about now.

Sheol slams his fist into my shoulder and says, "You made it."

"I told you I would."

"What you drinking?"

"Jack. Straight."

He summons the bartender to order one for me, then joins me at the bar. He says, "When I saw you the other night, you looked like you had a lot on your mind."

"You could tell, hunh?"

"Yep. It's all over your face."

"I've been going through it with my ol' lady."

The bartender sets the glass in front of me and I take a long sip and say, "Ah...that's



what I needed,” feeling the alcohol burn down my esophagus, hoping it solves all of my problems, but I know that’s impossible.

“Anything you care to talk about?”

“How about I give you some advice, Sheol?”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t get married.”

He chuckles. “Okay. Spill. What’s going on?”

“Ivy came to see me a few days ago, and she has my kid, man.”

“You have a kid?”

“Yes. A daughter. I didn’t know she existed until Ivy brought her to the clubhouse. And I haven’t even been fatherly to my own child. What kind of man does that?”

“One who didn’t know he had a kid in the first place.”

“But I know now, and I want to be a part of her life. I just don’t know how being that her mother and I are not on good terms.”

“Why not?”

“When I was locked up, she didn’t want anything to do with me.”

“But she does now?”

“Yes, only because she’s running from someone.”

“From who?”

“The guy she was messing around with when I was away. She broke things off with me when she learned I was arrested, so I guess she had a right to move on, but this guy is abusive. She’s literally on the run from him.”

“Hold up, Hawk. I know you’re not letting some punk threaten your wife and your child.”

“Ivy is only my wife by name. We’re not together. I’m not the man she wants a future with. I know that much. I knew that the day I tried to call her and she told me she was done. She washed her hands clean of me and thought she had landed someone better. Now she’s scared to death of him.”

“I understand all that, but think about your reputation. How will it look if you don’t handle your business? Like it or not, Ivy is still your property.”

I hang my head and massage the back of my neck. I know he’s right, but the anger I feel is holding me back from doing what I need to do. I need to protect her, which is what I think I’m doing. I also need to build a relationship with my daughter. I’m not doing too well with that, but I need to start now.

I drive home, go inside and immediately spot my little girl in the living room. Ivy is sitting on the sofa. I scoop up Lilly and turn to head outside.

“Wait—where are you going with her?” Ivy asks like I’m going to kidnap her or something.

“What are you doing, Gideon?” she asks, chasing me out the front door.

“I’m spending some quality time with my daughter.”

“But—”

“But what? Look at her. Does she look bothered?”

Ivy pauses and takes a moment to look at Lilly. We both do. My happy little girl has a smile on her face as she stares down at me almost as if she can sense our relation. She knows she’s mine, or at the very least that I’m safe to be with despite my many tattoos and rugged appearance.

“She’s fine with me,” I say. “You trusted me enough to bring her here, didn’t you?”

“I did, but—”

“Then trust that I will never do anything to harm her.”

“Okay. Fine,” she says but she doesn’t go back inside. She sits on the steps while I tote Lilly to the driveway. I show her my motorcycle. She clamors to get down and when she does, she touches the wheel and other areas that she can reach.

“That’s a motorcycle, babygirl.”

“Vroom, vroom,” she says, looking at me and smiling with those chubby cheeks.

“Would you look at that?” I say out loud. “She must takes after her old man. I never could get you to touch one of these.”

“That’s because they’re dangerous.”

“Only if the rider is untrained, Ivy. For me, riding is freedom. You’ll never feel freer

and more empowered until you hop on one of these babies. I can't wait to teach Lilly how to ride."

I say that just to ruffle Ivy's feathers. Something I've noticed about her since she's been here is, she's not the bold, outspoken woman she used to be. Abuse has stolen her voice and it shows, even if she doesn't recognize it. I need to tread lightly with her – help her get it back. She's stronger than this. Lilly needs the strong version. After talking with Sheol earlier, I know for a fact that I still have feelings for her.

"Alright, babygirl...time to go back inside before your mom has a stroke over there."

"Whatever," she says and rolls her eyes.

I smile inwardly. Yeah, that's right. Bring some of that sass back. That's the Ivy I know.

She takes Lilly from my grasp and goes back inside.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

A Week Later

It's a pain getting this alternator off of this car – I've been at it for the better part of an hour, but when you're dealing with vintage, you have to be extra careful with stripped screws and rust. Lion is counting on me to take care of his baby, and this is the only car I'm working on so far this week. I'm in no hurry.

Still, it irks me.

I roll out from beneath the car, wipe my greasy hands and when I look up, I'm met with a pair of big, beautiful brown eyes.

It's my Lilly.

She has on a pink shirt, jeans, and she's wearing a pair of white sneakers. There's a huge pink bow on her head, securing a ponytail.

"Da-dee," she says.

I smile. "Hey, babygirl. Where's your mom?"

"Right here," Ivy says.

I look up to see her sitting on the steps, fanning her hand in a single wave. She looks good today – looks more relaxed after spending the last week here with me. She has

on a yellow dress. Her hair is hanging in gorgeous curls that makes my hands tremble as I think about all the times I've had it balled up in my fist. Babygirl breaks my trance with her mother when she tugs on the pant leg of my dirty jeans and darts her arms straight up in the air for me to pick her up. My hands are so oily and greasy, I can't pick her up. I'd, for sure, ruin her clothes.

I say, "Daddy can't pick you up right now, babygirl. My hands are all dirty. See." I open my hands for good measure and say, "See...dirty."

She starts whimpering and whining, insisting that I pick her up. She must get that from her mother – the insistence that is. Having her way and all.

I grab a shop cloth and wipe my hands as best as I can and then secure her in my arms. Tears are still in her eyes, but she's smiling now instead of frowning. I walk over to Ivy and say, "I think I've created a monster."

She smiles.

I smile back. We've been getting along better this week – better than I could have anticipated. She's cooked those meals that I love and we haven't been arguing – that's a good sign. What's not so good is the way my body has been aching for her. I keep telling myself that she's here for protection – not to rekindle anything we once shared. Besides, it's been well established that my lifestyle doesn't suit her. Why try to bring her into my world again? It'll surely lead to disappointment.

"She's definitely forming an attachment to you."

"That's a good thing. I'm going to be around for a looong time. Ain't that right, Lilly?"

She giggles, then grabs strands of my hair in her little hand.

The sound of a car backfiring around the corner makes Ivy jump. She looked genuinely scared like she was having flashbacks. When she looks at me, I see embarrassment on her face. I make a note to talk to her about that later since we haven't discussed anything pertaining to the things she's endured with that guy. I was trying to stay away from it, but I see now it needs to be dissected. I still have Cash on my radar, but for now, I'm more concerned about Ivy and what she and my daughter had to endure with this man.

"I cooked dinner if you're hungry," she says.

"You know I've never been one to turn down a meal. I'll come in and wash up real quick."

"Okay."

I carry Lilly inside, then lower her to her feet. The aroma of the food hits me in the face. I love well-seasoned food and Ivy has been providing that to me all week. I fought like heck not to get addicted to her cooking again since she's only here temporarily. But those homecooked meals bring back memories of happier times. Of when I'd hike up her skirt and take her up against the refrigerator until all the cereal boxes fell. We shared a hungry passion for each other. There isn't a room in this house that we haven't blessed with our love.

But that was then.

After a quick shower and change of clothes, I walk to the kitchen. Ivy has made a seafood boil with shrimp, crab legs and all the goodness that comes in a good Louisiana boil. Man, I miss this food and no one does it better than her. Not even the best restaurants around here can make a boil like Ivy.

She mashes up some potatoes for Lilly and holds her while she eats.

I say, “This is delicious, Ivy.”

“Thanks. I remember it was your favorite.”

“Yes, it is,” I say licking my fingers. “You’ve been spoiling me this week. You have to stop.”

“Why?”

“Ain’t no need to cook for a man like this when you have no desire to stick around.”

“How do you know what I desire, Gideon?” she asks.

We lock eyes for a moment and she blinks her way out of it and says, “I appreciate the compliment. Thank you.”

I eat a piece of corn on the cob and crack a crab leg. The way it melts on my tongue has me ready to marry Ivy all over again.

Speaking of marriage, we’re still husband and wife. She never served me with divorce papers. Maybe amid all the issues going on with her, she hasn’t found the time.

“Looks like babygirl has eaten herself into a coma.”

She looks over at Lilly and says, “Yeah, she was playing pretty hard today. I knew she would pass out after dinner.”

“She sleeps like you—get tired and boom, just pass out right where you are like nothing else matters.”



She giggles. “Like that time we were on Bourbon Street and you got me to try that hand grenade.”

“Oh, that’ll knock you off your feet even if you ain’t tired.”

She chuckles. “Right. They’re good, though.”

“Yeah, they are.” I grab a large shrimp this time, dip it in the sauce and toss it in my mouth. “We had some good times, didn’t we?”

“We did,” she agrees. I can see in her expression that she’s reminiscing on those good times.

She snaps out of it and says, “I’mma go lay her down.”

“Yep,” I say and continue eating while watching her walk out of the kitchen with Lilly in her arms. Ivy’s done eating, so I don’t think she’ll be back since she’s not all that comfortable around me anymore, but to my surprise, she does return. She goes to the counter and takes the lid off of a cake saver. I wasn’t aware she made dessert, too.

“Do you want a slice?”

“Now, what kind of question is that? You already know the answer.”

“I’m just making sure.”

She proceeds to cut two slices. She puts them on small plates and returns to the table. It’s double chocolate fudge cake, my favorite. I wonder if it’s a coincidence that she’s made my favorite or if it was intentional.

I say, “I was trying to protect him. Gage, that is. That’s why I got caught.”

“You don’t have to talk about that if you don’t want to, Gideon.”

“It’s fine. I feel like I need to state my peace. You didn’t give me the option to do that before, so I want to take advantage now that we’re somewhat on good terms.”

She nods, eats cake and licks the fork. The motion of her tongue has me thinking of all the other things she’s done to me with it. I miss that tongue. I used to eat that tongue like a delicacy. We used to be good for each other.

“Gideon?”

“What?”

“Did you hear me?”

“Uh...”

No, I didn’t hear her. I was too busy staring at her mouth.

She says, “I said, if I could go back and do things over again, I would’ve listened to you. I was just so angry. I let it get the best of me when I should’ve listened to what you had to say.”

“I appreciate you for saying that.” I eat more cake and then say, “Gage said he and his guys had a plan. It went sour. His boys left him in the dust, and I was trailing Gage when we left the bank. I told him to turn off while the cops followed me. I thought I was home free until I hit something in the road. The bike flew. I thought I was dead.”

I take a sip of water and continue, “I got the boys at the motorcycle club to repair it for me...was good as new when I came home.”

She nods.

“I used to dream about you when I was in there. Most days, that’s how I made it through.”

“Now, you’re making me feel guilty.”

“It’s the truth. I thought about you a lot—even when I was mad at you. I still am. Mad , that is.”

She stands up and collects our plates, toting them over to the sink. I stand up and follow her there. She’s running water in the sink and squeezing dish liquid to wash the dishes when I walk up behind her. With my body pressed flush against hers, I reach to turn it off. Then I trail my nose along the side of her face, to her ears, delighting in her scent – a scent I miss more than I pretended not to.

She gasps. “Gideon.”

I undo the zipper of my jeans, hike up her dress and rip off her panties before spreading her legs wider. Then I find my way home – in the heat, the glory, the dampness between these thick thighs.

“Ah...this is what I’ve been missing.”

It’s what I wanted since I gained my freedom. Screw those women at the club. This is the real deal. I ain’t never had nothing like it, and don’t want nothing other than it. Can’t no woman compare to Ivy.

And that’s probably the case, too, because I love her.

Even after everything, I know that. She just doesn’t know if she wants me. I suppose

it's my job to convince her.

I hold her waist tight and thrust into her over and over again, pulling my length all the way out and going back in to feel the heat of her walls. I grunt and make all kinds of noises while swimming in her ocean.

She moans. "Gideon, oh...stop, stop, stop," she says desperately, gripping onto the counter.

"What's wrong?"

"We're going to wake Lilly."

"She's sleeping. If you're quiet, you won't have to worry about waking her."

"How am I supposed to—? Oh! How can I be quiet with you—oh!"

Her voice trails off. I don't let up. I keep massaging those insides before pushing her further down so she's bent at ninety degrees. I squeeze her waist and pull out slowly and enter her again.

Slowly.

"Oooh," she says druggingly. "Mmm..."

The noise she makes urges me to go faster, so that's what I do. I enter her, going at whiplash speed, feeling my release build and build and I'm not fighting it, but I do want her to come with me.

I play that sensitive bud between her legs like a guitar until her body shudders.

“Gideon!” she cries out, coming undone as her muscles squeeze and release me over and over again.

Her legs shake like I’m electrocuting her. I have to get a tighter grip on her and when I do, I let loose. I don’t think I’ve ever come so hard and so fast, but there I was, emptying every drop into her while howling to the freakin’ roof.

I slapped her on the butt – hit that thang hard when she moaned and whimpered. She wasn’t thinking about Lilly or anything else when that orgasm hit and neither was I. It was pure need that I took her this way. And it would be pure lust that’ll have me hitting it again tonight.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Ivy

After a quick shower, I go to the bedroom where my princess is sleeping. Lilly's still sleeping soundly and that pleases me greatly that she's able to sleep in peace. I apply lotion to my legs and secure my hair into a ponytail. I was just about to pull back the covers when Gideon opens the door, shirtless, showing off his ample abs and tattoos.

He says, "Make sure Lilly is secure in here. You're sleeping with me tonight."

I don't offer a rebuttal – didn't have time to, not that I would have. I just check Lilly's sleeping position and then leave the room quietly. I slowly walk toward Gideon's bedroom – the room that used to be our bedroom – and step inside. I hear the shower going in the bathroom. I reluctantly sit on the bed, remembering all those nights we spent making love in this bed – making this house a home. I wonder if we could ever get back to that place, or if he even wants to. After what I did to betray him, I think not.

He just wants me.

He comes walking out of the bathroom naked, his slender yet muscular body dripping with desire. He didn't even take the time to dry off completely before coming out, his manhood pointed due north while his eyes stayed glued to me.

"You may as well take that lil' gown on off, sweetheart, before I tear it to shreds."

Yeah, like I said...he just wants me.

I stand up, pull the gown over my head and he mutters as his eyes land on my breasts.

“Get on the bed,” he tells me.

I obey his command and lie down. He crawls over me and leaves a kiss on my lips. He traces my lips with his tongue and takes a dip into my mouth with it, consuming my moans while savoring my tongue. I feel it whipping my throat as he goes all in. His body is cool since he just got out of the shower, and that’s a good thing because I’m hot and writhing. He just took me in the kitchen after dinner, but I’m aching for more. I miss him. I need more.

He travels to my neck, grazing his teeth there as he sucks on my skin, causing my body to tremble. He then lowers to my breasts. I feel his hot mouth on my nipple, sucking and flicking his tongue before pulling them, teasing with his teeth and opening his mouth wide, trying to consume them.

“Gideon,” I utter, feeling all kinds of sensations run through me.

He’s relentless as he devours me, sending me into another realm of pleasure I haven’t felt in so long. My body sings his glory. I’m in awe with what he’s able to accomplish – with what he makes me feel.

He drags his tongue across my stomach and settles between my legs. Pleasure rips through me as he holds me steady, twirling, devouring me until I scream his name and cry out for mercy. I need air – need to breathe and I cannot do that with the assault that this man has on me. All I can do is take it. I try to grab his hair, but he’s relentless as he tortures me. He moans and moans some more before finally stopping. He crawls back up to me, settles between my thighs and in one smooth thrust, he’s buried deep inside of me. We’re so connected – he’s so deep, we’ve become one in every sense of the expression. And then he tunnels his tongue into my mouth, kissing me with deep strokes while stroking me below, rocking the bed with every upward

slam into me.

The feeling is immeasurable. I miss him so much and just when I think about saying that out loud, he pulls his mouth away from mine and whispers in my ear, “You’re so damn addictive, girl. You know that? What did I ever do without this? Mmm...”

“Gideon,” I whisper when I feel the pressure building inside of me same as before in the kitchen. It’s potent. It’s strong. It threatens to tear me apart if I don’t release it.

He says, “Don’t hold back, sweetheart. Let it all out for me.”

He’s steadily pumping into me like his life depends on it. I claw at his back, gripping him tight while he burrows deep into me with his girthy rod, rearranging my walls and groaning when he goes deeper.

My muscles grip him, squeeze him when the first waves crash through me, causing my back to arch off the bed.

“Oh, baby, that’s it. Oh...”

More strokes and I’m screaming his name to the ceiling as my body convulses. It doesn’t belong to me any longer. It’s his. It has always been his.

“Ivy, oh...” he groans softly.

I love to hear his soft groans. It turns me on so much, I feel my body releasing yet again, along with his.

He collapses on top of me and stays there for a while, just panting. We both rest this way, catching our breaths after catching up on lovemaking – if that’s what you call this. After all, we are still married – I’m just not sure that the love is still there –



especially on his end of things.

He rolls off of me. He doesn't get up, run to the bathroom or anything. He just lies here, staring up at the ceiling for a while, then repositions on his side so that he's looking directly at me.

He says, "Ivy."

"Yes," I answer but I'm too ashamed to look at him.

He whistles and says, "Over here."

I look at him, fighting back tears. I'm an emotional mess, thinking about how we used to be to what we are now.

He says, "If I could go back and do it all over again, I would've spent more time trying to convince Gage not to do something so incredibly stupid."

"Well, you can't change the past, Gideon. All you can do is keep moving forward."

He sits up, wraps his hand around my neck, takes a hard kiss from my lips, and says, "Yeah. You're right."

He gets up off the bed and walks to the bathroom while I lie here filled with emotions. I don't know what's happening between us. I just hope we're on good enough terms to be parents for our sweet Lilly.

Gideon

A noise jars me up in the middle of the night. I'm probably just hearing things. Or maybe it's Ivy. She's not in bed with me. After those backshots I gave her, she must've gone back to sleep in the room where Lilly is.

I glance at the clock. It's almost 3:00 a.m. I was just about to roll over and catch more shuteye when I hear more noise. This time, it sounds like glass shattering and I know for a fact my mind isn't playing tricks on me.

I ease up, grab my gun from the bottom drawer of my nightstand and walk quietly down the hallway. I open the door to Ivy and Lilly's room. They're both lying there, sleeping soundly, so neither of them is the source of the noise. I had to rule that out first.

I head to the kitchen and see a shadow standing at the back door. The glass is busted out and it appears they're trying to unlock the door from the inside.

Without warning I fire off a shot and the guy scrambles to get away. I wanted to chase him, but I didn't want to leave Ivy and Lilly at the house unattended just in case there were more of them – whoever they are.

I go back to the room and shake Ivy awake.

"Hmm," she says, groggy and sleep-ridden.

"Ivy, get up! Come on. I have to get you and Lilly out of here."

“What? What’s...” she rubs her tired eyes asking, “What’s going on, Gideon?”

“Somebody tried to break into the house.”

The terrified look on her face troubles me, but I don’t have time to console her right now. I have to get my family to safety.

She gets up, dresses quickly, and straps Lilly in the car seat sitting by the bed.

“Come on. Get your things. We gotta go!” I say, encouraging her to move faster.

I take the car seat with Lilly, thankful that she’s so tired, she hasn’t woken up to any of this. I’m amazed they’d both slept through the glass shatter and the shot I fired off. I wanted to empty the clip, but for sure that would’ve woke them up. They’ve been through too much already to be having flashbacks.

Once we’re all in the Scat, I floor it to the clubhouse. Someone is usually always there, and I’m counting on that for the safety of my girls.

“It’s him. I know it is, but how did he find me?” Ivy asks.

“I’m not sure, but now, it’s my turn to find him.”

I pull up in front of the clubhouse, park, and say, “Get Lilly. I’m going to see if Prez is around.”

I go inside and find Loki at the bar slumped over. The man knows how to handle his liquor, so I know he isn’t drunk. He’s just there, probably devising plans for the operation of this joint and the whole club. The weight of it all is on his shoulders, but today, this early in the morning, we have more pressing matters.

I say, “Prez...”

“Hawk, what are you doing here so early? Heard you were shacking up with your ol’ lady. Y’all working it out, huh?”

“Something like that. Ay, listen, man. I got a problem. I can handle it on my own, but—”

“Now, you know that ain’t how we roll around here,” he says, cutting me off. “What seems to be the issue?”

“Somebody tried to break into my place a lil’ while ago. I think it’s the man Ivy is running from. I shot at him, but didn’t pursue...had to make sure Ivy and Lilly were fine.”

“You get a look at him?”

“It was dark, he had on all black.”

“Nuff said. I’m calling church.”

“I can handle it on my own, Loki. I don’t want to cause any undue stress on my brothers.”

“I know you can handle it on your own, but that’s what the brotherhood is for. You just got out of the slammer. No sense in going back in so early, now is there?”

Ivy walks in with Lilly.

Loki looks at me, pulls out a credit card, and says, “Get them a hotel for a few nights. Then you come back here. We’re going to get this handled, brother.”

I take the card and instruct Ivy to follow me back to the car. I drive to a hotel down the street, making sure no one is following us. Once I get them all checked in, I say, “Don’t leave this room for anything. Do you understand me?”

“Yes. I got it.”

“I’ll be back for you.”

“Gideon, please stay out of trouble,” she says pleadingly. She looks scared like she’s going to lose me again.

I tell her, “I promise I won’t get caught this time, but this guy crossed the line. He has to pay for his sins. We all do, at some point. Right, sweetheart?”

“Just be safe, okay?”

“I’ll do my best.”

I head back to my house to leave the car and get my motorcycle, then cruise back to the clubhouse. I couldn’t have been gone a half hour and everybody’s here. Loki is sitting at the head of the table. I glance around at everyone else. Dragon looks like he hadn’t had any sleep. Wraith is always ready to ride. He looks alert and down for whatever’s about to happen. He always is. Bishop is also alert, sipping on a beer at almost four-something in the morning. Lion is playing with a butterfly knife and Sheol is calm, looking over at me like he can’t wait for Prez to let them all know what’s happening.

In a way, I’m amazed he called this meeting. I’m no officer – just a member – but I guess in his eyes, the club is the club, and if you’re a member, you’re a member.

“What’s pressing this early in the morning?” Bishop asks. “We haven’t had church in

a month.”

Loki says, “Well, some stuff went down tonight with Hawk, and we need to take care of business. Hawk, you want to fill in the blanks.”

“Sure. So, after getting out of the joint, I learned that my ol’ lady was being abused by some guy named Cash. I moved her and her daughter—well, our daughter—in with me for a while just to keep them safe. They’ve been with me for almost two weeks now and somehow, this man must’ve found out where she was because someone bashed in my back door earlier this morning. I fired a shot and he ran. I got Ivy and Lilly out of the house as fast as I could. They’re at a hotel now.”

“With no protection?” Wraith asks.

“I made sure we weren’t being followed. I had to take them somewhere.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Wraith says. “Somebody should be with them, just in case.”

“I agree,” Loki says. “Sheol, when the meeting is over, I want you to head over there. If anyone looks like a suspect—”

Sheol flashes an evil grin. “Yeah, I know what to do.”

“Hawk, do you have any idea who this man is?” Lion asks.

“All I know is what Ivy told me. She said his name was Cash Brooke.”

“I know that name,” Wraith says, but he looks like he can’t pinpoint where he’s heard it before.

“Did you get a good look at him?” Bishop asks.

“No. Like I told Loki, it was dark. Maybe he had on a ski mask, but I’m not sure. He was tall, I remember with a slim build.”

“I don’t care what he looks like,” Dragon says. “It sounds to me like LeBlanc Gator Tours needs to take him for a ride.”

“That’s what I’m talking about,” Lion says, then fist bumps with Dragon.

“Hawk, what’s your ol’ lady’s relation to this man?” Bishop asks.

“They were together while I was locked up. She broke it off with me, started seeing him a few months after Lilly was born and—”

“I got it! I know that rat bastard! He was one of the idiots who robbed that bank with your brother.”

Blood rushes to my head and all I see is red. That’s his connection? He was one of them? And my brother Gage is stupid enough to tell him where Ivy was staying? It had to be Gage who’s been feeding him information, and if it was, he’d feel my wrath later. For now, I have to make sure to handle this pressing business.

“What are we going to do to this fool?” Dragon asks.

“I’ll figure that out when I get there,” I say.

“Where is there ?” Bishop asks.

I say, “We’ll swing by Gage’s place, rough him up a bit and he’ll tell me where to find his idiot friend.”

“Okay, then let’s ride,” Loki says.

We grab our helmets and follow in succession as Loki leads the formation. I had already given him the address to Gage's run-down duplex and now, we're pulling up. I told the boys I'll handle it because they're liable to kill him on the spot. I mean, so am I – you just don't mess with a man's family – but at least I'll give him grace along with the black eye he's got coming.

I jump off my Harley, ready for redemption when I walk toward the door. Gage opens the door before I can kick it open and he catches my right fist to his right eye.

He winces. "Hey, what the hell, man?" he asks, covering his eye that will be bruised by morning.

I punch him again. This time he falls backward into the living room, if you can call it a living room in this dump. The place looks and smells like something on Hoarders – exactly how I imagined he was living.

He spits blood and looks at me like he's befuddled. He probably is. I've always had my brother's back, even when he didn't have mine, but he crossed the line when he messed with my family.

"Whoa, man! What are you doing?"

"Cash Brooke—you know that prick, so don't play dumb. That's one of your bank robbery buddies, isn't it?"

He wipes blood from his mouth.

"Isn't it!"

He winces some more like the punk that he is, touching his mouth and looking at the blood on his hand.



I say, “You better start talking, Gage, or I swear I’m going to knock every tooth out of your mouth.”

“Okay, okay! Yeah, I know him!”

“Did you know he was with Ivy while I was locked up?”

“I mean, I saw them together a few times.”

“You’re a friggin’ liar!”

“I’m not lying, Gideon. I swear!”

“Imma ask you a question and if you lie to me, I’m going to unleash the gates of hell on you. Did you tell him where I lived?”

“Ye-yeah. He said he had something to give Ivy.”

“And how did you know Ivy was at my place?”

“Brandon told me.”

I grind my teeth and punch him in the gut. “You crossed the line, Gage. I’ve always had your back and you pull this on me, but this is it. I’m done. You hear me? Done! If you ever step foot on my property, you’re going to catch heat. Think I’m playing? Try me. Now, tell me where this fool is?”

“I don’t know. He’s in and out. I let him crash here for a few days last week, but I haven’t seen him since then.”

“Come on, fellas,” I say. “I’m going to search every corner of this city until I find

him!”

“Ay, here’s a thought,” Loki says. “You got the name ‘Hawk’ because you don’t miss. Did you check the yard to see if you hit that fool?”

“No, I didn’t. I was too busy trying to get my wife and kid to safety.”

“I say we roll back to your place and check the yard,” Loki suggests.

“Good idea,” I tell him. “Let’s roll.”

In the cover of darkness, we roll through the muggy streets heading back to my place. When we arrive, everyone draws their weapon of choice and we converge on the place like a trained SWAT Team.

Loki says, “Bishop and Wraith—we’ll take the back. Hawk, take Lion and Dragon with you.”

“Ten-four,” I reply. “With my gun drawn, I walk in the front door, clearing room after room.

Lion says, “I doubt if he came back here.”

“You never know,” Dragon says. “I’m hoping he did. It’s been a while since I last stabbed somebody.”

They chuckle.

“Ay, out here,” I hear Loki say from the backyard. We run in that direction, stepping over broken glass to get out back. When we get back there, Loki has a flashlight pointed toward the ground. A man in all black, wearing a ski mask is lying face down

on the earth.

“Is he dead?” Lion kicks him.

“Looks that way,” Dragon responds.

“I knew it,” Loki says. “Don’t know why you doubted yourself, Hawk. You got him with one shot. Impressive.”

Now, I start freaking out because I just got out of jail. It’s not a good feeling to think I’m going back there, leaving Ivy and Lilly behind.

I say, “Man, I got a kid. I can’t go down for this.”

“Why would you?” Wraith asks. “The prick had it coming. He tried to break into your house.”

“The law won’t see it that way.”

“Screw the law!” Loki exclaims. “We make our own laws. He did the crime and now, he’s paid for it. And don’t you worry about going back in. That’s not going to happen.”

“Yeah,” Dragon says. “The gators will be well-fed tonight. Woo!”

“Ain’t none of this coming back to you,” Loki says.

“All you have to do is keep your idiot brother in check,” Bishop advises.

“That won’t be a problem.”

“Good,” Loki says. “Now, bring a rug or something so we can get this garbage off your property.”

I go into the house, pull up the rug in the living room and bring it out to them. They spread it on the ground, move Cash’s body on it and roll it up. While they do that, I run to the garage to get a roll of duct tape and run back, helping them secure the rug and its filthy contents. Afterward, they pick up the rug and carry it to my car. I pop the trunk, they throw the rug inside and the package is ready for transport.

I follow Dragon to LeBlanc Gator Tours where we transfer the dead woman-abuser onto the boat.

Dragon says, “I got it from here. Go take care of your family.”

Loki pats me on the shoulder and says, “Good work, Hawk.”

“Yeah. Thanks,” I say, not feeling particularly good about this. I am grateful that Ivy and Lilly no longer have to live in fear, but it shouldn’t have taken this for it to happen. When I got out of prison, I wanted to keep my hands clean of this stuff, but, then again, had the man not tried to break into my house, he’d probably still be alive, wouldn’t he?

I look at the members of this motorcycle club for a moment, each of them, and reflect how they had my back through all of this. I say, “I appreciate everything. Y’all really came through for me.”

“That’s what we do,” Bishop says. “We’re family, man.”

“Yeah,” Loki adds. “Family.”

I return to my car. They get on their bikes and we roll out. Tomorrow, I’ll get my car

detailed and washed by some prospects at the clubhouse. Right now, I'm going to the hotel to be with my family.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Ivy

I've been in a state of shock since Gideon woke me up, and now, I'm in a hotel room with Lilly while one of Gideon's MC members stand guard outside the door. They call him Sheol. While Lilly is distracted, I open the door and ask him, "Have you heard from Gideon?"

"No, not yet. I wouldn't be worried, though. If anyone knows how to take care of business, it's Hawk."

And that's precisely what I'm afraid of. I can't have Gideon back in jail, especially now that Lilly has been bonding with him.

And so have I.

I didn't realize how stubbornness had kept me from the only man I ever truly loved. The man who makes me laugh even when he's not trying to be funny. He has always protected me, and he's busy doing the same right now. I'm completely undeserving. He did make it clear that he was doing this for Lilly's sake because he feels I don't deserve it after abandoning him. Whatever the case, I'm just glad my baby girl is safe.

Startled by the tap on the door, my body jumps. I can't believe how uneasy I am, even with a bodyguard at the door. It's probably Sheol.

I glance through the peephole to make sure and see Gideon instead. I open the door and leap into his arms, asking, "Are you okay? I was so worried."

“It’s not your job to worry about me, Ivy. How are you?”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re shaking. Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“Good, and you will never have to worry about Cash bothering you again.”

“Hawk, what did you do?”

“What I had to, now listen. We’ll be here for the night. Tomorrow, you’re free to go to your place and get back to your normal life.”

“Really?”

“Yes. He’s no longer a threat. You and baby girl will be just fine.”

He looks over at the bed where Lilly is sleeping, and an aura of satisfaction crosses his face. He said I could go back home, and while that sounds so good to be able to return to my normal routine, I’m not sure if that’s normal for me any longer. I’ve made his home our old home. I don’t want to leave, but that’s not up to me.

“Have you eaten?” he asks.

“No. I don’t have an appetite.”

“Then just rest. It’s still early. We’ll figure out something later.”

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

I take Ivy and Lilly to The Grotto Bar and Grill to get their mind off of everything that's happened recently. They need to relax – to take their minds off the feeling of being imbalanced and lost in the midst of fleeing from abuse. They're good now. They're safe and secure. I provided that for them temporarily, but now, it's time to let them go.

Do I want to let go? No, I don't, but Ivy had a life outside of me for two years. I'm not the man she wants, so there's that. Whatever the case, I'm glad I was there to protect. And whatever happens between me and Ivy, I will always be there for Lilly.

My phone rings, I answer, "What's up, Brandon?"

"Have you lost your freakin' mind?" Brandon asks, yelling into my ear like he wants to get hung up on. That's exactly what I do – hang up the phone.

He calls right back. I get up from the table while Ivy and Lilly eats and step outside near the outdoor stages.

I answer, "Shut up and listen, Brandon. If this is about Gage, he had it coming. I'm tired of tiptoeing around him because he's the youngest. Who cares? He's a grown man and he's done enough to screw up my life. This is where it ends. You and mom deal with him. I'm wiping my hands clean."

He doesn't respond for a moment as if taking it all in, then asks, "What did he do to deserve a broken nose?"



“He told his friend, Cash—the man who Ivy was seeing while I was locked up, by the way...the same one who gave her that black eye—where Ivy was staying and this fool tried to break into my house and harm Ivy and Lilly. Not on my watch! I ain’t no saint, but one thing I will do is protect my family, even if it’s from my family.”

“Dang. I didn’t know all of that.”

“Yeah, well now you do. I have to get back to my daughter.”

“Okay, man. I’ll catch you later.”

After sliding my phone into my shirt pocket, I walk back into the bar and see Lilly laughing and making a funny face at her mother. When she spots me, she says, “Dad-dee!”

“Hey, babygirl. Told you I’d be right back.”

I glance over at Ivy to see her smiling. She says, “This is nice.”

“What is?”

“Us together like this.” She inhales deeply, releases it slowly then says, “I feel like I can finally breathe.”

“You can, Ivy. I will never let anything happen to you, or Lilly.”

She offers a small smile and refocuses her attention on Lilly. I focus my attention on her.

She shies away from my gaze.

It's funny how life is. This woman used to be my world. In some ways, she still is, but we're worlds apart, even after I found myself between her legs, stuffed in her tight, little box that has always drove me wild. Still does.

All those days I was locked up, it was memories of her that got me through. She ran back into my arms when her life was in danger, but now that the threat is gone, she really doesn't need me any longer.

"Gideon?"

I glance up at her. "Yes?"

"Lilly was handing you a fry."

"Oh, I'm sorry, princess. My mind was in a million places at once."

I take a sip of straight rum and ask myself what I'm doing here. The dynamic between us is confusing – yet, I have a potent desire to taste her.

"So, I guess I'll take you back to your place," I say just to see if she'll offer a rebuttal. To see if she'll express any interest in being with me.

She says, "Yeah. I have all of my things packed."

She has all of her things packed...

"We also need to work out some kind of visitation for Lilly. I wasn't that good at being a husband, but I want to try harder to be a father. I want Lilly to know me."

"Dad-dee."

I grin. “Yes, princess?”

Lilly hands me another fry. This time I take it and toss it in my mouth. She giggles.

“Um—yeah,” Ivy says. “We’ll work something out for sure.”

“Why did you say it like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like you’re not sure?”

“I am sure. I want you to be a part of her life, Gideon?”

“Are you sure you’re sure because you certainly didn’t want me to be a part of yours.”

“Gideon, I—”

“How horrible must I have been for you to do what you did to me?”

She looks to the left and right, judging our distance from people and says discreetly, “Gideon, I don’t want to do this here?”

I bang the table with open hands and ask, “Then when are we going to do it?”

Lilly’s face balls up like she’s about to cry. I didn’t mean to upset her, but the pain I feel is still very much present. Sex with Ivy didn’t fix it. Living with her for almost a month didn’t fix it. I don’t know what will.

I stand up, toss a fifty on the table, and say, “Catch an Uber home. I’ll bring your

bags in here so you'll have everything."

"Gideon, wait—"

"For what? You don't need me anymore."

And with that, I leave her there. I don't know why I thought we were going to have some quality family time. She made it clear how she felt about me, and I'd be a fool to overlook that.

Ivy

The one-eighty in the restaurant has me baffled. I thought we were making progress, but apparently we weren't because me and Lilly are in the back of an Uber, on the way home to my apartment. She's sleeping when I arrive so I lower her to the crib and close the door to her room. I haven't been here in some time so I take the time to spruce up the place. I vacuum the carpets, mop the kitchen and bathroom floors, then dust the furniture. Now that I don't have to worry about Cash coming after me, at least I can relax.

After cleaning, I grab my Instacart grocery delivery from the front door – all five bags stuffed to the brim – and take them straight to the kitchen to put them away. I don't have it in me to do much else but sit on the sofa. That's when a memory of Cash hitting me and chasing me around the coffee table all comes back to the forefront of my mind. He really did a number on me, and I held it all in – kept the details from my family – and now, sitting here reflecting on that, I fall apart and cry. I never thought I'd be a victim of domestic violence. All I wanted was to live a good life – one I didn't think I had with Gideon, but I was so busy trying to change him that I didn't see him for the man he was. He didn't have to do any of this stuff for me and Lilly, but he did. And now, he's right back out of my life again. He'll be there for Lilly, but he made it clear that we were pretty much over for good.

After much debating, I decide to call my mother. During all the chaos that was going on in my life, I've shut her and my father out. I couldn't imagine telling them what was happening to me, but now that I can start rebuilding my life, I'm no longer afraid.

When she answers the phone, she says, “Ivy, where have you been? Me and your father have been worried sick. Are you okay? Is Lilly okay?”

“We’re fine, Ma. At least now we are. I have some things to tell you and I just want you to listen. Can you do that?”

“Yes. I can do that.”

“Whew,” I say breathing through it while trying to release the tension in my throat. “I was in an abusive relationship.”

“Oh, no...”

“Ma, you said you would listen.”

“Okay, right. I’m sorry. It’s just so jarring to hear this.”

“I know, but just try because I wasn’t going to tell you at all. I didn’t want you and Dad to know any of this, but yes, I was being abused. I tried to stick it out, but I couldn’t, especially for Lilly’s sake.”

“When you say abuse—?”

“He was hitting me and threatening my life. He was yelling at me and Lilly constantly. I couldn’t live in fear anymore, thinking he would harm Lilly. So, I left and was living in my car before Gideon took me in.”

“Gideon? I thought he was locked up?”

“He was, but he got out recently.”

“And you ran right back to him—the man you left.”

I sigh heavily and respond, “It wasn’t necessarily like that, but, yes, I did.”

She’s silent but I can hear her judgments loud and clear.

“I’m assuming you told Gideon about Lilly.”

“I did. He knows he’s the father. Look—I’m sorry I shut y’all out, but I just thought that was the best thing for me at the time.”

“But you’re safe now?”

“Yes.”

“And where is Cash?”

“I don’t know. Gideon and his friends took care of it and I didn’t ask any questions, so I’m not sure what they did. All I know is, he’s not bothering me anymore.”

“Are you back with Gideon now? You told me you were done with that situation. I thought you were ready to file for divorce, but what do you do? You go running right back into his arms the moment you get into some trouble instead of running to your family.”

“Ma, don’t start this.”

“I mean, really, Ivy? Why wipe your hands clean only to dirty them up again? Look at the life he leads. He ain’t right for you. I don’t think you know what’s right for you. You may as well pack up and move back home with my grandbaby.”

“I’m not doing that. It’s my life. I’ll figure it out. I was calling to let you know what was going on—not for you to sit there and judge me. I can’t do anything to change the past. All I can do is continue to move forward.”

She sighs. “You’re right. I just—I don’t know why you choose to be with men like that.”

“Ma, Gideon has never laid a hand on me.”

“Then why were you divorcing him?”

“Because, I—”

That’s a good question – one that I’m apparently not prepared to answer.

ding dong

The doorbell saves me from not having to. I say, “Ma, somebody’s at the door. I’ll have to call you back, okay.”

“Okay. I’ll be waiting.”

I shake my head and sigh. When I end the call, I proceed to the door, wishing at times like this that my door actually had a peephole. The most I can do is leave the chain lock on and open the door to a crack.

Before I do that, I ask, “Who is it?” feeling my pulse increase. What if Cash came back? Maybe Gideon didn’t take care of the situation as well as he thought.

I wait but get no response. I ask again, “Who is it?”



“It’s me, Ivy.”

The sound of Gideon’s voice immediately puts me at ease, even though he was pissed at me earlier. I take the chain off the hook, unlock the deadbolt and open the door to find him standing there in his motorcycle jacket with a white shirt beneath. He has on a pair of rugged, faded black jeans and his signature silver wallet chain hanging from a belt loop. I realize something at this moment – this is the man I fell in love with. The man I married. He didn’t change. I’m the one who switched up on him and expected him to fall in line with the way I wanted him to be – the way I envisioned my life when, honestly, our lives were just fine the way it was.

I suppose it’s too late to confess that to him now. Besides, I know he’s here to see Lilly – not me. Not after the way he left us earlier.

“How did you know where I lived?”

“I can find out anything I want about my own wife,” he answers arrogantly. “Are you not going to invite me in?”

I step aside and say, “Come in.”

He strolls inside, looks around, and says, “So, this is your new home.”

“Gideon, I don’t want to fight with you, okay? I’ve been through enough.”

“And I haven’t?”

He sets those brown eyes upon me heavily and asks, “What did I do that was so bad, you had to leave me? I’ve always been there for you, Ivy, but the moment I needed you the most, you turned your back on me.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way,” I began, “But that’s because I felt like you turned your back on me. The most important thing to you was the motorcycle club and all of the illegal activities going on there.”

“You don’t know what goes on there because you never took the time to look into anything that I was a part of. Everything was about you.”

“No—it was about us . I didn’t want you being a part of the club because I didn’t want you to wind up in jail.”

“And that’s what happened, but in a twist of fate, look who you ended up with—a man who did the crime that I got locked up for. A criminal.”

“Wait—what?”

“Yeah...Cash was one of the accomplices in the bank robbery. I suppose that’s the money he used to wine and dine you with—to make it appear he has a successful life when the reality was, he had nothing. I’m no saint, but I don’t run around here robbing banks and I definitely don’t abuse women.”

I hold my head, sick of the back and forth between us. I’ve been through too much to keep up this constant fighting. All I want now is peace.

I say, “Lilly’s in her room. She was sleeping—not sure if she still is. You can see her before you leave. Just lock the door on your way out.”

I walk away from him, go to my bedroom and shut the door for a reprieve that I desperately need. He’s upset – we’re at odds – I get that, but if there’s no forgiveness with us and no fixing this marriage, at least he can have a relationship with Lilly. That’s what I want the most. Her welfare has always been more important than mine and always will be.

I sit on the bed and drop my face into my hands. I hate this. I hate the feeling of being the cause of this dissension between us and sharing a pretty little girl who has to be stuck in the middle of our problems.

I look up when I hear the door open. Gideon comes inside like he's ready for another round of arguing, but I'm not. I told him to leave but apparently, he has more to say.

He walks over to the bed where I'm sitting, kneels in front of me and reaches for the waistband of my leggings. He slowly pulls them down my legs and I let him because, honestly, since we made love at his house, I've been fiending for this kind of attention from him again. I just never thought I'd get it. But apparently, I'm getting it now.

"Gideon..." I whimper.

My cries go unheard. My heart rams in my chest when he reaches for my panties, pulls them down my legs and pulls them off. He settles his face between my legs and devours me. His tongue plays me like a stringed instrument. He's relentless, too, causing my body to jerk off the bed. He puts his hands on my butt and summons me closer, encapsulating me inside of his mouth, moaning.

"Oh," I gasp. The feeling is so overwhelming, my hips buck off the bed again, giving him even more clearance to my pearl.

"Gideon..."

He's focused on delivering maximum pleasure, not on me calling his name. It turns him on apparently because he locks his mouth tightly on me, sucking and piercing me with his tongue. The pressure is so great, I don't know how I can handle it. The pleasure, the aggression, the knowing that it's him – the man I still love – yeah, I'm going to die a delightful death right here on this bed.

“Mmm, Gideon. Oh! Gideon. Ooooooh. Gideeeeeeeon!”

My screams pierce the air, making me afraid that I will wake Lilly. All I could hope for is that Gideon locked the door when he came in here for this premeditated assault on my body. Gosh, I didn't know how this would go when he first walked into the room, but when he kneeled in front of me, I knew what I was about to get.

“Mmm,” he says, slurping. “I can never get enough of your taste, baby.”

He won't take his mouth off of me. He's taking all he can get and when he's quenched his thirst, he stands up, removes his shirt and unzips his jeans. When he slides out of his boxers, I notice his tool is ready for me. I miss it just as much – miss the way he wrecks and stretches my walls as I try to handle his girth.

When he crawls up on the bed, says, “Open your legs wide, Ivy. You know how I like it.”

I lay back on the bed, open my legs wide and he positions his manhood directly for my center. I gasp when I feel my walls stretch for his rod while my heart blooms like a summer flower. I brace myself. I know Gideon – he doesn't like it slow. In one smooth thrust, he rams me with and rides me hard, sending stroke after stroke after stroke, rocking the bed while rocking my world at the same time.

I inch up to relieve the pressure but he pulls me back down, and says, “No. Don't run. You're a big girl, aren't you?”

He rams me.

“Aren't you?”

“Ye-yes, Gideon.”

“Then take it like one.”

I close my eyes and hold on to him, feeling the first coils of an orgasm building inside of me. Just when I think I’m going to explode, he pulls his hardness out of me and flips me over. He pulls me up to my knees and enters me from behind. With his large hands securing my waist, he pulls me backward and pushes forward, making me ride and feel the full length of his manhood. I feel the thickness, every vein and even the huge round tip as it plays at the entrance of my hole.

Gideon has always been a phenomenal lover, but tonight, he’s taking it to a new level. He grabs one of my breasts and squeezes it as he’s losing control. And I’m losing it, too. I feel the orgasm rising in me, spurring me on to throw it back and handle it, listening as our colliding bodies.

Smack.

Smack.

Smack.

Smack.

He’s relentless. And I was coming.

“Gideon!” I scream, shudder and cream all over him as the waves flood me. I rode the orgasm and something about it spurred me on to move faster, the same way Gideon was moving at whiplash speed to find his.

He manually arched my back, giving him better access to my mound and he hit every wall. If he didn’t come soon, I just might die for real.

“Ivy!” he belts out as he lets loose inside of me.

I feel it all the way to my womb this time and he’s still riding me like he didn’t just empty a load inside of me. He can’t get enough.

“Gideon, what are you doing to me?”

“I’m making you regret that you ever walked out on me,” he responds boldly as he finds my pearl and massages it with his finger.

“Ah,” I gasp, feeling the makings of yet another eruption coming. I didn’t think my body could handle another one after the last one, but here he is, making me come yet again.

“Gideon!” I scream, hoping he will have mercy on me and finally let me go, but I feel his arousal harden again.

He pulls it out and flips me over again and dives right back inside of me. This time, he stares into my eyes and says, “It’s mine. You’re mine. No one else’s. Is that understood?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to make sure you understand,” he says and starts moving, giving me deep strokes. He throws his head back like he’s relieved to be inside of me again and with only the skill he possesses, he begins riding me hard, right into another orgasm that leaves me spineless.

And then he groans and screams my name as he drowns my insides yet again.

He pulls out, then lays beside me breathless and wordless.

I'm beside him, the same.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

“D ad-dee, Mommy?”

“Mommy’s sleeping,” I tell Lilly as I look upon her with pride. She’s beautiful just like her mother, but she definitely has my eyes and maybe a little of my personality.

“Mommy tired?”

“Yes.”

“Dad-dee tired?”

I grin and say, “I am, but not so tired that I can’t spend time with you.”

She smiles and I see her mother. Just plain beautiful.

“Finish eating your fruit, okay?”

Ivy walks into the kitchen shortly after, looking refreshed. She’s taken a shower, washed her hair and dressed in a pair of jeans and an oversized gray T-shirt.

“Mommy!” Lilly says. Like me, she loves the woman. I don’t care what she’s done to me in the past. I know there’s no one else for me. There’s no other woman I want to be inside of. Can’t no woman handle me like Ivy, anyway. I know that. The women I was with before I met her proved that. The tool between my legs belongs to her and that cake between hers is only for my enjoyment.



“Hey, Lilly,” Ivy says, scooping her up from her highchair.

“Mommy tired?”

Ivy glances over at me then turns her attention back to Lilly and says, “Yes, I am, but I’m okay. Are you okay?”

“I’m okay,” Lilly answers with her sweet, little voice.

“Daddy give me fruit.”

Ivy looks over at me again and smiles, then says, “Okay, finish your breakfast, honey,” lowering her back to the highchair.

Then she looks over at me and says, “Good morning, Gideon.”

“Good morning, Ivy.”

I stand up, walk over to the coffee pot, and pour us both a cup. I take mine black. She likes hers with sugar and cream. I hand her the cup.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

We stand perched near the counter, looking at Lilly sing happily and eating her food. I say, “This rift between you and I is bigger than us.”

“It is,” she agrees.

“But it doesn’t have to be rift at all.”

“But it will be as long as you continue hating me.”

“I don’t hate you. I hate what you did to me. I expect my woman to have my back at all times, and I know you gave me three strikes, but I never thought you’d actually turn your back on me, Ivy.”

“I’m sorry, Gideon. I just want a normal life—”

“There’s nothing normal about life. And it certainly ain’t normal for a man to lay hands on you, now, is it?”

“No.”

“That’s something I’ve never done and never will do. The only beating you’ll get from me is from this,” I say, grabbing my crotch. “And I meant what I said last night. You’re my wife and you always will be, so you can get that normal stuff out of your head. This is as normal as it’s going to get, baby. The motorcycle club is a part of my life, yes, but it’s not my world. My world is right here – with you and Lilly.”

Tears fall from her eyes. I don’t know what she’s thinking. I just embrace her and let her cry.

“Mommy sad,” Lilly says.

Ivy hurries to wipe her face and rushes over to Lilly and says, “No, sweetheart. Mommy’s fine. Everything is going to be fine now.”

“You got that right because I’m taking you both home where you belong.”

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

Gideon

One Year Later

It's been a long road to get here, but Hawk Mechanics is finally in existence and is fully up and running. Ironically enough, it's located less than a mile down the road from the bank my numskull brother robbed, but I'm done thinking about all of that. Besides, Gage is supposed to be on the straight and narrow now. He cut all ties with his criminal buddies and Brandon got him training to get his CDLs. He'll make good money driving trucks, and hopefully will settle down one day.

Today, though, it's about me. Sheol said it would only be right if the motorcycle club blessed my shop with their presence, and so they all rode their bikes up here – Loki, Dragon, Wraith, Bishop, Sheol and Lion – my road dogs. I have a ton of beer in the cooler for them as well as the grill going, with steaks, burgers and anything else these guys like to wolf down.

“Ay, where's the ol' lady?” Wraith asks.

“She's on the way. She should be here any minute now.”

And Ivy pulls up right on time. She gets out of the car, lets Lilly out and she runs over to me with her little motorcycle jacket and dark brown curly hair, yelling, “Daddy!”

She's always excited to see me, and I will always welcome her with open arms. I bend down and scoop her up, kiss her on the cheek and say, “How's daddy's big

girl?”

“I’m happy, Daddy. Are you happy, Daddy?”

“More than you will ever know, sweet girl.”

I look back at the car again to see Ivy walking over with our three-month old son, Chase, in the car seat. This is the first time she’s brought him out in public. I didn’t think she would want to bring him here, but she says she’s keeping an open mind about the club now – giving me freedom to be who I am.

I turn to my guys and say, “Ay, my son is making his debut. Welcome to the party, Chase.”

“Woo!” Wraith croons.

Lion says, “Oh, now that’s a sinner. You may as well go ahead and get him a jacket.”

“Yep,” Loki says. “Looks just like you, too. And how are you doing, Mrs. Ivy?”

Ivy smiles and takes my hand. “I’ve never been better.”

“Are you staying out of trouble?” he asks.

“As much as this one will let me,” she answers, looking at me.

I look at her and lean down and kiss those sweet lips of hers. Ain’t no letting go this time. She’s mine. Forever.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:48 am*

I was making groceries at the local market, when a loud screech rang out from the next aisle over. Usually not one to play captain save a hoe, I disregarded my urge to mind my business and moved toward the commotion. Just as I turned the corner, a large can of peas came flying through the air, knocking a man, who was running, in the back of the head. Shocked, I stood back waiting to see what would happen next. If nothing else, I knew this day was about to get ten times better. At least it would be entertaining.

A very angry woman, who I assumed was the source of the screech, came marching toward the fallen man. Wielding a switchblade in her hand, she was on a mission to maim or worse. The beauty was screaming about how nasty of a bastard the man was.

“You nasty mother fucker! I’ll teach you not to sexually assault women.”

Oh, Shit! Did she just say this couyon assaulted her? I started moving forward to rip the man’s head off. I stopped short when the lady moved forward and stepped on his thigh. It was then I noticed the man’s pants were open and his junk was exposed. Now, I was a biker, but even that was too nasty for me.

Without any apprehension the woman who I was fast developing a crush on, spun the blade in her hand, lifted her arm and jammed the knife in the fleshy part of the man’s groin. She just missed his jewels by a pin hair. That sealed the deal. I was head over heels in love.

“Fuck! Lady. Why did you do that? I was just playing around.”

“Next time, I suggest you play with Jesus. I am not the one or the two.”

The female wolverine twisted the knife in the man's leg and removed it so quickly it took a few seconds for the blood to spurt out. She had done this before. Unphased by the blood that was beginning to pool under the man, my girl started kicking him. The poor fool lay there screaming for help until his skin started to turn a nasty shade of gray. His face drained of all color and then he fell back.

Afraid that she killed the gutter punk, I rushed forward to help her escape before the cops arrived. She turned pointing the blade at my chest. If I had any sense, I would have been afraid, but the sight of her holding a weapon only managed to turn me on.

“Whoa, Cher. I am not trying to hurt you. If there was more time, I think I would sit back and enjoy the show a bit more. However, you've got about three minutes to haul ass before you'll be in deep shit with the law.”

“Say what?”

“Sirens, doll. I know you can hear them. They are now about two minutes away. Come with me if you want your freedom.”

Before I could grab her arm and usher her out of the store, she dropped the knife and took off like a bat out of hell. I swear, one second, I was trying to explain how I was going to save the day and the next all I saw was a blur. It was like watching one of those old school movies where the superhero streaks out of the room at lightning speed. To say I was impressed was an understatement.

Fine, she didn't want my help, but I was still going to look out for her. There was no way I wanted to see her on the news with shackles and a jumpsuit. I couldn't hide her, so I did the next best thing.

“Excuse me, can I please have your attention. I need everyone who recorded this incident to delete the footage, right now. This bastard deserved what he got. What if he had done that to you or worse, your child? Would you have done the same thing?”

“I would have cut it off!” one lady screamed, making everyone laugh.

One by one, the spectators put on their capes by deleting some of the most entertaining footage out there. None of them would be giving statements to the police and even the store manager agreed to delete the security footage both in the store and the parking lot.

I have never been so proud to live in New Orleans since the day I arrived. The people here stuck together and believed in street justice. Most believed in doing the right thing. Today, I witnessed it firsthand. None of us knew the lady who had been assaulted, but we all decided to protect her with our silence.

Thinking fast on my feet, I grabbed a bleach cleaner from the shelf, sprayed it on a rag I kept in my pocket and wiped the blade clean of prints. I then placed it in the man’s hand. Then I leaned over him and acted as if I was praying over him.

“Sir, I need you to step away from this man and put your hands up.”

I knew how this was going to go down. The police would detain me, ask me for my story and then I would be free to go as long as the manager corroborated my story. He was a friend of the MC, so I knew he would have my back. If not, he would have trouble with the Sinners, and nobody fucked with us.

After getting on my feet, I lifted my hands above my head and made eye contact with the officer. Fuck yeah! Somebody was looking out for me today. The pair of blue eyes that stared back at me belonged to Jason, one of the hang-arounds of the club. He wanted to prospect but hadn’t found a sponsor. This could be his way into the club. I would happily sponsor his ass if he got me out of this jam.

“Sheol? What are you doing here? Is this club business?” he whispered.

Laughing, I shook my head. “No officer, this man came running into the store a few

minutes ago. He was screaming and shouting for help. I noticed him and came over to help, but before I could tell him not to remove the knife, he pulled it out. After that, he bled out and then passed out.”

Jason was no fool. He went along with the story, a sly grin growing on his face. He knew he had found his sponsor for the club, and I knew I was getting out of this shit.