



Hitman (Savage Crows MC (Texas Charter) #14)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: I've been given orders to take out her father... and she's been given orders to take out me.

I'm a member of the Savage Crows MC, but more than that, I'm their assassin. Their hitman.

When they need someone taken care of, I'm the man for the job.

So, when the Ghost Born MC president reaches out, asking us to take out a billionaire who had his fingers dug into a trafficking ring, Grim hands the file to me.

I have a week to take him out.

But what I don't realize is the man already knows about me, and he's sending his own personal assassin to take me out.

His daughter.

She may be a pro, but I'm even better.

And after I take out her father, I'll claim her soul, too.

****Please read the author's note at the beginning of the book before deciding to read.**

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CHAPTER 1

Julian

Grim pulled a rolled up yellow mailer from the inside of his black jacket and handed it over to me. It slowly unfurled as I took it from his outstretched hand. “Your newest target,” he told me, his voice deep and raspy from too many years of heavy smoking. He’d cut back since he’d become a dad a few years ago, but everyone knew he’d never stop completely. Smoking was the one crutch Grim allowed himself.

“Who’d he piss off?” I asked as I pulled the little metal tabs and opened up the mailer. Reaching inside, I pulled the papers out that gave me every bit of information on my target. The information in these packets went so deep, I would know what the mother fucker had for breakfast that day by the time I got through reading all of it.

When I first began prospecting for the Savage Crows MC Texas Charter, I’d been quiet. Kept to myself a lot. I was just trying to find a place to belong after getting out of the private sector of the military—a sector civilians had no idea existed. I was picked during basic training in the army based on my personal training scores and my marksmanship during weapons training.

One day, I’d been training for the infantry, and the next, I was issued paperwork to fly to fucking Alaska for specialized training. I wasn’t given a choice. My captain made it very clear to me I either cooperated or the government made me disappear for now knowing this organization existed.

“Copper received word that this man helped fund a sex trafficking ring that another

club in Washington wiped out. He flew under the radar, but a man named Rico Martinez discovered him recently, and since he's down here in Texas, the president of the Ghost Born MC, Shaw, reached out to Copper, asking if this was something he'd be willing to take on."

Copper was the president of the mother charter of the Savage Crows MC. His father, Blink, founded the club with three of the men he served with in the military. While the other three founders had scattered, Blink was still around, but not as much as he used to be anymore. He now trusted Copper enough, so he'd started traveling the world with his wife, Lindsey.

"And Copper agreed because you have me," I finished for Grim, looking back up at him.

Grim nodded and pulled his cigarettes out of his cut pocket. After tapping one out of the pack, he lifted it to his lips. "Who better to take him out than Hitman?" Grim asked around his cigarette as he worked on lighting it.

Hitman was my club name, and I'd come by it honestly. Once Grim found out just how useful I was, he and Alex, the Texas Charter's vice president, sat down with me, asking me if I'd be willing to be the club hitman. It was what I was good at and what I knew, so I'd agreed. They patched me in, then contacted Copper to bring him up to speed.

I looked down at the papers, my eidetic memory immediately memorizing my target so I'd never have to look at the paperwork again. The man was overweight and balding with a horrible spray tan that made him look orange. I would've thought someone with a two point four-billion-dollar net worth would be able to afford better spray tans, but I guess I didn't know much about billionaires after all.

Stewart Barry Dukes was sixty-three years old, the CEO of a company that'd been in

his family for two generations, and he was known for making literally the most disgusting, cheapest liquor to be sold in the United States—Dukesuor. Not only was the liquor fucking horrible, but the name was absolute shit too and uncreative. But people drank it because it was a real easy way to get drunk.

“He’ll be taken care of by the end of the week,” I told Grim as I shoved the papers back into the mailer. Lifting my bike seat, I set the package inside, then lowered the seat back into its rightful position. Straightening my cut over my plain black hoodie, I asked, “We done here?”

Grim nodded. “We’re done here. Let me know when the job is done. I want to know before the news stations do so we can cover our bases and protect our asses.”

“Always,” I promised. Then, I straddled my Ducati and grabbed my helmet, sliding it over my head. I flipped the visor down, then turned the bike on. Revving the engine, I left the warehouse parking lot and headed for my apartment in the city.

Unlike my club brothers, I didn’t hang out around the clubhouse often. And it wasn’t just because I enjoyed my solitude. It was because if, somehow, I was found out, they would still be protected. It was agreed upon that I’d take all the heat and tell law enforcement officials I was working on my own. It wouldn’t exactly be a lie anyway considering besides either Grim or Copper giving me the targets, I did work on my own. I was one hundred percent responsible for the bodies that were dropped.

But being caught was never really on my radar. I hadn’t spent years in the military being a sniper, taking out high-value targets all over the world without ever being caught through pure luck. Sure, the government had been backing me, but they’d made it very clear during my training that if I fucked up and was found out, they’d disavow me and leave me on my own.

I was just purely good at what I did.

And just like my hundreds of jobs before this one, this target would be taken out just as easily.

By the end of the week, there would be one less crooked billionaire in the world.

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CHAPTER 2

Solace

My platform boots thumped across the pristine, white, tiled floors of my father's office building as I made my way across the thirty-first floor to his office. The man and I had a very strong love/hate relationship. He was a piece of shit who'd abused my mother for years until I finally convinced her to leave him when I was a teen. The only reason I hadn't cut all ties with him was because he had me as an off-book employee doing a job that paid exceptionally well, allowing me to keep my mentally unwell mother in therapy and have a live-in nurse around the clock.

As soon as I'd graduated high school, my father had cut my mother off. When I'd confronted him, so angry I'd brought a gun with me because she was losing the healthcare she desperately needed, he'd made me a deal all while I pointed that gun at his head, ready to blow his brains all over the wall.

He had numerous enemies, and every time he turned around, another was coming out of the woodwork. If he sent me to assassin school and I agreed to take out the targets he gave me, he'd pay me tens of thousands of dollars for each target I took out, which would in turn allow me to take care of my mother without having to worry about finances.

The deal had been too fucking good to pass up, but I'd made one stipulation. Until my first kill was made and I was paid, he had to continue depositing money into her bank account so she was taken care of while I was away. He'd begrudgingly agreed, which just showed his desperation to have someone like me at his disposal.

Now, years later, here we were.

I didn't bother knocking as I pushed open the door to his office. My father scowled at me, his jowls jiggling as he turned his head to glare at me. Someone in a very expensive suit and about ten years younger than my father was sitting in the chair across from him, and he looked a mix of shocked and appalled at my interruption.

I lifted my wrist, glancing at the time on my Rolex. I was right on time, which meant, once again, my father was cutting into my time, which was valuable, even if he didn't seem to think so.

"You told me to be here at two," I reminded him as I lifted my tatted hand to push my black and blonde hair out of my face. "I'm here at two on the dot, so your little meeting—" I jerked my thumb toward the door— "is over."

Dad's face reddened beneath his horrible spray tan, but instead of arguing with me like I knew he wanted to do, he instead turned to face the man he'd been conversing with. Good thing. He knew as well as I did that I'd walk right the fuck back out. He'd tried testing me once, and it'd damn near cost him his life when the target he'd wanted taken out had gotten too close.

He'd learned a valuable lesson that day. I did not play about my schedule. My time would not be messed with, and I would get the respect I demanded from him.

"Mr. Creed, we'll have to finish this at a later date," my father apologized begrudgingly. "I forgot I made a very important appointment with my daughter." Being referred to as his daughter made my stomach turn, but I pushed those feelings down. I was doing this for Mom. She was what mattered.

Mr. Creed's irritated face smoothed when he realized I was family. Seemed the man had some decency about him.

“Ah, I understand. Family is important, Mr. Dukes.” Standing, Mr. Creed held his hand out to my father. It took my father a moment to push himself up from his creaking desk chair, but he finally did, shaking Mr. Creed’s hand with a forced smile.

“I’ll have my assistant reach out to yours and schedule another time for a meeting that fits in both of our schedules.”

“Sounds good.” Mr. Creed turned, inclined his head to me respectfully, then left the room.

Once the door was shut behind him, I cocked my hip, crossing my arms over my chest as I tapped my combat boot against the floor. “Well?” I asked. “What do you have for me? I know this isn’t a social call. We don’t do those.”

He sighed heavily and sat back down in his chair. For a moment, I thought it was going to break. “I don’t know where I went wrong with you,” he muttered, shaking his head. Grabbing the keys from his desk, he unlocked his desk drawer, then pulled out a manila folder. He tossed it onto the desk. Striding forward, I snatched it up.

As soon as I opened it, my eyes landed on the sexiest fucking man I’d ever seen. His hair was dyed platinum blonde, and he was covered in tattoos. The left side of his mouth was lifted into a cocky smirk, and there was a look in his eyes that promised a good time. But beneath that promise was a darkness that called to me.

A darkness I understood.

“I received word he’s a hitman, and he’s connected to a... group—” I cocked my brow at him, not liking how he evasively used the word group— “that would like to see me dead. Make him disappear.”

Nodding once, I turned on my heel, heading for the door. “Consider it done,” I told

him. “He’ll be dead by the end of the week.” I always took my time with my targets. He knew that. Not doing so resulted in mistakes.

I didn’t have time for mistakes.

I left his stuffy office before he had a chance to respond, shutting the door behind me with a soft click. As I strode toward the elevator that would take me back down to the first floor, I looked down at that picture again, drinking in the beautiful man.

And then, I let my eyes drift to his name.

Julian McKenzie .

“It’s a pity you’re so pretty,” I sighed as I jabbed my finger against the elevator button.

CHAPTER 3

Julian

For someone involved in a sex trafficking ring and knowing his fellow comrades had been taken out, which included law enforcement on the local and federal level, senators, members of congress, and even billionaires, Stewart Dukes sure was comfortable keeping to a daily routine and never changing it up.

He arrived at work at promptly seven every morning, and then, his assistant would bring him coffee and three blueberry muffins. He'd do computer work for two hours after having his breakfast and coffee, then have a meeting. At lunchtime, he had a glass of expensive brandy, a soda, and fried chicken with macaroni and cheese. Then, he held another meeting. After that meeting, he did more computer work for about three hours. After that, he usually went over his schedule with his assistant for the next day. At promptly four in the afternoon, he booted his computer down and left the office, heading to the country club to rub elbows with other trash-ass mother fuckers just like him.

After rubbing elbows with other rich assholes for three hours, he went home where his cook had his dinner ready for him. He sat down to eat, then spent an hour in his office answering more emails. Once those emails were answered, he showered and went to bed so he could wake up the next day and start his boring as fuck routine all over again.

The only day his routine had been different was when a gorgeous as fuck woman with long as fuck legs and curves for days had marched her perfect ass into his office

a few days ago. I didn't know what they'd discussed, but he'd given her some folder with information in it. And she'd been important enough that he'd cut his meeting short.

I hadn't cared enough about her to dig into who she was. No matter how hard she got my dick, her connection to him made her off-limits to me.

It was easy to see how Stewart had slipped under the radar for so long. No one would ever suspect someone like him who kept to such a strict schedule and never hid. He never had any shady meetings, and he never looked even the slightest bit panicked about anything. In fact, the only time I'd seen the man even somewhat frustrated was when that woman had marched into his office, interrupting his meeting with the influential businessman he'd been talking to.

But he was no longer slipping under the radar. He'd been found out, and his time was up.

I climbed down from the tree I'd been chilling in for the past three hours. My boots were silent as I made my way toward the dark house. I was halfway across the expansive lawn when I heard a twig snap behind me. I paused because I'd been sure I'd been alone for the past few hours, then turned toward the noise.

"What a surprise," I murmured, running my eyes over the woman who'd interrupted Stewart's meeting earlier that week. She was holding a knife in her hand, and her gaze was hard and unforgiving as she stared back at me. The moonlight cast a beautiful glow over her, and had I been in any other situation, I would've definitely tried to get her back to my place.

But I knew a hitwoman when I saw one. Everything about her screamed pro. Which was just my fucking luck.

“I don’t know what business you have with him, but you won’t be finishing it,” she told me, her voice frigid.

I smirked. “That so, doll?” I asked. I slid my hands into the pockets of my leather jacket and looked her up and down, taking my time as I drank in every bit of her, committing her beautiful body to memory.

“You think someone as rich as him doesn’t know when he has a hitman coming after him?” she snapped, moving closer to me. I kept my posture relaxed, letting her think she had the upper hand. I wasn’t afraid of her. To her, she’d think my cockiness would be my downfall. But in reality, I was tracking her like a predator, cataloguing every single move she made. I already knew when she thought I least expected it, she’d strike.

But I’d be ready. I wouldn’t kill her. She wasn’t on my targeted list, which made getting rid of her off limits. Taking out a target without the backing of the club would only mean my own end. That didn’t mean I wouldn’t do what I needed to make sure she stayed silent while she still breathed though.

“Usually, people aren’t worried about being eliminated if they weren’t doing something worthy of being murdered in the first place,” I drawled.

Annoyance flashed in her eyes. She was so close now, I could smell the sweet scent of her expensive perfume. The moonlight was reflecting in her pretty, gray eyes, and the blonde streaks in her black hair almost seemed to glow.

Pity she was so fucking beautiful. Knowing she was off-limits would’ve been easier to bear if she hadn’t been so damn gorgeous.

“Don’t make assumptions,” she sneered at me.

I laughed, letting my eyes close. And just as I predicted, that was when she struck. Because surely, I wouldn't expect it when I couldn't see her? Anyone else, that probably would have been true. But I'd been highly trained by the government. When one sense was gone, I knew how to focus using my other senses. So, when she lifted that knife, ready to swing at my throat, I snapped my hand up, wrapping my fingers around her slender wrist just when the knife was a mere inch from my jugular.

Slowly opening my eyes, I let a cocky smile tilt my lips. "Rookie mistake, doll."

Using her arm, I spun her around so her back was facing me. In her surprise, she dropped the knife. Wrapping my free arm around her neck in a chokehold, I yanked her back against me. Lowering my lips to her ear, I pressed a kiss to the pierced cartilage, humming low in my throat. "Sleep tight."

She fought me for a good thirty seconds, calling me every name under the sun, and then, she slumped. Sighing, I turned her to face me, then tossed her over my shoulder, carrying her toward the house.

I'd find something in the house to tie her up with, then I'd take care of the low-life piece of shit upstairs. After that, I'd take her back to the clubhouse, deal with the fallout from Grim and Alex, and figure out what the fuck to do with her.

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CHAPTER 4

Julian

Grim was waiting for me when I rolled through the clubhouse gates in my pickup truck. The woman who'd interrupted my kill was tied up and silently raging in my passenger seat. Fire burned in the depths of her gray eyes every time she looked at me, and I knew if her hands and feet were free, she'd be trying to murder me, even at the expense of her own life.

I'd called Grim after taking care of Stewart Dukes, letting him know the kill was done and that I had a problem. He hadn't been pleased, but instead of inquiring while we were on the phone, he told me to get to the clubhouse so we could try to resolve it.

As he glared through my windshield at the bombshell sitting next to me, I had no doubt he had expected any other problem but this one.

He was going to rip me a new asshole for this fuck-up. That was for sure. Never, not in my years in the military or the years since I'd been a member of the SCMC had this kind of thing happened. I kept running over what I'd missed, but as far as I knew, I hadn't missed anything. I'd scouted the area thoroughly.

But if she was as highly trained as I thought she was, then I wouldn't have noticed her. Not until she wanted me to. Had she not stepped on that stick, making it break, I wouldn't have noticed I had company until it was too late.

And honestly, I found it sexy as fuck. I could've lost my life tonight, but who the

fuck gave a shit when I got to meet someone as fine and dangerous as her?

Shutting the truck off, I pushed open my door and hopped out, my boots thumping onto the gravel lot. The rocks crunched beneath my boots as I met Grim at the front of my truck. He slowly pulled his eyes from the woman in my truck to narrow his eyes at me. “Get her in the basement, then get your fucking ass in that goddamn chapel,” he growled, his voice threaded with a warning to not waste time.

With that, he turned on his heel, heading inside the clubhouse. I scrubbed my hand down my face before making my way to the passenger door of my truck. The woman turned her head, glaring at me with pure hatred, but I ignored her. Gripping her waist, I tossed her over my shoulder, then bound my arm around her thighs to keep her from falling when she tried squirming.

I might have been built lankily, but that didn’t mean I was weak. I just didn’t fill out like some other men. She wasn’t getting free unless I wanted her to be free.

I kicked the truck door shut, then headed inside the clubhouse, carrying her through the main room and toward the basement door. Using my key, I unlocked it, then headed down the stairs, my boots thumping on each step. Once I reached the chair in the center of the room, I leaned over, depositing her into it.

“If you fall out of it and can’t get up, not my problem,” I warned her when she glared at me. I had no doubt if she didn’t have that bandana in her mouth, she’d be cursing me and everyone attached to me.

She mumbled something behind her gag, but I couldn’t understand her. And I didn’t have time to toy with her, so I simply turned on my heel and headed back for the stairs. Her enraged scream was muffled but still pretty loud behind the gag, and I smirked.

If I got the opportunity to play with her once this was all said and done, she was going to be a hell of a lot of fun. I loved a woman with a fiery personality.

Alex was sitting at the table with Grim when I walked into the chapel. Grim pointed stiffly to the chair that Ink, our Road Captain, normally occupied to his right, and I wordlessly dropped into it. Alex slid a hand through his dark hair, frowning at me.

“Care to explain how the fuck that happened?” Alex asked when Grim didn’t speak and just stared me down.

I sighed. “She was hired by him to take me out,” I told him. Grim grunted, then snatched his cigarettes off the table. If this were any other situation, I’d have laughed at his need to smoke the second something stressful happened, but I knew I was treading on very thin ice with him for this fuck-up. “I don’t know how he found out about me. I didn’t have time to question her.”

“Someone like him probably had connections. I called Copper, and he did some digging with Scorpion—” Scorpion was the president of the Texas Charter of Satan’s Worshipers MC and tech savvy as fuck— “and they found out he has government connections. Don’t know how deep his connections run, but he probably found out you were civilian now and did some digging on you since you lived so close to him.”

“We’re running facial recognition on the woman you brought here,” Alex continued as the smoke from Grim’s cigarette rose between us. I waved it away. “We should have a name here soon, as well as some information on her. She seem pro?”

I nodded. “The only reason I noticed her was because she accidentally stepped on a twig. It gave away her position. She had a knife at the ready. Had I not noticed her, my death would have been upon me before I was even fully aware I was dying. She’s definitely a fucking pro.”

“Fuck,” Grim swore, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose. His burner phone went off before he could say anything more. He pulled it from his pocket, glanced at the screen, and answered the call. Tossing the device on the table, he said, “We’re here.”

“Your girl is Solace Dukes,” Scorpion said. Alex sighed. Grim reached for another cigarette. His first one wasn’t even completely finished yet. “She’s the daughter of Stewart Dukes—the CEO of Dukesuor. She’s twenty-seven years old. Her parents divorced when she was fourteen. He sent her off to the same institution Julian trained with in the government as soon as she graduated high school. She works solely for him, and he pays her tens of thousands of dollars for every kill. Looks like she pays a lot for care for her mother, who is mentally unwell and requires around the clock care.”

Grim pointed his unlit cigarette at me. “If you were any-fucking-one else,” he growled at me, “I’d put a bullet through your skull for this bullshit.”

“She didn’t even show up in the paperwork you gave me,” I snapped, getting agitated, too. “Had she been in that fucking paperwork, I could’ve done my homework on her.”

“He was a kill?” Scorpion asked before Grim could do something—like put a bullet through my skull. When none of us answered him, he heaved a loud sigh. “Well, the reason she doesn’t show up is the same reason Julian doesn’t. The government made her disappear.”

That made sense. Everything I had was technically under someone else’s name in this club, even if I paid for it. I didn’t have a social security number any longer. My birth certificate was absolutely worthless. Under US laws, I was here illegally, and to any government agency, I didn’t exist.

Understandable the same had happened to her.

“How did you find her?” I asked.

Scorpion snorted. “I hacked into the military’s database. How the fuck else would I find her if she didn’t exist otherwise?”

“We’ve got two options here,” Alex spoke up. “We take her out, too, or we keep her here and convince her to keep her mouth shut about Julian and this club. Scorpion, do you think there’s any love lost between her and Stewart?”

“No clue,” Scorpion told him. “That’s something you’ll have to find out on your own. But if she interfered with Julian’s kill...”

Yeah... she might have cared about him. Fuck .

I leaned back in my seat and scrubbed my hands down my face.

The pretty ones were always the most fucking trouble.

CHAPTER 5

Solace

I was boiling . I'd never been so angry in my life. Julian mother fucking McKenzie had destroyed everything tonight. Not only would my mother be at home panicking because I wasn't going to be home on time, which would send her into a spiral that would require more medications and sedatives to keep her calm, but my paycheck to take care of her was gone .

How the fuck was I supposed to cover her care now that Julian had taken out my father? I didn't have to see his body to know he was dead. There'd been no mistaking that gunshot as I laid on that fucking couch, bound and unable to escape or stop him. The bindings around my wrists and arms were inescapable.

Julian was a pro in every sense of the word, and I hadn't been prepared nearly enough to take on someone of his magnitude. He'd known my knife was coming without even opening his eyes. Had halted me with his eyes closed, no hesitation in his movement.

I'd been set up for failure from the get-go. I didn't know where he got that kind of training. The only time I'd seen anyone with that level of skill had been in the training camp my father had sent me to after I graduated. Those people were top-tier assassins. The best of the best of the best. Finding someone else in the game better than them would be near impossible.

I wiggled, trying to get more comfortable on the hard, metal chair Julian had

deposited me into, but it was futile. I was tired, my ass was hurting, and my arms and legs were beginning to go numb. Not to mention, the taste of the bandana in my mouth was getting really fucking old.

The door to the basement I'd been left in opened, and three pairs of feet began making their way down the stairs. A light flickered on, and I squinted, momentarily blinded. My eyeballs burned as they tried adjusting to the new lighting. Once I could see, even if my eyes were watering, I took in the three men who'd come downstairs.

Julian was easy to spot with his platinum blonde hair and dark eyes. The man standing to the left of him was wearing the president patch on his motorcycle vest. I'd already known Julian was a patched member of the Savage Crows MC from the file I'd been given on him, which meant the president was more than likely Grim.

No one operated in the field I did and hadn't at least heard of Grim. He was a cold-blooded man, and he wasn't afraid to drop the bodies of anyone who got in his way. Whereas Julian and I had been trained by the military, Grim had been trained by the streets.

His presence didn't bode well for me.

The man standing to Julian's right was the vice president, Alex. I only knew his name because of his attachment to Grim and the club. Otherwise, I didn't know a single thing about him.

This had been the group my father had mentioned Julian was tied to. A fucking biker club. A biker club with more connections than the president of the United States himself.

Fuck .

Grim strode forward and removed the bandana from my mouth, tossing it aside. I rolled my jaw around and licked my lips, trying to relieve the ache in my face from my mouth being forced open for so long. He crouched in front of me so we were eye level with each other. His dark eyes were unnerving and sent a trickle of fear rolling down my spine.

“Solace Dukes...” he drawled. I swallowed thickly. It sure as fuck hadn’t taken him long to find out who I was. I’d been careful not to reveal my identity to Julian. “Your father is dead. You know that, yes?” When I nodded, he continued. “Do you know why he was on my hitlist?”

I shook my head. Julian grunted. “He financed a sex trafficking ring in Washington,” Julian answered for Grim. My gut churned, and my face paled. My dad was a piece of shit and a real bad work of art, but he hadn’t been that low of a human being, had he? One look at Julian’s face, then Alex’s, confirmed he was, in fact, that much of a piece of shit.

I shouldn’t have been surprised, but I was. This information was coming out of left field. Stewart had been the kind of man to stick to a routine and never deviate from it. He never seemed to do anything shady.

“I take it you had no clue,” Alex said as he slid his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

“No,” I rasped, my throat too dry for comfort. “I only worked for him because my mother needs the care. He tried cutting her off when I graduated high school. She’s not well.”

“We know,” Grim said. I gritted my teeth. I didn’t like them having information on my mother I hadn’t given them. She was innocent in all of this. “So, now, you have a choice.” I looked back at the president, who was still crouching in front of me, those

dark, unnerving eyes locked on my face. “One, we can put a bullet through your skull and wipe our hands clean of this whole mess.”

I immediately shook my head. I didn’t care about dying. Death never frightened me. I bathed in the blood of my father’s enemies on a monthly, sometimes even weekly, basis. But my mother could not live without me. Who would take care of her? Who would make sure she didn’t end up in an institution or hurt herself?

“My mother?—”

“I’m not done,” Grim snapped. My jaw shut so quickly, my teeth clacked together. I didn’t bow down to anyone, but Grim wasn’t just anyone.

He was a monster, and everyone was a pawn on his chess board.

“You can pledge your allegiance to us, agree to work for my club, and we will take over financing your mother’s care.”

“That’s it?” I asked. Seemed too good to be true, especially coming from a man like him.

“Our list grows daily of people we need taken out,” Julian said. I lifted my head to meet his dark eyes. They were a beautiful shade of brown—almost black. That haunting darkness in them called to me, even when I wanted to hate him. But I was finding that hard to do now that I understood why he’d taken my father out and why it’d been necessary.

Couldn’t hate a man for trying to protect the innocents in this world.

“You were trained by the same government agency I was—” Julian continued—
“which means your skills are top-tier. We can use that.”

“What do you say?” Alex asked. “We’ll give you a trial run. Prove your loyalty to us, and you’ll never have to worry about your mother again.”

“And we’re not in the business of breaking our word. But if you betray us, we’ll make you disappear,” Julian warned me. “So, don’t do something fucking stupid.”

“What’s it going to be, girly?” Grim asked impatiently, drawing my eyes away from the beautiful man who’d taken me captive.

“I’ll take the job,” I answered without hesitation. Being an assassin was what I was good at. It was what I knew . And if I had to continue dropping bodies to take care of my mom, then that was what I would do.

Grim stood, nodding his head. “Smart girl.” Heading for the staircase, he called over his shoulder, “Release her. Alex, get someone to take her home. Julian, get your fucking ass back in that chapel. Copper will be calling soon.”

Julian sighed, his lips tightening. “Fuck,” he finally muttered, heading for the stairs.

Alex clapped a hand to his back as Julian passed him. “Toughen up. You fuck up, you pay the price. Just be glad it’s a phone call and he’s not riding his ass down here.”

Julian just grunted. Alex walked over to me and began undoing the bindings around my wrists and ankles. I breathed a sigh of relief once I was free, moving my extremities to get the blood flowing back to them again and relieve the stiffness in my muscles.

Alex held a hand out to me. “Come on. I’ll give you a ride home. No sense in waking up anyone else when I’m available.”

I eyed his offered hand with distrust for a moment before I grabbed it, allowing him to pull me to my feet.

I had no idea what the future held for me as an employee of the Savage Crows MC. I just hoped I hadn't made a huge mistake.

"Will Grim uphold his word to me?" I asked Alex as we ascended the staircase.

"Grim never says anything he doesn't mean," Alex assured me. "He promised we would provide the finances to take care of your mother, so we'll do that."

"Even if something happens to me?" I asked as I walked through the doorway. I needed to know she'd always be taken care of.

"Yes," Alex promised, pulling his keys from his pocket. "Think of it as a pension for her."

That was good enough for me. Silently, I followed him out of the clubhouse and to an old pick-up truck parked near the garage.

I climbed into the cab, then lifted my wrist, looking at the time on my Rolex. Blowing out a harsh breath, I dropped my arm back to my lap. Hopefully, I made it home before my mom woke up and realized I was late.

CHAPTER 6

Solace

Despite getting very, very little sleep the night before, I was up and awake at six. I had coffee brewing and breakfast just about finished when my mom and her live-in nurse, Claudia, emerged from the hall. Mom smiled at me, and I let a smile of my own tip my lips, even though I felt anything but chipper. I was tired, overwhelmed, and I felt like I was walking on eggshells now that Dad was dead and I worked for the Savage Crows MC.

It was definitely not the way I pictured my life going, but it was going that way, nonetheless. And I didn't have much of a choice in the matter if I wanted my mom to continue receiving the healthcare she needed.

"Good morning, sweetheart," Mom greeted as she took a seat at the coffee table. "How was work?"

"Work was work," I replied, wanting to leave it at that. My mom was aware of what I did for her ex-husband, which was why she panicked so easily when I wasn't home on time. She was always afraid something would happen to me on a job, no matter how highly trained I was. And while I no longer worked for him since he was dead and I now worked for the SCMC, I didn't want to tell her that. I was afraid how she would respond to not only the change in my job working for an entire criminal organization but also knowing her ex-husband was dead.

Mom took the remote Claudia held out to her, and Mom turned on the TV, switching

to the news channel like she did every single morning. And I didn't think anything of it because no one should know my father was dead yet. It wasn't time for him to be at work, so no one should have known he was missing.

But someone had already found him.

"I'm standing in front of the Dukes estate, where first responders have responded to a call for a potential murder. Police sources state they found Stewart Dukes, CEO of Dukesuor, a liquor production company, dead in his home this morning. The investigation is still ongoing..."

I tuned the news reporter out, my gaze immediately locking on my mom. Her lips were trembling, and her hand was shaking around the remote she was still holding pointed at the TV. Tears welled in her gray eyes and slowly trickled down her cheeks.

I opened my mouth to say something, but then, she smiled . Like really fucking smiled. Her smile was so wide, it spread almost ear to ear. And then, she started laughing all while crying. I shot Claudia a panicked look, sure my mother was about to snap, but then, Mom looked at me.

"Did you do it?" she asked.

"No," I said quietly. She knew I wouldn't lie to her. But seeing her so... happy made me wish I'd been the one to do it. To end her misery long ago.

She sniffled and nodded. "Do you know who did?" she asked.

We stared at each other for a moment before I sighed and nodded. "I do."

She tapped the table with her fingertips. "I want to meet them. I want to thank them." She shook her head, a tear rolling down her cheek. I clenched the edge of the

countertop. “I’ve been living in fear of that man for years , terrified he’d come back here and demand we get back together just so he has someone to beat on again.” I swallowed thickly because I never knew she feared that. She had to know I’d never let him near her. But maybe she didn’t. “I’m free , Solace.”

I nodded, my throat suddenly too tight. “You’re free, Mom,” I rasped.

She started laughing and crying again, but this time, I didn’t fear she would snap. This was a woman who’d been living on a knife’s edge for almost my entire life, and now, her abuser was dead. He was no longer walking the earth. He could no longer hurt her. He no longer held any power over her.

Grabbing my phone from my pocket, I looked to Claudia. “Can you plate Mom’s breakfast?”

She smiled at me. “Sure thing, honey.”

I headed toward my room, dialing Alex’s number as I did so. He’d given me his digits before dropping me off late last night. And apart from going to the clubhouse, this was the quickest way to get in touch with Julian.

If my mom wanted to meet him and thank him, I would do my damnest to make it happen.

“Hello?” a sweet woman’s voice answered.

“Um...” I frowned, pulling my phone from my ear to make sure I’d dialed Alex. I definitely had. “I’m looking for Alex. Do I have the wrong number?” I asked once I put the phone back to my ear.

“Not at all,” the woman said. “I’m his wife.” Well, that made sense. “Can I ask who’s

calling?”

“Solace. Please let him know Solace is calling.”

“Sure.” A moment later, I heard low murmurs, and then, the phone was clearly passed off.

“Little early for phone calls,” Alex drawled. “What can I help you with, Solace?” I heard a kid yelling in the background, and then another kid yelled back. Alex sighed. “Make it quick. My kids are re-enacting the world war.”

I snorted. “I need Julian’s number.”

“For?” A kid screamed, and he growled. “Goddammit. Never mind. I don’t care. I’ll text it to you.”

With that, he hung up the phone. A moment later, my phone pinged with Julian’s contact information. After saving it to my contacts, I called him. He answered on the fourth ring sounding more asleep than he was awake, and the sound was sexy enough that my belly clenched.

Christ . Not only was he the finest man to walk the earth, but he also had to sound like pure sex? It wasn’t fair.

Fuck knew I’d bang him like a screen door the first opportunity I got.

“This better be life or death,” he growled.

“Julian?” He grunted. “It’s Solace. I... I have a favor to ask of you.”

He groaned overdramatically. “This couldn’t wait? It’s not even seven in the fucking

morning yet, and I got bitched out for two hours last night because of you. Let a man get some sleep, doll.”

“You should have been on your Ps and Qs,” I retorted. He snorted, not even the least bit offended. “My mom would like to meet you. Stewart’s death has hit the news, and she saw it this morning.”

He made a small noise, something akin to a grunt but not quite. “Why me? Shouldn’t she hate me?”

“No,” I said quietly. “She’d like to thank you.”

He huffed a laugh. “That’s a fucking first.” My lips twitched. I knew as well as he did that in this business, we usually weren’t thanked for what we did. “But yeah, doll. I’ll meet her. Just shoot me a text with the time and your address, since I assume dinner will be at your place. And for the love of God,” he added before I could say anything in response, “do not call me before ten A.M. again unless you or someone else is dying, ‘kay?”

I scoffed. “You can be a real douchebag. You know that?”

He hummed. “One of a kind, doll.”

He hung up the phone before I could even open my mouth. I glared down at the screen.

“Asshole,” I muttered. But at least he’d agreed. That was about the only thing Julian Fine-as-Fuck-Asshole McKenzie had working in his favor.

CHAPTER 7

Julian

“Where are you headed?” Grave asked from where he was lounging back against the bar. Bones, his wife, was pouring two fingers of whiskey into a glass. Their daughter and her dog were MIA, probably somewhere playing with the other kids. School was out for the day for some random student holiday, so the clubhouse was a bustle of wives and children, a stark contrast to how calm it usually was when the kids were in school.

“Yeah—thought you were on punishment,” Bones teased.

I flipped her the middle finger. She pretended to catch it and shove it down between her tits where she tended to store everything else because God forbid she carry a purse. I rolled my eyes. “I’m going to Solace’s.”

“Oooh,” Grave said, drawing out the sound as he stood a little straighter, his interest definitely more piqued than it’d been a moment before. “Spill the beans. Because from what I heard, that girl walked out of here hating your fucking guts last night.”

“Christ, you all gossip like old women,” I griped. “She called and asked me to dinner with her mom because her mom wanted to thank me.” I smirked. “Some people in this world appreciate the hard work I do.”

“Hard work.” Bones snorted. “Get the fuck out of here, man. Your job is not hard.”

Once upon a time, Bones used to do the same kind of work, except the streets had trained her, just like they had Grim. She'd been a lone wolf and the person people called when they wanted someone taken out. She'd earned the club's favor when she rescued Grim and Scab's wife, Katyushka, from being buried alive. But she hadn't been fully trusted until she decided to give up that life and settle down here, taking a job in Grave's garage. And from there, the two of them had been inseparable.

I gave a dramatic gasp and pressed my hand over my chest. "I beg your finest pardon?" I asked in the poshest voice I could manage. "How dare you insult my job like that?"

Bones laughed and tossed back the whiskey she'd poured. I turned on my heel, heading for the door once again. "I'll probably head back to the city tonight," I told them. "Tell Trixie to stop cleaning my room. She's not my fucking maid." Alex's wife, Trixie, had a habit of wanting to take care of literally everyone, but it wasn't her job to do so. If I was gone for weeks and my room got covered in a layer of dust, I was capable of cleaning it myself. She didn't need to be overdoing herself just because she thought she needed to show us all love through acts of service.

Grave snorted. "Yeah, good luck with that one."

He wasn't wrong. I knew he'd relay the message for me, but I also knew my room would be spotless whenever I decided to crash at the clubhouse again. Trixie never listened, and Alex would let her do whatever made her happy.

The house Solace lived in was small and quaint. She lived on the outskirts of the city in a single story, white brick home with blue shutters. Her driveway was paved, and she was surrounded by trees on all sides. It was secluded but still close enough to the city that she could get what she needed without being inconvenienced by the trip. A damn good location if I'd ever seen one.

I imagined she probably bought the place for her mom. I imagined living in the city with sirens wailing at all hours of the day and night, horns blaring, and people constantly coming and going up and down the streets wouldn't be good for her. Hell, the only reason I tolerated it was because my apartment had sound-proofed walls. I didn't hear anything happening outside. A bomb could go off, and so long as my building didn't feel the effects of it, I would remain unaware until I ventured from my apartment.

I eased my bike to a stop beside a black sedan and turned it off. The front door of the house opened just as I slid off my bike. Pulling my helmet off my head, I drank in the beautiful woman standing on the cement porch, pulling the door shut behind her. Black leggings clung to her long, shapely legs, and a white tank top outlined the dip in her waist and her breasts, which were just large enough to fit in my hands and tease me.

The woman was fucking perfection. Too bad I was pretty sure she hated me. I had no doubt the only reason she was allowing me into her home was because her mom had asked it of her. It was clear she had a soft spot for her.

"Come on in," she told me. "I just got back with the pizza."

Pizza was good. Pizza was always good.

"How'd you get your car back?" I asked. I'd left it wherever the hell she'd parked it at the night before. It hadn't been my concern, and by the time Copper got done chewing my ass out, I honestly had been too tired to mention anything about it to Grim.

"It was here when I woke up this morning." She pushed open the door and walked in ahead of me. "I figured it was Grim's doing." No doubt. Now that she was attached to the club, he would have been covering his bases last night to make sure she was

protected, too. She pointed to where shoes were piled by the door. “Shoes off.”

“Yes, ma’am.” She shot me an annoyed look, but I just grinned back at her. Rolling her eyes, she turned and strode off, giving me the opportunity to admire her ass. Fuck, what I wouldn’t give to grip those globes in my hands as I fucked into her tight, wet heat.

“Stop staring at my ass,” she snapped over her shoulder without turning to look at me.

I huffed. “It’s not my fault you’ve got an ass worthy of being stared at,” I retorted.

Her surprised laugh had me grinning. After my boots were off, I padded across the house in my socks, stopping in the kitchen. A woman who was essentially just an older version of Solace was sitting at the kitchen table, but she stood when I entered, a warm smile tilting her lips. “You must be Julian,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am,” I answered, letting my mask fall into place, an easy smile tilting my lips. I didn’t want to do anything that might frighten her, and I knew my hard, blunt personality could do that sometimes, especially since I barely felt human seventy-five percent of the time. “Julian McKenzie.”

“You killed my ex-husband,” she said. Solace winced, shooting me an apologetic look, but I ignored her. I didn’t mind it when people were blunt. When they spoke exactly what was on their minds, there was little room for misunderstanding.

Nodding, I confirmed, “I did.”

She stepped forward and hugged me. I froze at the contact, not sure how to act for a moment, but then, I slowly folded my arms around her, letting her have this moment. I didn’t know what that sick son of a bitch had put her through, but whatever it was

had been bad enough that she felt a need to personally thank me for taking him out.

“Thank you,” she whispered, her words muffled by my leather cut. “He was an evil, vindictive man. So, thank you.”

I slowly released her and stepped back. “No need to thank me, Miss...”

“Call me Ivy,” she said.

I smiled. “There’s no need to thank me, Ivy,” I assured her. “I was just taking the trash out.”

When she laughed, Solace smiled, and I swear to fuck, I got sucker-punched right in my solar plexus because suddenly, I couldn’t breathe.

There was no denying Solace was a sexy as fuck woman, but when she smiled and her guard was down, she was fucking beautiful . And me? I was a goddamn goner.

A woman who could take my shit, dish it back out, could kill with the best of them, and was soft for her family?

She was fucking perfect . And I wanted her.

CHAPTER 8

Julian

Solace walked with me out of the house, quietly shutting the front door behind her. Her mom had gone to bed shortly after dinner, claiming her medication made her sleepy. I'd bid her goodnight, let her hug me and thank me once again, and then helped Solace clean up the kitchen. Surprisingly, she hadn't been snarky the entire evening, and when she happened to catch me staring at her—because fuck me, it was damn near impossible not to—she would just look away without saying a word.

Wasn't sure if that meant she was softening toward me or if she was just waiting for her mom to be out of ear shot before she ripped me one about as good as Copper had the night before. I had no doubt that she could and would given the opportunity.

"Pizza was good," I said, wanting to make conversation as we made our way toward my bike.

She cut me the side eye. "I didn't even make it. I literally only ordered it and picked it up."

I snorted. "Just take the compliment, doll."

She rolled her eyes. I turned to face her once we'd reached my bike and shoved my hands into my hoodie pockets. "There's no hard feelings about last night, is there?"

She sighed. "I want to have hard feelings, but honestly, if I were in your shoes, I'd

have probably done the same thing. You were trying to protect yourself and complete your job, and you were eliminating a man who had a hand in trafficking people. Besides, I can't really harbor any feelings about it when we're literally in the same field." She shrugged one slender shoulder. "If I'd have stopped you, my mom wouldn't have had this day." She looked up at me, warmth residing in those usually hard, cold, gray eyes. "I've never seen her this happy, Julian. Because of you, my mom might actually heal. She might actually get better and won't need around the clock care anymore. So... thank you."

I grinned at her. "That sounded painful to say."

She lightly shoved me, but a smile played at the corners of her mouth. "It was."

I let my eyes trail over her curvy figure before I turned and grabbed my helmet off the seat. She gripped my sleeve when I moved to straddle my bike. Slowly, I turned my head to face her, arching one eyebrow at her in question.

"Yes?" I asked when she only slowly released me and took a step back, shaking her head as if she were ridding herself of some ridiculous thought. "What is it, doll?"

"It's nothing," she muttered, turning and heading back for the house. I sighed and straddled my bike. The beast rumbled beneath me when I turned it on, and after I slid my helmet on and flipped my visor down, I glanced toward the house, finding her standing on the porch and just... watching me.

I cocked my head to the side the slightest bit before smirking, even though she couldn't see it behind my helmet. I'd let her stew until I got home. And then, I'd shoot her a text, inviting her over, which would leave the ball in her court.

It was clear what she wanted from me. We'd both been ready to kill last night, and only one of us had gotten the opportunity to do so. Now, I bet she had a lot of pent-up

energy in her bloodstream that she needed to release, and I was all too fucking willing to let her use me.

Solace

I stared up at my bedroom ceiling, wondering if I'd made a mistake or made the right choice in letting Julian ride off back home. He was attractive as fuck, and he'd been so good to my mom tonight. And honestly, any man who had patience for her, especially when she asked so many questions and did everything in her power to paint him as a hero, was instantly a good man in my book.

Julian was a murderer—more than likely a serial murderer at this point in his life. He couldn't take a fucking thing serious, and he wore that cocky ass smirk of his like it was painted onto his lips. But when he thought no one was paying attention, his mask slipped, and he looked as void and dead as I was sure his victims looked when he was done with them.

Why was I attracted to that? I should want someone that was emotionally available after how my father had treated my mother while I was growing up. But despite Julian's lack of emotional development, I knew without a shred of doubt that he'd never hurt me like that. Even when I'd damn near almost killed him, he hadn't harmed me. He'd simply put me in a chokehold, then tied me up. Fuck, when I came to while he was still upstairs, I was on the couch, and he'd even put a pillow beneath my head.

That meant he was considerate... right? I was probably reaching far and wide for reasons I should like him besides the fucked-up reasons I did, but I wanted him.

My phone buzzed beside me on the bed. Sighing and hoping it wasn't Grim asking me to take on a job already, I grabbed my phone.

Julian's name stared back at me.

Quickly, I unlocked my phone and opened his message.

Julian:

If you want me, come to me.

He'd included his address, his building code, and his apartment code. I had no doubt he'd change it by morning if I didn't show. Hell, even if I did decide to show up, he'd change the codes anyway so his apartment wasn't compromised.

Fuck, even I changed my codes weekly. No one in this business got too comfortable.

I reread his message again two more times before huffing and rolling out of bed. He'd put the ball in my court, and fuck it, I was taking it while I had the opportunity. If he intended for this to just be a one-night stand... well, we'd see about that.

If that was the case, he was going to find out it wasn't so easy to get rid of me.

CHAPTER 9

Julian

I tilted my head back, letting the hot water from the shower run over my face. I'd sent my message to Solace an hour ago, and when she left me on read and didn't respond, I took her silence for what it was.

She had no plans of showing.

That didn't mean I would stop chasing her. I would just give her space tonight. I was a predator, and I was damn good at stalking my prey. I knew how to wait them out. It was literally what I got paid to do. Learn everything about them, then pounce when they least expected it.

And I had every intention of doing so to Solace Dukes.

Something about her had stuck out to me the moment I spotted her in Stewart's office that day. I'd pushed her out of my mind because I had a job to do and figured I'd never see her again. But now, she had my number, her mom absolutely loved me, and she was tied to the Savage Crows MC for life.

There was nowhere for her to run. Because even if she did try to run, Grim and Copper would send me after her.

There was no escaping me. It was only a matter of time before I got what I wanted from her.

The shower door was suddenly pulled open, and I opened my eyes, turning my head to look at the naked beauty in front of me. Every single bit of her beautiful body was exposed. I licked my lips as I ran my eyes over her, reaching up to slick my drenched blonde hair back from my face. “Thought you weren’t coming,” I rasped.

She hummed and stepped inside the shower, pulling the door closed behind her. “And let this opportunity pass me by? I think not. I just had to let my mom know I might not be home when she wakes up in the morning, and she interrogated me a bit until I came clean about where I was going when I didn’t have a job.”

“Oh, yeah?” I asked, reaching out to slide my hands along her ribcage. I let my palms move down over the dip in her waist to the curve of her hips. She sucked in a sharp breath when I yanked her so close, I couldn’t tell where her body ended and mine began. She fit against me fucking perfectly, all the pretty ink on her body clashing with mine. “Did you tell her you were coming here to get fucked down?”

She barked out a laugh, tossing her head back and revealing that pretty throat to me. Leaning down, I flicked my tongue over her damp skin, and she moaned softly. “I only told her I was coming to see you. The interrogation ended there.”

I smirked. “If only she knew how dangerous I was...” I murmured, leaning in to skim my lips over hers. Her mouth parted on a shaky exhale, and her nipples hardened, pressing against my upper abdomen. Even though she was taller than average for a woman, I still towered over her a bit.

“Danger is my middle name,” she whispered.

I growled and kissed her again, this time deeper and more thoroughly. I licked into her mouth, memorizing every smooth bit of flesh, the texture of her tongue, and how her teeth were aligned. I wanted to know every part of her. Commit her to memory. So on nights I didn’t have her, I could still feel like I did.

I was already fucking addicted.

She moaned, and her hands landed on my back. I groaned when she began running those calloused palms over my heated, damp skin. There was something about a woman having hands that showed how hard she worked that turned me the fuck on. And there was no denying that this bombshell of a woman worked hard for everything she had and everything she wanted.

She sucked in a sharp breath when I pressed her against the tiled wall. Ripping my mouth from hers, I lowered my head, sucking and licking at her damp neck and shoulder, leaving my marks all over her soft skin. Once tonight was over, anyone would be able to take one look at her and know she was a taken woman.

Solace clung to me, soft whimpers and moans spilling from her lips as I did my damnest to devour her.

I couldn't get enough. I would never get enough.

"Julian..." she panted, her nails scouring my chest. "I didn't come here to be teased."

"I'm trying to take my time," I growled. "I need to savor you, doll."

She gripped my hair and pulled my head up. Her pupils were blown wide, almost completely taking over her gray irises. She licked her kiss-swollen lips, and it was by pure control I'd harnessed over years that I didn't lean in and kiss her tantalizing mouth again.

"Savor me some other time," she breathed. "I want you now."

I arched a brow at her as I leaned back a little to look down at her. "Will there be another time?"

“Fuck yes,” she snapped, getting irritated with me. “Try running from me, Julian, and you’ll realize I’m just as unhinged as you are.”

I grinned at her, my smile purely fucking feral. “Say less, doll,” I growled. Then, I spun her around to face the wall. Gripping her hips, I yanked her ass back, then slipped my fingers between her thighs, moaning low in my throat when I found her soaked and ready for me.

“You on birth control?” I asked her. “Because I’m gonna be pissed if I have to get out of this shower to get a condom.”

“Yes, I’m on fucking birth control,” she snapped. “Stop fucking around, Jul— Oh !” she cried out when I slid my cock home inside her tight sheath without warning. She moaned, her head falling forward. She braced her arms against the wall as I eased out and drove back into her, groaning at how fucking good she felt.

“So perfect,” I rasped. “So hot and tight and wet . Your pussy is fucking crying for my dick, doll.”

She nodded, moaning like a whore as I fucked her hard and fast. Neither of us were going to last long. Already, I could feel her drawing closer to the edge. She was so wet, her pussy made a squelching sound every time I slammed my cock deep inside her.

“Need you to come for me, doll,” I growled, reaching around her to circle my fingers over her clit. She cried out, her pussy tightening around me. “That’s it,” I crooned. “Milk my cock. I need to come inside of you. Come on, doll.”

“Julian,” she moaned, and then, she was coming, her thighs trembling. Her pussy tightened around me, then loosened, then tightened again as she flooded my cock. With a snarl, I pumped into her three more times, then came as well, growling her

name and burying my face against her back.

“You’re mine,” I panted, peppering kisses along her shoulder blades and down her spine. “All fucking mine. And if you try to run from me, Solace, I will hunt you down. Every. Mother. Fucking. Time.”

She nodded. “Same goes for you,” she said, breathless.

I grinned. “Oh, doll, I’m not fucking going anywhere.” Easing out of her, I spun her around to face me, then lifted her, pulling her thighs around my hips. Her eyes went wide when I slid back inside of her, not nearly done with her yet. “You’re stuck with me.”

She moaned, her eyelids fluttering. “Good,” she breathed.

Solace

Mom laughed as the kids played musical chairs using the chairs from the tables in the main room of the clubhouse. It was Ink and Reina's son, Elijah's, birthday today, and all the guys had pulled the kids from school so Elijah could have a birthday party on his birthday. There would be another one this weekend for Elijah's friends from school to attend, but today was just for the club.

And fuck, I loved how big this family was. And despite how I'd come to be integrated with them, as soon as Julian made it known I was his old lady—a term I despised so he used it as often as he could just to irritate me—they welcomed me and my mom with open arms. Mom even eventually moved into the clubhouse when Alex offered her the opportunity, and now, she and Claudia lived here. There was always someone around to help if needed, and Mom felt safe here. And I was able to live my life without constantly having to worry about her.

She had come a long way in her recovery after Julian took out my father, but she still suffered from PTSD and flashbacks, which led to panic attacks more often than not. But everyone was patient with her, and it just made me love this big found family more.

I'd never been grateful for fucking up a job before, but I was now. Had I not stepped on that twig and revealed myself to Julian, I wouldn't have this. Mom wouldn't have this.

We were happy. We were loved. We had everything Stewart had always made sure we never had while he'd been alive.

And to think that son of a bitch had even tried taking Julian from me. Granted, Julian and I didn't even know each other at the time, but I refused to be sensible about it. I hoped that mother fucker was rolling over in his grave. Because not only were me and Julian together—fucking married, at that—but Stewart's death had been ruled a suicide. They said he laid in bed and shot himself in the head. They pinned it down to too much stress at work, especially when it was revealed that Dukesuor wasn't doing as well as he had led the world to believe.

My father had been in the midst of filing for bankruptcy.

Everything about Stewart had come to light—his bad business habits, abusing my mother, neglecting me. His involvement in the sex trafficking ring had come to light, too. The only reason I hadn't been exposed for being his personal hitwoman was because Julian had made phone calls to make all of that disappear.

I didn't know who I owed for that, but Julian told me not to worry about it. It'd taken me a minute to let it go, but I eventually had. I trusted Julian, and if he told me not to worry about it, then I wouldn't.

“You good?” Julian asked, appearing behind me out of nowhere. Pure training kept me from jumping in surprise. His hands landed on the counter on either side of me, and the front of his body pressed against my back. He smelled like expensive leather, his teak and sandalwood cologne, and the smell of the barbeque pit. Resting his chin on my shoulder, he turned his head and pressed a kiss to my throat. “You look lost in thought.”

“I'm fine,” I assured him. Turning in his arms, I rested my back against the counter and looked up at him, bracing my hands behind me on the counter beside his. “Grim gave me a new job for tonight. You joining?”

He arched a brow at me. “When the fuck do I ever pass up the opportunity to watch you play the club's personal little reaper?”

He never did. He loved watching me work, and then, he'd drive us home on his bike to our apartment, where he'd lay me out on the nearest surface and fuck me so good, I couldn't walk and I could barely remember my name.

"What time are you leaving?" he asked.

"Probably about midnight. I need to do some recon on her, so it's going to be a long night."

"Oh, they're a female? What'd she do to piss the club off? It's not very often Grim or Copper orders a hit on a woman," he mused.

"Child pornography." Even as I said the two words, they tasted like shit on my tongue. "Scorpion found her on the dark web when he was doing some digging for Johnston." Johnston Trim was the president of the mother charter of the Satan's Worshippers MC. He was a cold-blooded man, and the only person he truly gave a fuck about in this world was his wife. He'd watch everything burn to ashes so long as he got to keep her. But his wife was pretty chill. She and I got along great.

Julian's lips twisted in disgust. "Want help?"

I snorted and patted his chest. "Nah, baby. I've got this." Leaning up on my tiptoes, I pressed a quick kiss to his lips. "I'm going to catch a quick nap before we need to do the presents thing and eat. Come get me when it's near that time?"

He nodded and stepped back. "Sure thing, doll." When I moved to pass him, he smacked my ass hard enough to make me yelp. I spun around to face him again, glaring as I rubbed my abused ass cheek.

"What the fuck?" I snapped at him. I hated when he did that.

He winked at me. "Love you, doll."

I huffed. “Fuck you. My ass is going to bruise.” His mouth curved into that grin that was purely feral. A monster. The smile of a predator. And fuck, it made my nipples hard every single fucking time. “I love you, too, but really. Fuck you.”

His laugh echoed behind me as I made my way toward the stairs that would lead to our apartment.