



Johnny B (Young Outlaws Mc: Nevada #3)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: The president of the Young Outlaws Nevada had made it clear that if Johnny B, a member of the Florida chapter, came back to Reno, he would end him.

But did Smoke really think that he would stay away?

When the opportunity comes knocking for JB to join a handful of his club brothers on a road trip to help out the western chapter, he jumps at the chance.

He knew it would be only a matter of time before he'd lay eyes on Scarlett, the red-headed beauty he hungers for, but he never expected it to be so soon, or that she'd shoot him down with little remorse. Harsh words and murderous looks leave him licking his wounds, realizing he's waited too long to make his intentions clear.

However, with the threat of the Death Valley Irish still looming over the YOMC, JB comes up with a plan to gain Smoke's ratification and a second chance with Scarlett.

That's if he doesn't end up dead first.

This book is a MC romantic suspense, love story containing dark elements.

JOHNNY B is the third and final book of the trilogy of the YOMC Nevada series.

You do not have to read the Florida series to enjoy the Nevada series or vice versa.

However, some of characters from the Florida chapter do have cameo roles in this series.

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Chapter

One

Johny B

Standing just outside the open door and out of sight, I listen in on the conversation inside the room.

“What’s going on?” I instantly recognize Smoke’s deep, raspy voice as he questions the only two men in the room with him.

Mammoth and Stone insisted I stay outside, giving them the chance to break the news of my being here. Damage limitation, they reckon, and seeing as Smoke hates my fucking guts, they’re not wrong.

“With everything that’s been going on, I haven’t had the chance to warn you...” Stone starts to explain before he’s interrupted.

“Spit it out, will yah,” Smoke barks back at his VP. “Whatever it is, compared to the day this club has had to endure, it will be cake.”

Patience is not something I have, so I take a few steps forward, push the door fully open and walk into the room. I know I look good, not a hair out of place, clean-cut face that makes the females cream, and a swagger that pisses off many, but shit, I can’t help being fucking hot as fuck. I just make the most of what God graced me with.

“Can’t deny that women love some of my sugar, still that’s the first time I’ve ever been considered as cake.” I say as I swagger into the room.

“JB, I told you to wait outside,” Mammoth groans at me as I take my place beside him.

“You know how I like to make an entrance,” I respond. “Always popping up when you least expect it, nonetheless, when it seems to be most needed.” I turn my attention to the man who is throwing daggers at me with his dark, thunderous eyes. “You know that, Smoke.” I add, referring to a situation in our past.

“Johnty fucking Bravo,” he hisses through his teeth. “You were told to stay away, so I suggest you turn your ass around and get the fuck out of my club; out of town, before I put a bullet in that pretty head of yours.”

“Aww, come on Smoke, it’s been months. Surely, it’s water under the bridge by now,” I tease. “Not that I was expecting a welcoming committee, but in my book, you still owe me.”

“The only thing I owe you is a fucking beating until you take your last breath.” Smoke pushes out of his seat and swiftly moves around the table until he’s right in front of me. Smoke is a tall guy, but so am I, so has negligible effect on me. I retain my usual cocky stance as he barks into my face. “Now I come to think of it, a bullet to the head would be far too quick and nowhere near painful enough.”

“JB,” Mammoth grabs the neck of my cut and pulls me back, putting some space between me and the man who wants me dead. “Fuck off into the bar while I handle this.”

“Sure thing, Brother.” I reply cheerfully, a half-smile playing on my lips. I refuse to react to the hate that is coming from Smoke. If I did, and let myself give into the evil

that I've learned to control since I was a kid, then this room would end up looking like a blood bath.

"Catch up with you soon, Smoke," I wink as I back-step out of the room. I can hear the barrage of curse words that follow me, even when the door shuts behind me. Smoke is raging, making me realize that my return, my plan, is not going to be easy. But I'm not a quitter, and I have a level of determination that is second to none.

"Would you get me a bourbon, darlin'?" I ask the pretty redhead behind the bar.

"Sure thing, handsome." She grabs a glass from a pile on the side and after sweeping the cloth she has in her other hand around the sides, she snatches up a bottle of Bulleit and pours me a healthy shot. She slides it over the bar towards me, then cocks her head to one side. "Nice to see you again, JB. You here for long?"

"That, my darlin', is the million-dollar question." I take a long draw from the glass, letting the liquid coat my tongue before swallowing it. It has the perfect burn as it makes its way down into my gut, leaving just the right amount of warmth.

"You want some company?" she asks me, pushing her chest out, giving me the full experience of the round dome of her tits and the deep valley of her cleavage.

"You're gorgeous, you know that, right?" I smile back at her. Her cheeks pink at my compliment. "Believe me, I'm tempted, but my head is elsewhere and unless I can give a lady like you my full attention, then I have to politely decline."

"I ain't a lady," she laughs a little too loudly, a hint of self-hate in there, too. Even though I never spent much time with Ginger when I was here before, I get the impression that her background is something she tries to hide and never talks about. My guess is that she's had the kind of upbringing that is as far away from club life as corn dogs are from Beluga caviar. She hides it well.

“Don’t sell yourself short, Ginger.” I drain the glass in front of me before I get to my feet. “You’re going to be one hell of an old lady one day, and the brother who gets to claim you will be one fucking lucky bastard.” I slap the palm of my hand hard onto the bar top before walking away.

I push through the doors that lead back out of the clubhouse, and the air, still tainted with acrid smoke from the fire, hits my nostrils.

I lean against the porch railings, looking out over the yard. A few of the guys are doing what they can to clean up any lingering evidence of the explosion, but anyone who hasn’t spent any time at the club before wouldn’t notice a thing.

The entrance gates still look on the tilt, but along with the prospect that’s been posted there, it’s doing a good enough job to keep out any unwanted visitors.

The wreck that housed the explosive device was the first thing dealt with. Within minutes, a tow truck turned up and removed the heap of burned-out metal. Leaving the scorch marks on the asphalt as the only remaining evidence on the perimeter. The rest of the chaos had been confined to the MC’s grounds.

My heart bleeds for the loss of Cub. The kid was a bundle of energy, fun, and mischief. He’ll be greatly missed. None more so than by his father and club secretary, Wolf. The fucker, Paddy, also known as Jimmy Dunne, and the Death Valley Irish, who is undoubtedly behind this, are not going to know what’s hit them. They might think that they’re only fucking with Smoke and his club. Nah, not a fucking chance. They’ve fucked up big time, because you fuck with one of us, you get the wrath of every single chapter, every single brother. The Young Outlaws are family, and we fight as one, which is why my Prez, Cannon, had us here.

Only a handful of us had endured the long journey over to Nevada. Mammoth’s intention is to weigh up the situation first and report back to Cannon. But I’ll bet my

right nut that as soon as he hears about what's gone down here today, he'll call a meet with the other chapters of the MC.

This could be the start of one hell of a war and could be problematic when it comes down to it, and the reason why I'd all but begged Prez, against his better judgement, to let me tag along with Mammoth, Masher, and Doc.

Mammoth bursts out of the door and comes to stand beside me. He swipes a hand down his face before addressing me.

"Fuck JB, have you got a death wish or what?"

"He calmed down any?" I ask, unable to hide the snigger that goes along with it.

"Only because I put my neck on the line, and told him that you'd stay well away from Velvet Reds." He turns towards me so he gets my side view. "Don't make me out to be a fucking liar, JB, or I'll be the one holding you down while Smoke beats the living fuck out of you. You get me?"

I turn to face him full-on, my expression as serious as it gets. "You know I respect the hell out of you, don't you, Mammoth?" He casts me a questioning glance. "And because of that, I won't make you any promises I can't guarantee I won't break."

"JB," he hisses between his teeth. "Don't push your fucking luck. The last thing we need is a shitstorm between chapters. With everything that's going on, we need to stick together."

"Exactly." And with that, I take the few steps down from the building and decide to walk away before I get cornered into giving away more than I care to. At least for now, anyway.

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Chapter

Two

Smoke

When I step outside, that fucker JB is nowhere to be seen, and it's a good fucking job because I can't guarantee that I will stick to the agreement I made with Mammoth if I see the cocky little fucker. Mammoth has been warned to keep a tight leash on JB and to make sure that he stays out of my fucking way.

Him being here, in Nevada, is a problem that I sure as fuck don't need, especially while all the mayhem is going down with Dunne.

What the actual fuck!

I take long strides up the hill towards the cabin. Each step I take bringing me nearer to where I know Tenley is, and my need to close the door on all the crap that is currently invading my life. The weight on my shoulders is not visible but is real and a heavy load to bear.

I don't knock before I push open the door and step inside. I do, however, take the time to kick my boots off before making my way further into the house.

"Everything okay?" Oriana asks as she looks over the back of the couch where she sits with Sasha, watching some animated program on the TV. I don't respond, my focus firmly fixed on Tenley, standing at the other side of the kitchen counter, a bowl

of popcorn balanced in her hand.

I step around the counter, take the bowl from her hand and fill it with mine, letting my fingers lace with hers. As I lead her past the couch, I hand the popcorn over to Oriana without breaking pace, continuing towards Tenley's room.

"Smoke?" she questions but follows me willingly.

Once we enter her room, the door firmly closed behind us, I crowd her, wrapping her within my arms. When I drop my head to her shoulder, she tilts her head, giving me access. I nuzzle my face into her neck, my lips resting on her soft skin as I breathe in her intoxicating scent.

"Smoke, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. Everything." I admit easier than I should. "You smell so fucking good." I inhale deeper, letting her goodness seep into my mind, dulling the crazy that is my life. I tighten my hold on her, not wanting to lose the escape she's giving me. She winces. Quickly, I drop my arms, taking a step back.

"Fuck, your arm," I gently run my fingers over her forearm. "How is it?"

"It's fine. The doctor says it's not broken, just badly bruised. It will take a few days of rest, but it should be as good as new." Hooking her good arm around my back, she steps forward until her tits are crushed against my chest. "So, don't you be worrying about me. What's got you so wound up?" she asks softly.

"It's a long story, and not one that I want to go into right now." I brush my lips against hers, intending to take it further, but she tilts her head back and fixes me with an intense look.

“You want to be with me?” she questions, her eyes searching mine for the truth. Only a few hours ago, in the very same room, I’d made clear my feelings for her and that I wanted her to be mine.

“You doubt me?” My brows knit together as I fire back my own question. “Didn’t I make that clear to you?”

“Then don’t keep things from me.” Her lips fall into a soft pout as, once again, she tries to read my expression. “No secrets Smoke, no lies. Whatever you tell me will go no further, I swear on my life. You need to trust me. If you’re serious about us, then you need to talk to me. I ain’t going to be no mushroom, kept in the dark and fed shit.”

“No secrets,” I promise. “In time, just not now, because at this moment, all I want to think about is you.” I put an end to any further discussion by covering her lips with mine, this time with a determination that she’s unable to ignore. She gives no resistance when I grab her ass and lift her from the ground. Her legs impulsively wrap around my waist, her hand falling to the back of my neck, fingers weaving into my hair as she deepens the kiss that has escalated into lashing tongues and clashing teeth. It’s like we can’t get close enough.

“I need to feel your skin,” I growl as I walk us both towards the bottom of the bed. When I get us there, I unhook her legs from my waist, sending her feet gently to the floor. “This,” I tug at the fabric of her dress, “needs to come off.” Unwilling to waste any more time, I grab a fistful of the cloth and pull it up and over her head. When I see that she’s not wearing anything other than a tiny triangle of fabric covering her cunt, I move her to sit on the edge of the bed and fall to my knees.

“So fucking perfect,” I whisper as I cover both of her full, round tits with my tattooed hands. The dark ink looking so fucking hot against her unblemished skin. Each pink nipple, hard against my palms, is telling me how aroused she is. “Let me get lost in

you, Tenley?” I want to get so deep into her that nothing else matters, my mind consumed with only her.

“I’m here for you, Smoke. Only you.” The thinnest rim of blue can be seen in her eyes, replaced with dark, enlarged pupils, as she gazes back at me with utter, unadulterated lust. “Take what you need.”

“I’ll take,” I assure her. “But I will give you what you need in return.”

I grab her ass and move us both further up onto the bed. I slip off my cut and lay it on the floor. Tenley’s hands come to the hem of my t-shirt and she impatiently tugs to bring it up. I brush her hand away only so I don’t catch her when I put my hand behind my neck, grab the collar, and pull the whole thing over my head before slinging it to the floor.

“I need to be inside you Tenley, and I’m warning you now, this ain’t going to be some kinda slow and meaningful fuck. It’s going to be fast and hard.” I unfasten my jeans, pushing the waistband over my hips, freeing my rigid cock. It’s so engorged and desperate for release that it pains me. The pang of guilt at taking my fill with little regard to her needs quickly dispels when she opens her legs wide, inviting me in. “Fuck,” I growl out as I pull the already damp scrap of fabric that covers her pussy to the side and slam my cock into her warm, velvety cunt until my balls slap hard against her skin. “Jesus,” I moan out at the same time as she lets out a squeal at the sudden intrusion. “Shit, babe, I’m sorry.” I still and suck in air. The sensation of her wrapped around my cock takes me so close to shooting my load that I have to take a minute. “You feel so fucking good. I’m not going to be able to get you there too, baby, but I’ll make it up to you.” I start to move, and holy fuck, this is better than before. Maybe it’s because I’ve come to terms with the fact that this woman is it for me, and I no longer want to hide that fact. Or could it be that strangely I feel no guilt in loving this woman as deeply as I love Violet?

Is it Love? I know that I can't envisage a life without Tenley in it so I guess it must be.

With every thrust I make, Tenley lets out a moan that does nothing to quench the fire that is burning in my groin. My concern at not being able to last long enough to bring her to the edge was unnecessary. Her body is quivering, and short sharp pants fall from between her open lips as she gets closer and closer, so I slip my hand to where our bodies meet and sweep my thumb back and forth over her clit. Her back arches off the bed. I pump into her faster, and as she screams out, her orgasm hitting, I follow right behind her.

I roll to her side, my back hitting the mattress. I tug in huge lungs full of air and let my head stop spinning from the crazy, euphoric high that's better than any drug I've done in my past. I turn my head to look at her only to find her eyes wide, lips parted as she too tries to catch her breath.

Tenley

I can sense him watching me, although, at this time, I'm not sure if I'm still on this earth or floating with some celestial body in outer space.

I turn my head towards him and meet his gaze.

"Mindfuck!" I voice a little too loudly and quickly slap my hand over my mouth.

The orgasm that has just raged through my body, assaulting my very being, was something magical, and all I want is to repeat the experience daily.

He rolls towards me, takes my hand in his, fingers threading with mine and kisses the back before moving his mouth to mine and kissing me deeply, passionately, with a mind-blowing intensity.

“Darlin’, don’t hold back. Tell me exactly how it is,” he laughs at my outburst. “Come here.” He takes a hold of my hip and pulls me towards him. Arms coming around me, until we’re skin on skin. I lay my head against his chest and tilt my head up to see him.

His hair is one hell of a mess, the long waves falling around his face like an abstract veil. His lids are heavy, as if fighting sleep, and I can barely see the dark color of his eyes. His mouth has the slightest upturn at the edges, and there’s not a hint of a crease on his forehead. I search for the word that would describe him but struggle. Then it comes to me.

Serene.

Smoke, motherfucking president of the nefarious Young Outlaws MC, the man who has an inability to show emotion, and who very rarely wears any kind of expression on his face, is... content, peaceful, and it’s a fucking glorious sight to see.

I snuggle into him further, and in return, he sweeps a kiss against my forehead. It’s not long before his breathing becomes steady. The rhythmic sound has me drifting into a light sleep, too.

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Chapter

Three

Tenley

The sound of a raised voice is what rouses me from my sex-induced nap. As I move to sit up, wondering what all the commotion is about, it's enough to disturb Smoke, too.

"Do you think that they are having a lovers tiff?" he asks drowsily. Stone's deep voice is instantly recognizable, but as the female voice gets louder and footsteps get closer, it's not one I recognize.

"That's not Oriana." Smoke looks at me, his brows pinched.

"Where is he, Stone?" The unknown female voice barks out even louder. "I'm not leaving until I see him with my own eyes."

Smoke's eyebrows shoot up until they're nearly nesting in his hairline, clearly recognizing who the voice belongs to. He moves as if to get up and off the bed, but when the door flies open, he throws himself back flat to the bed and grabs the sheets that had covered us to our waist, pulling them all the way up to his chin.

When I see the stunning redhead standing in the doorway, I'm instantly consumed with jealousy and hatred in equal measure. She's young, younger than me, I'd be guessing at early twenties. Her skin is flawless, like porcelain against her flaming

hair. Lips a perfect bow painted in a vibrant red. She's dressed in tight-fitting washed-out jeans and a white sweater.

She walks into the room and comes to a stop at the bottom of the bed. With feet firmly on the floor, she cocks a hip, her hand resting on it.

"Really?" she raises a brow and purses her lips tightly together as she casts daggers with her eyes at the man lying beside me.

"What the fuck, Scarlett?" He growls at her. "What the hell are you doing here?" He gestures to Stone, who's hovering in the doorway, trying his darndest to stifle the laughter that is clearly bubbling inside him. He looks like he's about to erupt. "Pass me my goddam jeans, will you?"

Scooping them up from the floor, Stone throws them toward the top of the bed. Smoke pulls them under the covers, and we all watch with amusement while he dresses himself without flashing his ass. I'm sure he'd not give a crap if Stone caught a glimpse, and I sure as hell ain't an issue, so I can only assume that Scarlett is the only one Smoke is concerned about.

"What the hell do you expect me to do when I overhear a call from one of the guys saying that there's been an explosion?" I don't know who this woman is, but hell, she's a sassy bitch, and she certainly ain't pulling no punches by the way she talks back at him. I can't help but mentally applaud her for that. "I was worried about you."

"T-shirt," he barks at Stone, but it's Scarlett who scoops it up from the floor and drops it on top of the bed. He reaches to grab it at the same time as he swings his legs over the side of the bed. He pulls the t-shirt over his head before getting to his feet. "Well, as you can see," his voice now softer as he moves towards the pretty woman. "I'm perfectly fine." Scarlett stands in front of him, and when her hands come to rest

on his chest, I blink rapidly. My eyes become moist not only from the threatening tears but from the pain crushing my heart.

“Baby, you know that the second anything should happen to me, Stone would be in touch.” He pulls her into his arms, and I watch on.

Baby. He called her Baby! He’s looking at her like she’s someone special... someone... argh. Why is he looking at her that way, and worst of all, right in front of me with zero attempt at hiding it?

Words linger on my tongue, but I don’t seem to be able to project them. One thing I do know is that I can feel the fire of anger building fast within my belly that I won’t be able to contain for much longer.

“Is it true about Cub?” the infuriating bitch asks him, glancing at him all doe-eyed. “That he’s dead?”

“Yeah, sweetheart. I’m afraid so.” When she lets out a muffled sob, he brings her fully into his arms, crushing her to his chest.

What the fuck. How dare he do that? I was the one in that very same place not less than ten minutes ago. How dare he be so barefaced as to switch me out for a younger chick without so much as a second thought?

My temper is now at boiling point, I jump up off the bed, making sure I take one of the sheets with me to cover my modesty.

“Enough!” I yell at the top of my voice, bringing everyone to a sudden stop. “I don’t know what the fuck is going on here and to be honest, I don’t give a rat’s ass, but before I go all motherfucking ape shit on all of your asses, can you... Get. The fuck. Out of my room.” The last bit I screech at eardrum-popping levels.

They all stand looking at me. Stone, Smoke, and Scarlett as if I'm nothing but crazy. My ranting must have been louder than I thought because the next minute, my stepsister, Oriana, comes bursting into the room.

"What the hell is going on?" Initially, she looks at Stone for an explanation, but then her gaze falls on me, her face pale and full of concern.

"You can't hide this anymore," Scarlett says to Smoke, whose eyes are fixed on mine. I search his face for something, anything, but he's back to the expressionless asshole again. "It's time," she adds, resting her hand on his arm. Still, he says nothing, but gives her a gentle nod.

She breaches the gap between me and her, then holds out a hand to me in greeting. My instinct to slap it away quickly quashed when she announces calmly.

"Hi," she says, her voice sweet and calm. "I'm Scarlett. Smoke's daughter."

Johny B

I have to admit that the wooded land that runs around the edge of the compound is pretty damn special. Don't get me wrong, back in Florida, we have trees bordering our land, but we also have one big fuck off area of what can only be described as alligator-infested water. Great for getting rid of those unwanted bodies, but not the amount of walkable space they have here. Rumor has it Mammoth has a cabin hidden away somewhere, but only his old lady, Cannon and their brother Brick are privy to where that is.

It must be over an hour since I left Mammoth on the porch of the clubhouse, and I'm sure that he'll be wondering where the fuck I am by now. At least I'm doing what he asked and staying out of Smoke's way.

I have a surprisingly good sense of direction, but I'll admit that even I've lost my bearings. I come across a track that looks to head back towards the clubhouse, so I take it. It's not long before I see the back of Stone's home that he shares with his lady Oriana and cute little niece, Sasha.

As I round the corner of the building, the door opens and out walks Smoke, but it's not him who catches my attention. It's the vibrant red hair that flows long down her back. The shapely legs, narrow waist and perfect curves that are etched into my brain as permanent as the ink on my brother's skin.

"Scarlett," I breathe out loud enough that it has her turning at the sound of her name.

When her eyes meet mine, her mouth falls open, eyes wide. She shakes her head as if not believing what she sees. I take a few steps nearer to her, wanting to breach the gap between us, but if I thought for one minute that she'd come running into my open arms like in my reoccurring dream, then my hopes are quickly dashed when she finally speaks.

"What brings you here, JB?" her voice is laced with disdain. "Got yourself into trouble again. Well do us all a favor. Go find some other sucker to hide your sorry ass this time." With that, she links her arm with her father, and starts to lead him down the path and back to the clubhouse, leaving me reeling from her rejection.

Like a stalker, I watch her sweet little ass all the way until she climbs into a silver Honda that's parked out front, my thoughts instantly propelled back to the time that I spent hiding out at Velvet Reds with the woman who shocked the hell out of me when she plucked out my heart and although she might not know it, holds it firmly in her hands.

Scarlett

Velvet's is quiet tonight, I'm thankful as my ability to keep my shit together is balancing on a knife edge. It's taken all my resolve to keep my inner turmoil firmly inside and vacant from my face. Thanks to Harmony, having agreed to cover for me, I'm free of guilt at leaving the girls to it, as I make my way up the stairs to my private quarters.

Once the latch is firmly in place, along with the two extra locks that my dad insisted on, with my back against the door, I slide emotionally to the floor. All the tears that I have struggled to keep in check all afternoon begin to flow unbridled. With both hands clasped over my mouth to stifle the sound of my sobbing, I let myself truly go.

Months. It's been months. Not one word have I heard from him since he upped and left here. Yet he turns up and has the audacity to look fucking hurt when I reject him.

"Mother-fucking asshole," I hiss out to no one other than myself. I push myself off the floor, I stagger to the couch and drop my troubled, exhausted body onto it. Laying on my side across the plush seating, I curl into myself, tucking my knees up and wrapping my arms around them. I close my eyes, a big mistake because it's only a matter of seconds before my mind travels back to the very start. The when, why and wherefores as to when my path crossed with the man who left an indelible mark on my heart and soul.

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Chapter

Four

Six months earlier. Velvet Reds.

Scarlett

B rothel. Whorehouse. Chicken Ranch.

Whatever name you want to use, it comes down to the same thing: a house full of women who sell their bodies for money—one of the oldest professions known to man. Mmm, Men.

Can't live with them and, in this instance, can't live without them, although we do have a handful of female clientele who visit our ladies that are bi-sexual and only too happy to accommodate.

We try our best to cater to all sexual needs and desires, but when it comes to the darker, kinky stuff, the girls set their own hard lines. I'm aware of every single one of them and make sure that the clients never cross it.

You'd be surprised at how many male clients prefer to watch while a girl or two gets themselves off, usually with cock in hand, pleasuring themselves. Guess they don't consider that they're guilty if they haven't actually had any physical contact with my ladies. They can go home to their deluded wives, conscience clear, but we all know that in their fucked-up minds, it's their hand fingering the wet, warm pussy and their

mouth that's sucking on Chelsea's pink pert nipple, not Nina.

You see, I know this place—every inch, every room, every single movement. This place is in my blood and has been from the day I screamed my way into the world from between my young momma's thighs as she named me Scarlett.

Naming me was a no-brainer, really.

With my bright tuft of red hair and pale skin, I was every bit the image of my sweet momma—the queen of Velvet Reds—who had worked hard to get to where she was by fucking her way to the top. She showed the caring, mothering side of her personality, gaining her the respect of the other girls working in the joint and the owners.

A year before I was born, she stopped taking callers, her time purely taken up with running the house owned by the Young Outlaws Motorcycle Club. It was her job to keep a clean house, within the law and make sure the money that came in was plentiful.

Despite being raised in a legal brothel, my upbringing was relatively normal. Our living quarters had a distinct boundary, cutting us off from the 'working' area and living quarters of the girls. We even had a separate entrance at the back of the house, out of sight from the general comings and goings on the business side. I had an abundance of loving and caring aunts who made sure my momma's wishes of protecting me from knowing the truth behind Velvet Reds were kept.

When I hit the age of five, like any other kid, I attended the local elementary school. It wasn't until I was halfway through middle school, at the tender age of thirteen, that I found out exactly what environment I was living in. I guess it was inevitable because why on Earth would Becky Couldn't- Keep-Her-Trap-Shut-If-She-Tried Lambert not spread that little doozy around? The teasing started but soon stopped

once their parents had received a warning from one of Velvet's leather-clad protectors.

When I faced my momma about the jibes I'd received, I could instantly tell by her expression that the rumors were true. I immediately turned into an intolerable brat. Screaming and shouting, I lashed out. I wasn't physical with my momma—I'd never do that—but I trashed my room, barricading myself in and refusing to come out. Momma sat on the other side of the door, and I listened to her pathetic cries of regret and the reasoning behind why she had deceived me. Honestly, I didn't give a shit—at least not until she explained how she'd ended up at Velvet Reds in the first place.

Her childhood had been full of violence, abuse, and neglect. Food was sparse, love and care non-existent—unless you counted being coerced into stealing or performing sexual favors for her own mother's male friends who had fancied a young body to violate.

Momma didn't pull any punches. She told me everything: how, at fifteen, she managed to escape from the clutches of her sick-minded parents—who had been squatting in a barely habitable house in the West Side of Chicago—and hitched rides across states until she ended up in Reno. It was while she was scouting at a roadside diner for her next trucker, negotiating a ride over to the California coastline with the promise of a fuck or cock suck in return, that things took a dramatic turn.

With a hunger that ate her from the inside out, she did the one thing she hated the most. But needs must. She walked around the back of the diner to where the trash bins were. Splitting open the waste bags, she hunted for something resembling edible food.

Even though she was nauseous from the smell of the mix of various greasy foods that were congealing, when she found something, she grabbed it like the scavenger she had been forced to become simply to survive.

Stepping back from the dumpster, she brushed any evidence of dirt from the sleeve of her tatty denim jacket. The half-eaten burger was about to breach her mouth when a hand grabbed her wrist, stopping it from passing her lips.

Enter Molly Sanders: owner of Big Moll's diner and, in my momma's eyes, someone who would always be her savior.

Some might say that Molly was far from that, as she was the one who had handed her over to the then manager of Velvet Reds, Dolores, but Molly had six kids of her own, in a two-bedroomed house, the takings at the diner barely covering her costs, she'd had no room and no other option.

It was obvious to Molly that Momma had been damaged young and was prostituting herself to get by, so the lesser of two evils was Velvet Reds, a legalized brothel in Storey County around twenty miles east of Reno, and a warm, safe place to stay.

A way of making money.

Velvet Reds became her home. For the first few years, she was a glorified housekeeper and cleaner, but as soon as she reached the age that was acceptable to the madame at the time, she asked to become one of the girls.

As the story of her life concluded, I sat with my back against the bed, took in the mess I'd made of my safe, comfortable place, and was sick with regret. My heart knew that although I would have preferred my momma to have a different profession, she had done what she needed to do to survive.

When I slowly opened the door, finding my momma huddled up on the floor, tears streaming, face red and blotchy, I crawled into her lap and cried with her—for her loss of a safe and loving childhood, the pain and neglect she'd had to endure, and how deep my love and respect for her had intensified beyond belief.

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Chapter

Five

Scarlett

“Hey, I wasn’t expecting you today?” I say when I eventually glance up from my desk after hearing the door opening. Smoke, the president of the Young Outlaws MC here in Reno, stands in the open doorway watching me, not saying a word, waiting for me to acknowledge his arrival. To others, this might seem strange, as, along with the YOMC, Florida chapter, they own Velvet Reds and, therefore, that makes him my boss. Yet he treats me with the greatest respect and is far from what you’d expect from a dirt-assed biker.

Smoke and I have a bond that no others are privy to. It’s something that he insists on keeping under wraps. He makes out that it’s because he doesn’t want me to be subjected to his club brother’s crude and unfavorable jokes, but I know that if it was known to others outside the club that I would be deemed as his weak spot, a target that could easily put me in danger if his enemies wanted to take a shot at him.

“What’s going on?” I ask, pushing myself out of the seat and walking towards him.

“Thought I’d check in,” he replies, moving into the room. When he turns to make sure the door is firmly shut behind him, I know he’s here for a reason, and not just to check up on his investment.

“Bullshit,” I laugh before pushing up on my toes and placing a kiss on his bearded

cheek. The smell of tobacco, oil, and worn leather invades my senses. “If it wasn’t something important, you would have sent Stone or one of the other guys over here.”

If it wasn’t for him wearing his cut, you’d be mistaken for thinking he is a member of a rock band. He’s wearing tight jeans that fit his lean, muscular body like a second skin; faded Rolling stones T-shirt that has a row of holes a couple of inches up from the hem; and combat boots that are only part laced, the heavy leather tongue flapping forward. An unlit cigarette hangs from the corner of his mouth, ready for lighting as soon as he leaves the room, as he knows my office is a no-smoking zone.

“You need me to take care of something?” It wouldn’t be the first time he’d ask me to put pressure on a John to do the club a favor or give up information that would be of help to them.

“In this case, it’s not a ‘something’, more of a ‘someone’.” He looks me straight in the eye while rubbing the tips of his fingers through the hair on his chin. “He needs to leave town—disappear for a while.”

“He,” I gasp. “You want me to hide a man in a whore house? Jesus, Smoke, that won’t be hard. The place is full of them most of the week.”

“Not in the main house. He needs to hide in your private living quarters.”

“Are you serious? You want me to share my home with this guy?”

“I know it’s a lot to ask, and I fucking hate putting you in this position, but I’ve not got many options. I can’t risk the girls letting it slip that he’s here because the fewer people that know the better.”

“If he’s from another town, why not just hold him up at the club house?” I try to argue.

“Because he’s a Young Outlaw, and that means the first places these fuckers will come looking, if they get wind that he’s skipped town, are the other clubs’ chapters. Ours will be the first place they look, as it’s no secret that we have a close bond with Florida. However, they’re not aware of the link they have with Velvet Reds.”

I don’t like it, but what can I do? When it comes down to it, this is Smoke’s place.

“So, what’s the asshole done to get him into so much hot water?” I stand my ground with my fists firmly pressed to my waist. I cast him a glare that tells him that boss or no boss, this is still not a done deal.

“Got caught with his dick in some dude’s wife.”

“Is that it?” I chuckle. “Par for the course for your lot. Damn, I thought you were going to say he’d slaughtered someone and was on the run from the cops.”

“Well, she was the Chief of Police’s wife, so I guess you’re partly right.”

“Jesus, just another guy whose cock doesn’t weigh up the consequences before poking the pussy.”

“Shit, Scarlett. Please don’t talk like that. It doesn’t suit you.”

“Sorry, but what do you expect when I run a place like this? Angel wings and sweet, poetic words ain’t what you’re gonna get.”

“You better not be fucking, that’s for sure. If for one minute I thought you were, I’d...”

“Hey.” I step closer to him, lifting my chin and softening my tone. “I’m not and I never intend to get involved in that side of the business. I manage this place; I don’t

turn tricks.”

He nods, his face relaxing at my truth. He glances over at the desk. “Glad to see you’re still keeping up with your studies.” Stepping closer, he flips to the front of one of the many books laid open to check out the title. “How come a law dictionary is thicker than a standard one?” He questions before flipping it back to the page it was open to.

“Crazy, yeah. Don’t worry, I’m well on it and before you know it, I’ll be taking care of the club's legal matters.”

“That’s not why I encourage you to take your education seriously, and you know it.” He scowls. “The club already has a perfectly good lawyer. You’re an intelligent young woman, and you are wasted here.”

“I’m just teasing.” I laugh. “Besides, if I were to become your lawyer, at least it would give me the chance to still be involved with the club without raising too many questions.”

“I wish it didn’t have to be like this,” he says sincerely, “but it’s still too dangerous, and if anything ever happened to you because of my past, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself. I still have blood on my hands from your mother’s death. If anything happened to you, too...”

I step up behind him and wrap my arms around his waist, so my front is to his back and hug him with everything I have because words won’t cut it. I can sense the pain as it vibrates from his heart, making his whole body tremble. It’s the same heavy hurt I feel in mine, but his is laced with blame and self-hate as we both still grieve a major loss in our lives: death caused by the hands of those who held a grudge against Smoke and the MC.

One day, he and his brothers will reap their revenge. That I don't doubt for a moment.

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Chapter

Six

Scarlett

I sip the hot, rich coffee from the China cup, letting the dark nectar tease my taste buds before I let it slip down my throat, warming a path to my eagerly waiting stomach. Coffee is my go-to breakfast, while actual food can wait until later in the day. It's been two days since Smoke dropped by, so as I lean against the kitchen counter, I'm not surprised when I hear the distant rumble of motorcycles. I glance at the clock on the microwave and see that it's exactly the time, to the minute, that he said he'd be here.

"Punctual as always," I murmur to myself before draining the last of my coffee and placing the now empty cup into the sink.

When the rumble grows louder, I walk towards the back door and slip out into the early morning sun. Since this place is alive with people coming and going in the evenings, Smoke and I decided that the crack of dawn was the best time for our guest to arrive. My girls are still in bed, and most of them sleep like the dead, so at least it will give me time to settle the new arrival undetected, saving me from being hit with a hundred-and-one questions.

Smoke is already off his bike and standing with his back to me. His authoritative stance tells me he's having harsh words with our guest, yet all I can hear is a dull droning. It's not until Smoke has turned and walked toward me that I catch sight of

the man I'm tasked with holing up, not only under Velvet Reds roof, but in my own personal quarters for God knows how long.

The image I had conjured up in my head—middle-aged biker, dirty jeans, scuffed boots, and a distinct lack of grooming—couldn't be further from the truth.

He steps closer, eclipsing the bright sun that obstructs my view, leaving a bright halo of light behind him, and I see him.

Sure, he has the leather cut, the boots and, of course, the motorcycle, but everything is so clean and pristine: sharp jeans, crisp white T-shirt, the one per cent patch on his rich, leather cut spotless, looking like it's been freshly laundered. There's not a speck of dirt to be seen, and the high shine on his boots is one any military man would be proud of.

Young, so much younger than I'd envisioned, around twenty-two, maybe twenty-three years old. His hair, every strand, is in place with a height to his quiff which is unreal, considering he's just been wearing a helmet.

Holy Jesus, am I going to have my work cut out keeping him under wraps because he is fucking sex on legs? With the body of an athlete, packing a little extra muscle bulk, and a face that resembles a sixties rockabilly heartthrob, if my girls get their sights on him, they'll be offering him freebies like it's Saturday at Costco.

His Nordic blue eyes are bright against smooth, tanned skin, and his rich, dark, almost black hair. Even if hit by a cyclone, I'm sure it won't move an inch.

What products does he use, and how many does it take to keep it looking like he's just stepped out of an expensive hair salon? I need to know this magic.

Once I've gathered my wits about me, I step forward.

“Hi, you must be JB.” I hold my hand out to him in greeting. “Welcome to my home, seeing as Velvet Reds will be out of bounds for you.”

“You must be Scarlett.” His smooth, sultry, almost lyrical voice dances in my ears while he takes my hand in his, wrapping his fingers around it in a gentle but firm way. My disbelieving eyes drop to where we connect, searching for the reason behind the zap of electricity that sizzles against my skin—the kind you only read about in cheesy romance novels. When I find nothing, I raise my gaze to his to be met by a devilish gleam in his eyes and an expression that can only be described as pure hellraiser. Believe me, I’ve met my fair share of cocky assholes in my time, but he’s beyond belief.

“Motherfucker,” Smoke growls, punching a fist into JB’s upper arm. It has the desired effect as instantly JB releases me, breaking the unorthodox connection between us, pulling his arm back to rub the area that now must be throbbing like hell. “Didn’t you listen to a word I just said to you? Out of fucking bounds, asshole. Don’t think I won’t follow through with my threat.”

“And what threat is that?” I chuckle at Smoke, raising an eyebrow at his overzealous reaction.

“Let’s just say that if he doesn’t keep his dick in his pants, he won’t be needing any new tighty-whities to hold everything in place because there won’t be anything left hanging.”

“Then we better get him inside my apartment before any of the girls wake and get a glimpse at pretty boy here, and start taking bets on who gets to be the first to put his chance of ever having a family at risk.”

“For the record”,—JB pipes up, dramatically covering his crotch with both hands as he shuffles from one foot to the other, as if in pain — “having kids is not one of my

life goals, but keeping a firm hold on my junk is, so lead the way.” His face scrunches up, but it barely diminishes his handsome good looks.

I can’t help but laugh at JB’s dramatics. Even Smoke—despite his seriousness in making sure that JB knows that keeping a lower profile is imperative not just for him but also for the safety of everyone at Velvet Reds—has a slight upturn to the side of his mouth. That tells me that regardless of JB being a liability, he likes the guy.

“Smoke,” I place a hand on his chest, stopping him when he moves towards the house. “I can take it from here. Best make yourself scarce. If you hang around here at this time of a morning, you could end up raising some awkward questions, too.”

“It’s my fucking place,” he grits out.

“Shit, Smoke. You drop by once in a blue moon to check on things. Usually, you send one of the guys, but you’ve been twice in a matter of days. Trust me, I can deal with this.”

“I’ll be on my best behavior.” JB holds three fingers up to the side of his head, trying to come across all innocent. “Scouts honor.”

“Fuck me,” Smoke huffs out. “Like you’d ever make it into the scouts. Robert Baden-Powell will turn in his grave hearing you say that shit.”

Smoke stares out JB, and I can tell he’s weighing up his options: insist on staying and piss me off, or leave as I’ve asked. Turning to me, he says. “You’ll ring me if this asshole gets out of hand or if word gets out that he’s here?”

“The very minute,” I promise. I think about doing the three-finger scout thing, too, but I’m not sure he’d find it amusing based on his mood.

Reluctantly, Smoke stomps over to his ride while slamming his lid on his head. He isn't happy, but he'll live.

"Come on." I walk towards the back door, but when I go to open it, I'm beaten to the post by JB. He swings open the door, giving an exaggerated flurry of his arm, beckoning me to enter first. "You can cut that flirty, male chivalry crap out for a start," I warn. "You seem to forget that I know exactly why you're here."

"What?" he says once again, his face a mask of innocence. "I don't know what you mean and besides, you shouldn't judge a person before you at least hear their side of the story."

"This jury is out, and the verdict is guilty," I throw back at him as he follows me, far too closely, might I add, through the kitchen and up the stairs to where the rest of the living quarters are.

"Well, I prefer to make up my own mind," he counters as we walk to the bedroom that was mine until I moved into my mamma's old room. I push open the door to a space I haven't had time to de-feminize. But he's staying here gratis, so he'll just have to suck it up and put up with the floral.

I mimic his arm flurry of earlier, gesturing for him to enter his new sleeping accommodation, but before I get the chance to step back to give him space, he steps forward, wedging us both just inside the open doorway, face-to-face, the length of our bodies way too close for comfort. Instead of moving into the room, he stays where he is. With the back of his hand, he sweeps it across my cheek, then captures a loose ribbon of hair that has escaped from a clip holding back my curls. He fingers it with a gentleness that makes me suck in a deep breath.

"Redheads are supposed to be wild and sassy, impulsive and quick-tempered." He leans in a little further until his mouth brushes the shell of my ear. "The temptation to

find out is real, but I promise to do my best to resist.”

With that, he steps away, closing the door behind him, leaving me with my mouth hanging open and wondering what the hell I’ve let myself in for.

Johnny B

Being told by my Prez that I had to get out of town wasn’t something I was happy about. In fact, I was fucking livid, but I’d dipped my dick into a high-risk chick and only had myself to blame. Prez had stated that staying around Florida was too risky, but fucking Nevada? Jeez, I could have just gotten out of town and laid low for a while until the heat was off. But no, Cannon insisted that I was shipped off to stay with another chapter of the YOMC, someone who he could trust and watch my back if the fuckers did manage to track me down. Personally, I think that it’s overkill. The Chief is all fucking hot air and piss, and if he’d been showing his wife the attention she was due, then she wouldn’t have been so easily distracted. Although, I do seem to have this irresistible attraction that pulls in the ladies. I’m never short of a lay when I want one.

It wasn’t until we pulled up outside Velvet’s, where I’ll be staying for the foreseeable future and saw the fucking red-headed beauty waiting for us, that I realized why Smoke had been ranting on about keeping my dick in my pants and my hands firmly to myself. All the females were strictly out of bounds. No one was to find out that I was here. Not to forget the threat that if I so much as looked at my host the wrong way, Smoke would take immense pleasure in removing my manhood, leaving me singing soprano and wearing my ball as earrings.

Fuck, she was stunning. The color of her hair was like nothing I’d seen before. Rich, dark red and vibrant with the softest of curls, pinned up in places, yet some falling long around her shoulders and down her back. She’s curvy in all the right places. As we walked towards her, I caught sight of her emerald green eyes that sparkled like

precious jewels, filled with confidence and knowledge yet still housing a hint of innocence. For sure, she's not one of the working girls; she's too soft, unjaded and untouched.

I could very well be waving goodbye to ever having any kids. But hell, just one taste of her could be worth being demoted from Johnny Bravo, lothario and man whore to a pathetic dickless eunuch. The temptation is real.

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Chapter

Seven

Scarlett

It's been two weeks since JB arrived, and it's been far from easy.

First of all, I'm used to it just being me in this self-contained living space. The kitchen is on the lower floor, totally sealed off from the rest of that level, with a private entrance. On the upper floor there are two bedrooms, a bathroom and a general living space. A door on this floor gives me access to Velvet's, which automatically locks and, except for one key that Smoke has, I'm the only one who can move freely between the two domains.

So, having someone invading my privacy is driving me insane.

Secondly. He has the ability to irritate the fuck out of me.

It's not so bad in the evenings because I spend most of my time downstairs, front of house in Velvet's. But if the evenings are quiet, I usually take advantage of the time to study. However, I have found this near impossible when the larger-than-life JB takes up valuable space in the living area, which doubles up as my office. With his current confinement, he has taken to books. Not that it's a bad thing, but he has this annoying habit of verbalizing his reactions to the storyline. The sniggers, huffs and tutting are both irritating and distracting in equal measure. Not to mention that he seems to suck all the oxygen out of the room, which has me cursing furiously under

my breath, while taking the back stairs, fleeing out through the kitchen until I'm outside breathing in the clean air and regaining a modicum of composure.

Thirdly. He's an outrageous flirt.

The way he comes up close when it's totally unnecessary.

For example, he sneaks his hand around me to reach into the refrigerator to grab something at the exact time that I'm there checking out what groceries we need.

When I find time to catch a movie, and I'm sitting cozy on the sofa, he comes in looking so fucking hot in his jeans and a tight T-shirt that it should be illegal. He drops into the seat beside me, close enough that our thighs are touching, when there's a perfectly good, and comfortable, armchair that he could make use of. The body heat he radiates is off the charts. I end up giving up on the movie due to being too hot, too distracted with my level of annoyance at boiling point, my heart racing, and urgently needing to put some distance between me and his irritating ass.

And then there's the number of times I've caught him watching me.

If I'm perfectly honest, sometimes it's JB catching me watching him, but that's only because I'm still trying to work him out. The way he bats his ridiculously long eyelashes—that should be outlawed on men—staring at me with eyes that I swear are trying their darndest to undress me, is shameful. That scandalous smile of his plays on his lips and, Jesus, it makes me, dare I say, nervous.

For someone who faces numerous men every day, who come into Velvet's with only one thing on their mind—sex—you'd think I'd be immune to his salacious advances.

But when it comes to him, my heart races, my face turns pink, and my body reacts like a horny teenager desperate to pop her cherry on prom night. Overall, I find his

attention incredibly... flattering? But I'm also acutely aware that it's wrong, so irritatingly wrong.

It's three in the morning, and tonight has been a crazy busy night in Velvet's. The poor girls have been inundated with horny men because of the influx of additional labor from neighboring towns, brought in to speed up the construction of a new skyscraper in downtown Reno. I'm exhausted while waiting for the last of the clients to go so I can retire, grab a hot bath and much-needed sleep.

I leave the girls to take care of locking up, slip through the door and back into my space. The sound of footsteps coming up from the kitchen takes me by surprise, as it's late for JB to still be up. Maybe he woke and needed a drink or snack, but as I'm tired and not in the mood for his flirty banter, I step back into the shadow of the large ceiling-to-floor bookcase until he's back in his room.

What I don't expect to see is him dressed in sweatpants, T-shirt and sneakers. He's hardly the shy type and doesn't usually think twice about walking around in tight shorts or boxers.

Where the hell has he been?

I watch as he disappears down the hallway towards his room. I slip off my shoes so I can tiptoe behind him unheard. The door to my bedroom is first. His, at the opposite end of the hallway. But when I see that the light is on in the bathroom between our bedrooms, and the door ajar, my curiosity gets the better of me.

With my back against the wall, I twist my upper body just enough so I can peek through the opening of the door. If it weren't for the discarded clothes on the floor, you wouldn't think anyone was in there. It's so quiet. JB's naked body comes into view as he swings open the door of the shower cubicle. Shame immediately hits me at my voyeuristic moment, and I pull back sharply, my head banging against the wall.

Fortunately, the noise of the water being turned on and gushing out from the shower head disguises it.

Insanity takes over, along with my questionable inquisitive need to see what exactly has been hiding underneath JB's well-kept clothing. I poke my head around again to peek through the gap, and I'm met with the side view of JB with his hand outstretched against the tiled wall in front of him, his nearside leg forward as he leans under the water spray. And might I say, HOLY CRAP.

With his head dipped downwards, long wet tendrils of hair—no longer in a quiff and flattened to his head by the cascade of water that flows over him—hang over his forehead, veiling his eyes, the tips brushing the bridge of his nose. His free hand, spread flat on his chest, moves slowly down across the plains of his abdomen, skimming each ridge and indent until it slips past his navel and vanishes between his legs.

The way his arm moves, biceps contracting, it's clear that he's got a firm hold of his cock and is stroking it. Any doubt of that is quickly quashed when he straightens up, pulling back his leg that was previously violating the perfect view. The water droplets and light condensation on the glass do nothing to hide the impressive outline of his firm, hard cock as he caresses and pumps it. His chest rises and falls quickly with every sharp intake of breath.

I need to look away before I get caught, but my heart races along with the rush of arousal that surges through me to my very core, making it impossible. The pull, the beauty of it, I can't turn away from the majestic sight of a soaked, very hard JB jerking himself off.

With a deep guttural groan, JB's head rocks backwards, ribbons of cum spurting from his cock and dripping down his fingers. My fingers itch, and I'm desperate to slip into my underwear to ease my frustration. But instead, I let my gaze rake over his body

one more time so I can store it away in my memory bank for when I'm alone and able to take from it what I need. Only when I get past the abs, and up his pecs to his face, he's looking me right in the eye, wearing a smirk on his face that tells me I've clearly been busted.

Johnny B

However comfortable this place is, and for that aspect of the stay, I can't complain. But hell, I'm going stir-crazy. I'm not allowed to go into Velvet's, and with Scarlett spending most evenings downstairs, I get fucking lonely. The times we've spent in the same space, whether kitchen or living room, it's not long before she's taking herself off somewhere else. I seem to irritate the fuck out of her.

Back home, if I wasn't tied up with club business or spending time with my brothers in the clubhouse, I'd be out there burning off my excess energy by hitting the asphalt. Yeah, I run. It's what keeps me sane and out of trouble. Once my heart is pumping and near exhaustion, I'd call one of the many females that's more than happy for a late-night hookup, fuck any remaining energy out of me, so I could eventually catch a few hours deep sleep.

So, I've taken to sneaking out the door that leads out of Scarlett's private living quarters, under the veil of darkness. Dressed in dark clothing, hood pulled over my head and running sneakers, I take a route away from Velvet's that will minimize any chances or raise suspicion; so far, I've managed to stifle my hyperactivity. Except when I get back, I'm unable to finish with a fuck, so while washing away the sweat that has built up on my skin, I grip my cock and stroke and tug at it while my head is full of images of Scarlett and those curves she hides beneath her clothing.

Don't ask me how, but I could sense her watching me. Maybe it was the way my skin felt heated, hypersensitive as I let the water run over it, washing away the soap suds. All it did was make me take my time stroking myself, putting on a show, just for her.

Knowing that her eyes were on me made my cock harder than ever and it took all my resolve not to blow my load in record time. While her eyes were on me, I let myself imagine that it was her delicate hands, her fingers wrapped around my shaft, the softness of her palm sliding against my skin. It being her thumb stroking over the engorged head. When I could hold back no longer, I let my head fall back, the sound of my pleasure slipping from my lips as my sticky cum paints the tiles and drips from my fingers. With that, I tilted my head, piercing her with my eyes, a knowing smile on my lips so that she was fully aware I had caught her in the act.

My sexy little spy.

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Chapter

Eight

Scarlett

The embarrassment at being caught last night has me up early. Grabbing a large cup of coffee and a book I need to read to help with my studies, I escape into Velvet's well before JB usually surfaces. The last thing I need is to see his smug face or hear any jibes about last night. At least not before I've come to understand what the hell I was playing at in the first place.

It's quiet in Velvet Reds. Most of the girls are still sleeping. I drop my tired ass into the high-backed armchair that's placed near the entrance, my usual spot to greet the guests. I'm exhausted thanks to the unusual late night, and flashbacks of JB's hard, wet body seem to be ingrained into my memory. Even after giving in to temptation and letting my hand slip between my legs until I got some self-satisfaction, I've done nothing but toss and turn all night.

I lay my current read, 'Understanding Criminal Law', in my lap and flip open to where I left off. By the time I'm halfway down my coffee, I feel human enough that the text becomes clearer and registers in my brain.

The sound of my name has my body jolting to attention.

"What?" I pant out. My heart races as I sit upright in the chair. Damn it. I must have fallen asleep.

“Wake up.”

I blink rapidly, clearing my mind and vision and find Clara, one of the girls, standing in front of me.

“How long have you been down here?” she asks.

“What time is it?” I glance at my wristwatch. “Three-thirty. Crap. The doors open in thirty minutes. We need to get everything ready.”

“It’s okay, we’ve got it covered.” She assures. “But you might want to take a minute to straighten yourself up. You have drool on your cheek and your hair could do with a bit of attention.”

I run my fingertips over my cheek to find it smooth and dry. I ‘Ha, ha’ at Clara when I find no sign of dampness or dry crusty remnants. She giggles back at me before turning on her heels and going back into the main saloon. However, once I get into Velvet’s bathroom and see my reflection in the mirror, I see she wasn’t joking about the state of my red hair. Several clips that loop up strands of my hair have come loose. I set about rectifying them, so at least I look my usual presentable self by the time Velvet’s doors are open for business.

“I’m sorry, sir. All the girls are taken for the night,” I explain to the drunk, who has just stumbled through the doors into Velvet’s. Tonight, there has been a steady flow of clients, and I do have two girls who will be free within half an hour, but this guy despite still being on his feet, has had a lot of liquor. I’m pretty good at reading people, and this dude has trouble written all over him. He’s not a big guy by any means. In fact, some of my girls would tower over him, even without their heels on, but he’s part of the construction team that’s in town, so I’m sure he has strength behind his small, lean body. On top of that, he has a dark harshness in his glare that makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck.

“I’m not fussy,” he slurs. “I’m not usually into red heads, but you’ll do.”

“That’s not possible. I manage this establishment,” I reply with a level voice. I go to open the door for him to leave, but he’s having nothing of it. He takes a step forward, grabs my wrist and pulls me forcefully towards him.

“I don’t care if you’re the Queen of fucking Sheba. You can either take me to a room, or I can fuck you right here.” He sneers, spit dripping from the corner of his mouth.

I yank my arm free, surprisingly without much effort, just as Rush, one of Smoke’s guys, comes through from the lounge with Harmony.

“Everything okay, Scarlett?” Rush asks, stepping up to my side, his eyes rigidly fixed on the guy.

“It will be once you escort this gentleman off the premises.”

“My money is as good as anyone’s,” he grunts. His hand goes into his trouser pocket. Rush immediately tenses, but all he does is throw a wad of twenties in my face. I watch as the notes fall to the floor by my feet, but as I look up, his pants are unzipped and has his junk in his hand. “My cock is, too,” he adds. His hand pumps it, but due to the amount of liquor he’s had, it stays flaccid in his hand. “I need to get laid; I’m not leaving.”

“Then I suggest you go home, sober up and come back tomorrow with a more respectable attitude. Then we’ll be happy to take your money.”

With that, he lunges at me. Both his hands fly to my neck, circling and squeezing. Rush is immediately on him, but in the time it takes for him to gain control, which must only be a matter of a minute or two, my vision blurs, and my head swims at the lack of ability to get air into my lungs. It’s enough to scare the shit out of me.

Rush pulls him off me and pins him up against the wall. With a punch to the gut, the drunk buckles over and slides down the wall until his ass hits the floor.

“For fuck’s sake,” Rush growls at him. “Put your junk away. I don’t wanna see it. Now get the fuck out of here.”

“Scarlett.” Harmony immediately comes to me, sliding her arm around my shoulders. Her words are soft and full of concern. “Go up to your place. Rush and I can deal with this.”

“No,” I gasp between sucking in air to clear my head. “I’m fine,”

“No, you’re not,” she replies, rubbing up and down my arms with her hands. It’s then that I realize I’m shaking. “Go sit, have a brandy. We can take care of things until it’s time to lock-up.”

“Okay,” I concede, stepping away from her comfort. I take the steps up to my living quarters. Once at the door, I take a quick glance back down the stairs to see Rush grabbing the guy by the collar and dragging him out of the door. Rush is a good six inches taller than him and at least a hundred pounds heavier—more than capable of throwing out the trash.

Confident that Rush is in control, I step through the door, making sure that the latch has caught before moving over to the cabinet where I keep the liquor. I pull out a glass and pour myself a healthy measure of whiskey. The liquid sloshes about in the glass in my shaking hands, but as the warmth of it passes my lips and tongue and heats its way down to my stomach, the tremors in my body subside.

Chapter

Nine

Scarlett

Thankfully, the room is empty with no sign of JB, so I assume that, once again, he has snuck out under the veil of darkness. No doubt he's found some chick nearby who's willing to give him some attention—the probable reason for him immediately hitting the shower on his return last night, to wash away the smell of illicit sex.

Sitting on the couch, I bring my legs up to my side, relaxing into the comfort of the plump cushions, only to be jarred back to my feet at the sound of a high-pitched scream and shouting from downstairs. I can't make out what's being said, but my gut tells me it's not good. I need to find out what the hell is going on.

With my hand on the catch of the door that leads back into the saloon, I twist it open, only to be thrown back with the force of the door being kicked open. My head pivots backwards, and I hit the ground, screaming out in pain. My vision blurs from the impact. I roll, pushing myself up onto my hands and knees so I can get back on my feet. What feels like a boot hits my ass, the pressure forcing me flat to the floor. An even heavier weight crushes me across my lower back, pinning me down. I look to my side to see a dirty, jean-covered leg, but when I try to look further, a hand grips hold of my hair, pulling my head back to the point of pain.

“Hello, pretty little whore.”

I immediately recognize the voice of the drunk who, but moments ago, had tried to squeeze the living daylights out of me. As he breathes against my ear, the waft of stale cigarettes and liquor assaults my nose. That and the weight of his body pushing mine harder into the floor as he lays over me has me fighting the urge to puke up what little I have in my stomach.

“Thought you could run from me, hide up here in your ivory tower? Well, there’s nothing I like better than a challenge, the chase and, of course, the thrill of getting exactly what I want.”

“I suggest you get the fuck off of me,” I growl out between my teeth, pushing against the floor with everything I have, trying to buck him off of my back. He laughs, squeezing his thighs tighter against my sides, crushing any chance of me gaining the upper hand. He pulls my head back further with force, my hair still fisted in his hand. The sting at the roots has me screaming out once more.

“Jeez girl.” He twists my head, then leans in and licks the side of my face with his putrid-smelling tongue. I shudder with revulsion. “I love it even more when you bitches fight back.” The sound of his manic laugh fills me with the fear of God, which is only intensified by the sound of his belt being unbuckled and the swish of it being pulled from the waistband of his jeans.

He lets go of my hair, giving my sore, burning scalp a reprieve, but before I get the chance to make another attempt to escape, he’s captured both my hands, jarring them behind my back. Holding them tightly together, he wraps the belt around them both, pulling it so tight that the leather cuts into my skin and I grit out in pain. I wriggle against the restraints when he sits up, thinking if I could just move onto my back, I could kick out, fight back, but then his forearm comes around my neck and pulls until my upper body is raised off the floor.

With his free hand, he snatches a handful of the fabric of my blouse and yanks at it,

ripping it away from my body. Buttons fly, bra exposed. His grubby fingers pull at the lace cup, bringing it down and freeing one of my breasts.

“Nice tits,” he sneers in my ear while grasping the exposed flesh. I let out a yelp, my body tensing when his ragged fingernails claw at me, breaking the surface of my skin.

Not only is he going to leave his mark on me mentally, but physically, too. He releases his hold. My face slams back to the floor. His hand comes down sharply between my shoulder blades, keeping me firmly in place.

With the sound of ripping fabric, cool air hits my ass cheeks, the thong I’m wearing giving me zero cover now that my skirt has been ripped away. Soon, even that has been snapped and pulled from me. He flings it, hitting the side of my head, and it lands an inch or two from my face. Even with the pounding of my heartbeat in my ears, I don’t miss the sound of the zipper as he releases himself, nor the sensation of his cock pushing up against my bare ass.

“You should think twice about what you’re about to do,” I sneer through my building fear.

“Shut your fucking mouth, you little bitch.” He slaps me hard across the back of the head, making my brain rattle inside my skull. “I know exactly what I’m doing. I’m going to take my time with you then fuck your tight little asshole so hard, it’ll feel like I’m splitting you in two. Then I’m going to choke you out so I can watch the very last breath leave your body.”

He uses one of his knees to push my legs apart. Hooking a hand under my right knee, he pulls up my leg. I try to fight him, but when he bites down on my thigh and I feel the skin split around his teeth, the pain has me conceding.

I’m open to him, giving him full view and access to my pussy, my ass, and my

dignity.

No, no, no. Not like this. Not this way. This can't happen. Reality hits me, and the lack of ability to fight the inevitable spears me with dread. Tears fall freely now, and as his fingers slips into the crack of my ass cheeks, opening them in preparation to assault me, I do the only thing left I can.

I scream like a banshee.

I scream so hard that my lungs and throat burn. It's enough to distract my attacker and cause him to lean forward to slam a hand over my mouth to deaden the noise. I clamp my teeth down hard. The skin on his hands is calloused, but I bite down on the fleshy skin at the base of his thumb.

Warm, coppery liquid floods my mouth, a chunk of flesh hits the tip of my tongue, held firmly between my teeth.

This motherfucker is not the only one who can bite.

"Argh," he growls out sitting back, more of his weight lifting from my body.

With all my built-up anger, I manage to twist my body enough so I can turn my head to spit his own blood and flesh into his pain-ridden face. "Yeah, you sick fucking bastard,"

I cackle like a demented witch, happy that if I can't fight him off at least I will have left my mark on the ugly fucker's face.

"You fucking bitch," he growls, raising his hand to strike me, only for it to be forcefully gripped by another before it makes impact.

Chaos erupts.

Chapter

Ten

Scarlett

All the weight is removed from my body; I roll onto my back. Bringing up my legs, I push against the carpeted floor to get away while watching what plays out before me.

I can see the muscles ripple under the sweat-soaked T-shirt that's stuck to JB's back as he kneels and rains punch after punch onto the now sprawled-out body of the drunk. Blood flies, and more punches are thrown. JB shows no sign of stopping, even though there's a lack of movement from his victim.

"JB," I shout out, but he's ruthless, like an animal, continuing to beat the crap out of him. "Please!" I scream louder.

JB stills. His muscular arms, flecked with blood, fall to his side. His head drops to his chest, his shoulders rise and fall in rhythm with his rapid breaths, as he takes a moment to calm himself and regain some clarity. With a glance over his shoulder, our eyes meet, his brow is clenched with concern.

The door flies open, and Rush falls into the room, looking dazed. Blood coats his mouth and chin. His nose is clearly broken, a bleeding cut across his forehead.

JB stands up, blocking Rush's view of me, giving me a chance to pull my tattered blouse across my chest. With one hand, he pulls his soaked T-shirt over his head, and

throws it across my lap, giving me back a modicum of decency.

“Where the hell were you?” JB growls as Rush takes in the beaten and bloodied body of the drunk sprawled out on the floor and my obvious state of distress. “Fuck, if I hadn’t cut my run short and come back... Fuck, I hate to think.”

“Shit, I...” Rush stutters, shaking his head as if his brain is still foggy. “I’d got him outside, but when I turned my back on him, he jumped me, copped a lucky punch to the side of my head. I must have gone down hard because the next thing I knew, I was coming around on the floor outside. I think the fucker broke my nose.” He leans to the side to look around JB. “I’m so fucking sorry, Scarlett. JB,”—his hand grasps a clump of his hair and he tugs on it, frustrated — “what can I do?”

“Take him down the back stairs into the kitchen,” JB barks at Rush. “If he comes around, knock him the fuck out. Bind him to a chair; make sure he can’t go anywhere. I’m not done with him yet, not by any means.”

Rush acknowledges JB’s orders and pulls the asshole up and over his shoulder. The way Rush lifts him with ease makes me realize it was pure luck rather than judgement that his dude got the better of Rush. Not so lucky for Rush or me, though.

Once Rush has left the room and disappeared down the hallway, JB comes to kneel before me. My eyes follow his as he looks down at his wet, blood-splattered T-shirt in my lap, then I raise my gaze to him.

“Shit, sorry. Let me get you something else.”

“No, it’s fine. Just untie me will you,” I whimper, shrugging so he can see that my arms are tied behind me.

He pulls a pocket knife out and flicks open the blade before moving behind me and

within seconds he's sliced through the leather belt and my arms are free. With a groan, I bring my arms forward. A deep ache burns through my shoulders from them being forced back into the unnatural position.

Still crouched behind me, JB reaches around to where my hands lie in my lap and gently lifts one. His palm against mine, his thumb caresses the back of my hand, careful not to touch the red bleeding welts from where the leather has cut through the skin. His breathing is heavy, and I can almost feel the heat of his anger as it starts to mount again.

"I'm going to fucking kill him." His voice is as sharp as a knife, and twice as lethal. He goes to pull away from me, but I capture his hand.

"All in good time, but first can you help me up?" My head is telling me to stop being a baby and get my ass up off the floor, but my body is exhausted from trying to fight, and I doubt I'll be able to get to my feet unaided, however much that goes against the grain.

"Fuck, Scarlett, of course." He takes a few steps towards the couch and snatches the blanket that's laid across the back. He shakes it out before he lays it over the top of the bloody T-shirt, handing me the corners. "Wrap it around you when I bring you up."

I nod, understanding his thinking.

"You ready?" he asks, his hands resting above my waist.

"Yeah," I respond, moving my legs to the right position so I can push up with what little energy I have left.

As he lifts me, I pull the blanket closer to my body. Once I'm on my feet, he moves

his hands from my waist to my shoulders, giving me the chance to wrap the blanket around my torso, tucking in the corner to hold it in place. When my legs start to give way, his arms wrap fully around me, holding me close to his chest.

I look up into his stormy eyes. The usual piercing blue color darkens with a mix of rage and concern.

“Did he...” The words don’t need to fall from his lips: I know exactly what he wants to know. I can’t look at him as shame and realization hit me like a freight train.

The crazy that just happened.

The horrors that were about to happen.

Don’t get me wrong, there’s no doubt that this will scar me for some time to come, but if he’d gone further, stripped me of all that is mine without my willingness to give, I might never have been able to wake up from this nightmare of a day.

Tears flood my eyes, dripping from my lashes, soaking the edge of the blanket that sits across my chest.

“Scarlett,” JB whispers as he places his forefinger under my chin, pulling my gaze back to his.

With a sob, I watch as his eyes flick over my face trying to read the extent of my pain. “You saved me.”

His thumb comes to my cheek sweeping away some of the wetness before he brings it to his mouth and sucks in my tears. He pulls me into him, my head coming to rest on his naked chest. His hand gently holding the back of my neck, his thumb a featherlight stroke against the skin. “And I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

Even though I'm enjoying the warmth and safety of his arms, I pull back, just enough so I'm able to tilt my head back and look up to him. Pushing up onto my toes, I place my lips on his, no pressure, a brush.

His body stiffens, his hands gripping hold of my shoulders. At first, I think he's going to push me away, which confuses me. The memory of his relentless flirting instantly comes to mind, and I wonder why he's not responding to my forwardness. Then it dawns on me that with all that has just transpired, my advances towards him are a bit crass, the timing totally wrong.

But along with his hesitation, regretting my actions are quickly dispersed. Hooking his arm around me, he pulls me in close. His hand threads into my hair pulling me into him, deepening the kiss.

And oh, my fucking god, can he kiss.

His tongue slips between my lips, teasing my own with a sweeping touch. He tastes so good, so good that I want more. I tug at the back of his head keeping him exactly where I need him, making sure he can't pull away as I suck on his bottom lip.

He growls out when the blanket falls from between us, my blouse wide open, leaving us skin on skin, the heat between us explosive.

"Scarlett, I want you so bad, but...."

The door from Velvet's flies open, and once again, chaos reigns.

"Get the fuck off her," Smoke's voice bellows across the room. JB is dragged away from me, leaving me exposed, not just to Smoke but also his VP, Stone, who is standing behind him.

Quickly I grab the blanket from the floor where it has fallen and cover myself.

Smoke has JB by the throat. A matte, black Glock is held to the side of his head.

“Smoke, stop,” I scream at him, but his focus is fixed on JB.

“I fucking warned you, you piece of shit.” Smoke’s top lip curls back, baring his teeth as he snarls like a rabid dog up close into JB’s face. “You motherfucker. I knew I couldn’t trust you.”

“Smoke,” I shout again trying to get his attention, but he’s blinkered by his anger.

“I’ve changed my mind,” he spits into his face. “Cutting off your dick is too good for you.” Smoke’s finger curls tighter around the trigger of the gun, his elbow raises, and he pushes the nozzle firmly against his temple.

“Hey, Brother,” Stone intervenes, trying to calm shit down. “Take a breath, think about this for a minute.” Stone places a hand on Smoke’s shoulder.

“Stay out of this,” Smoke seethes, violently shrugging off Stone’s hold. “I’m going to end this pretty boy, motherfucker.”

“Dad,” I scream at the top of my voice. “Dad. Stop.” I call him by the name I rarely use twice to make sure it registers with him, but it’s unnecessary because his head flings in my direction immediately at the first mention.

Smoke, aka Dad, is not the only one staring at me with raised brows, mouth slack in pure shock. Of course, JB had no idea, so that’s no surprise, but Stone? He’s not only an MC brother but he and Smoke have always been so close, like brothers in blood, too. I thought at least he would have been privy to our secret.

JB looks at me, his mouth moving but for a few moments no sound breaches his lips until he eventually blusters. “Smoke... Your dad?”

I nod quickly before taking a few steps towards both him and Smoke.

I place my hand over Smoke’s hand as he holds the Glock to JB’s head. “Drop the gun, Dad. JB’s done nothing wrong. I was the one who made the move.”

“Don’t cover for him, Scarlett.” Smoke continues to hold the gun firmly to JB’s head. “Your clothes, the marks on your neck, the blood on your face.”

“Shit.” I swipe my forearm across my mouth and cheeks. I’d forgot that I had bitten into the drunk’s hand. How revolting. I had kissed JB with that creep’s blood on my face. It’s kinda wrong but I can’t help but think despite the state of me, JB had still kissed me back.

“He was making a noise, so I knocked him the fuck out again,” Rush barks as he walks into the room from the hallway, “That shit felt good, too...” He stalls when he takes in the arrival of his club brothers. “Prez. How did you know? I was just about to call you.” He spots the gun held to JB’s head and the fact that I’m still looking dishevelled, and barely covered. “Woah, wait up. This...” He waves his hand between JB and where I stand. “This has nothing to do with JB. If anyone should have a gun to his head, it’s me. I fucked up. Not JB. He’s the one who stopped the motherfucker who was hurting Scarlett.”

My eyes flick between them all, the tension mounting, unsure as to what my dad is going to do next.

“Can someone tell me what the fuck is going on here?” Smoke eventually bellows out.

“I’ll tell you everything, but first, will you please put the fucking gun away?” I plead. He drops his arm back down to his side and releases his hold on JB, but it’s clear that Smoke is still raging.

Despite that, he comes to stand in front of me, his hand cupping my chin, and raises my gaze to meet his.

“Fuck, Scarlett, are you okay?”

I give him a weak smile. “I will be, but I suggest you get that motherfucker downstairs out of my house before I take that gun of yours and shoot the bastard myself.”

Johnny B

The blood-curdling scream hit me as soon as I’d opened the door to let myself in. Gut instinct told me it was Scarlett instantly, and despite every inch of my body aching from the punishing run I’d just taken, I sprinted towards the stairs, oblivious to the burn in my muscles.

What I saw as I burst through the door both sickened and triggered a rage in me that was relentless. Immediately, I captured the fuckers’ arm in my fist, then pulled the asshole off her, slamming him back down on to the floor. My anger raged with every punishing punch to the dirty bastard’s face. My mind going back to my childhood years, and the bullying I’d endured but never had the guts to retaliate. Until that fateful day when I’d lost it.

They say that we are a product of our childhood, but although that’s partly true, I don’t think it’s the only catalyst behind my uncontrollable rage.

My mom brought me up single-handedly after my father was incarcerated before I’d

even left the womb. After sitting on death row for 1481 days, he'd been executed by electrocution. I was four. I never met the man; in fact, I wasn't even aware of his existence until I was eight years old. Even then, he was just a name on a piece of paper. A violent murderer whose inability to control his outburst of pure violence.

I can honestly say, having only one parent posed no detriment to my younger years because my mom cared and loved me in abundance. I was such a happy kid with days full of fun and laughter. My mom had been my hero. Then suddenly, she was gone.

She never made it known she was constantly in pain, fighting cancer that was eating her up from the inside out. Not once did she go to see a doctor that I knew of, but I was young. A couple of times, I'd noticed something wasn't quite right, but she'd brush it off as nothing.

Aged eight, I'd come home to find her collapsed on the floor. Three days later, she died in Orlando Regional hospital. With no record of any family, I became a ward of the state.

There weren't many couples willing to take on a sulky, unresponsive adolescent boy, so I spent most of my years in a state-run orphanage, and with that came the physical and mental abuse, and constant bullying from the older boys. At first, it consisted of the occasional comment, then along came the shoves because I wouldn't be part of the practical jokes they played on the staff.

Over time it escalated, yet even though, in my mind's eye, I would fight back, I never did. I'd curl up in a ball and take the kicks, the punches. Once they'd stopped, I'd slope off somewhere where I could lick my wounds, away from the prying eyes of everyone. It had been constant, but I'd taken every blow, knowing that if I had complained to staff, it would have made my life ten times worse, so I took it. At least, until it all went too far.

His name was Ian James, and at the age of sixteen, he was as big and strong as a fully grown man. When it came to the hierarchy amongst the boys, he was the top dog. Nobody questioned his orders that no one was to follow him when he cornered me in the bathroom that day. He had made sure that he had no witnesses to what he was about to do to me. Sick bastard.

Turns out, Ian showed me attention for many reasons. How does the saying go? You always hurt the one you love. This wasn't love. More like I made him hard. He used his power to force himself on me, to abuse me in a way that, to me, was sickening. I won't go into details, but as soon as he'd pinned me against the wall, my face against the cold, dirt-ingrained tiles, his hand cupping my clothed cock, I'd lost it.

When one of the wardens found him hanging behind one of the stall doors, his own belt wrapped around his throat, they'd quickly determined it was suicide. Even that was hushed up. The case quickly closed and the true evidence overlooked. The last thing they wanted was the press to get hold of the story, as that would have opened a huge can of worms as to what could only be classed as the lack of government money and care within the system.

To this day, I can still recall how the rage consumed me. How I'd overpowered him, adrenaline pumping through my veins as I'd wrapped my hands around his throat. The sound of his last breath and how it felt when his windpipe crushed under my powerful fingers. Which made me think that maybe genetics could be behind the hidden demon within me that, once awake, is hard to contain.

So, it had happened again, and if it hadn't been for Scarlett calling my name, clearing the mist of mayhem that had saturated my brain, I'd have killed this man with my bare fists, right there and then. Not that I'd have regretted ending him, much like Ian James. In my eyes, he deserved it. But I would have regretted doing it in front of Scarlett, and her seeing my darkness up close.

I intended to finish what I'd started, make it a long, drawn out and very painful process, but when Smoke and Stone turned up, I knew that I'd no longer have the pleasure of torturing the fucker. I'm knew that honor would now be Smoke's.

Before I knew it, I was outside being pushed towards my ride, a clear warning to follow them to the Young Outlaws clubhouse. I wasn't given the option to check on Scarlett or even to say goodbye. It was clear that my stay at Velvet Reds was over.

The one thing I did get to take with me though, that one thing swarmed my mind, and lingered on my skin, was the mind-blowing, sweet memory of Scarlett's kiss.

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Chapter

Eleven

Scarlett

It's been three days since Smoke, Stone and Rush removed my attacker, gagged and hogtied, from my house. JB was removed, too. I guess that after recent events, Smoke reconsidered and decided that the Young Outlaws club house was a more sensible place for JB to be holed-up.

Sensible, my ass. Smoke just doesn't want JB anywhere near me.

I fucking hate it. I miss him more than I ever thought possible. That kiss. His touch. The way he'd beat the crap out of the fucker who would have raped me if he hadn't intervened.

He saved me from a whole fucked up heap of torment and pain.

While they deal with matters of violence, Smoke has placed three of his guys at Velvet's to reassure me I'm safe.

Once that man was out of my house, I took an exceptionally long, hot bath. With an ache in my heart and a crushing fear of what could have been, I cried a lot of tears. When the tears were all cried out, I scrubbed away the remnants of that dirty asshole's touch from my skin. In my head, I put those thoughts in a tightly locked box, sealed and chained, never to be opened, and replaced them with the memory of

JB's intoxicating kiss.

Even now, when my thoughts turn to JB, I find my fingertips brushing against my lips, recalling his touch, his delicious taste and the fire that he awakened in my soul.

Rush was due an arse kicking from Smoke for his slip up. Harsh? I totally agree, but that's the way of the MC. You fuck up, you pay the consequences. Although, I'm pretty sure that my dad will reduce the severity of the punishment.

I'm not sure what JB will face. When it comes down to it, he did go against Smoke's strict instructions to stay away from me.

God only knows where that's going to go.

I've not been back down into Velvet's yet.

Although the visible scars on my wrists, chest and thigh can easily be covered, it's the emotional ones that are holding me back. I'm aware that I need to get past it, and I will. Just a few more days. In the meantime, Harmony is taking care of business for me.

The steam from my freshly brewed coffee hits my cheeks as I take my first hot sip, but I drop the cup to the work surface when I hear the rumble of a motorcycle. It's not Smoke, unless he's using one of his MC brother's rides. With my fingers, I push open a gap between the blinds to see Stone pulling up outside, but he has someone right behind him.

It's JB.

My breath catches in my throat when I see him climb off his bike and stand to his full height. With his back to the house, he pulls off his helmet, and that quiff of his

remains perfectly in place, his leather cut gleaming like a new pin. I wouldn't have expected anything else. He swings around, his eyes falling to the window, as if sensing I'm watching from the other side. The sight of him is all it takes, and my skin is on fire. Desire darts to my core.

My breath hitches as I watch Stone lead the way towards the front door.

"Hey," Stone greets me as he steps over the threshold. "We've just come to pick up JB's gear."

"Sure," I respond, trying to be as cool as I can, regardless of the tension within the room. My eyes go to JB, but his body language is giving nothing away. "You, okay?" I ask him. There are no visible signs of him having taken a beating from anyone, but I need to know that he's not hurting.

"I'm good," he grunts back, barely acknowledging me, as he makes his way to the stairs. I go to follow, but Stone's hand comes out and captures my arm.

"How are you doing?" he asks. It's obvious he's been given his orders from Smoke to make sure he keeps me away from JB.

"I'm not so bad, thanks." I move again towards the stairs, only to be blocked by Stone and his huge body.

"So, Smoke's your dad. Didn't see that one coming." He startles. "Bastard usually tells me everything. I'm a bit pissed that he didn't feel he could trust me, but I understand why he keeps it under wraps."

Smoke's and Momma's relationship had always been kept quiet, along with the fact that he had a baby with her. It was something he insisted on from the very beginning. They had both been so young and totally infatuated with each other. They'd also been

stupid enough not to use protection. At first, his reasoning was that he didn't want the club to see my mother or me as his weak spot or as an excuse to ridicule him. As time went by, he rose to the position of president, and the risks became greater. After my mother's life was taken, it became imperative that our secret stayed firmly under wraps. The daughter of the president of an MC club would be of significant interest, the perfect target and a negotiation tool for those who might want to take advantage of it.

"Stop with the distractions, Stone. What's going on? Why are you stopping me from talking to JB? Daddy's orders?" I say sarcastically.

"Partly." He takes a step closer to me, hesitating before he puts his hand on my shoulder. I guess he's scared that it might trigger me, but it doesn't. I've known Stone a long time, and I see him as family. "I'm the one who thinks it's a bad idea." He lets out a deep sigh. "JB's leaving. That's why we're here. He's going back to Florida today."

"But I thought he was involved with some trouble down there?"

"He was, but an agreement's been made with a promise of no repercussions, so Cannon, his Prez, has called him back."

"Oh, I see." I cannot hide the disappointment in my voice.

Footsteps at the top of the stairs warn us of JB's impending return.

"It's for the best, Scarlett. Smoke would never agree to this going any further," he whispers just before JB walks into the kitchen.

"Sure," I reply, as I try to ignore the pain that's gripping my heart. I keep my eyes averted because I can't risk looking at JB. If I do, I might just embarrass myself by

throwing myself at him and begging him not to go. I'm the daughter of an MC club president and the manager of a Whore House. I've already shown that I can be weak and vulnerable. I won't be showing it again.

"You got everything?" Stone asks JB, who's holding a backpack and bedroll.

"Just about," he responds.

I make haste towards the door, swinging it open and standing back, clarifying that it's time they left.

"Safe trip home, JB," I blurt out, keeping my eyes fixed on a spot far across the yard. "Try to keep out of trouble."

As he walks to the door, not once do I feel his eyes on me. He just walks on by, with no emotion, no words, not even a goodbye, thank you, nor kiss my ass. I slam the door shut behind him but can't resist moving back to the window.

Johny B

When I get to my ride, I secure my bedroll to the front of the handlebars, then grab a fistful of my bag ready to secure that, too. But knowing that I can't leave like this, I let it drop back to the ground.

Stone is already on his bike and revving the engine, ready for us to go. I quickly glance his way, our eyes connect, and I smirk back at him. Ignoring the swift shake of his head, I turn and walk back towards the house.

With my hand on the handle, I fling open the door and with sure steps, I head into the kitchen to where Scarlett is standing with her back against the counter. I take hold of her shoulders and bring her swiftly into my arms. I place my lips firmly on hers and

the intensity of the sexual charge between us is palpable.

“What are you doing?” she questions.

“Making sure that you understand that this is far from over for us, Scarlett,” I whisper against her lips. “I promise. You and me, what we have, the connection. This is just the beginning, and you can be sure as fuck that I’ll be back to finish what we started.”

One more deep, lingering kiss and I’m out the door before Stone makes his move and drags me back outside. Hopefully, leaving Scarlett with a racing pulse and a heart full of promises.

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Chapter

Twelve

Present time.

Johny B

“ W hat’s crawled up your ass and fucked you hard enough to put that pained expression on your face,” Mammoth teases, dropping onto the stool beside me as I knock back a shot of bourbon. Pissed at Scarlett’s reaction, I’d headed back to the bar, needing something to numb the pain.

“You don’t need to answer that. I already know,” he added before I’d got the chance to respond.

“Know what?” I growl back at my brother.

“That you came face to face with Scarlett and she handed you your ass in a bag,” he snickers.

“Fuck off,” I growl at him while signalling to Ginger to set me up with another drink.

“Look.” Mammoth lays his arm across my shoulder. It weighs a fucking ton because everything about Mammoth is huge. “We’re here for a reason, and that’s to work with Smoke to remove those assholes, Paddy and the Death Valley Irish.”

“I understand that, and I’ll do whatever you need me to, you know that,” I throw back defensively.

“I do. You have nothing to prove to me, but Smoke...”

“Stop fucking with me, Mammoth.” I turn to him, giving him my full attention. “Spit it out. What you getting at?”

“You have the perfect opportunity to show your worth, that you're loyal, hardworking, and willing to put your neck on the line for not just your chapter, but for the Young Outlaws. Show Smoke that you're much more than just a pretty boy with the perfect haircut.”

“What then?” I snigger. “Scarlett’s not interested.”

“Bullshit,” he laughs in my face. “For a dude who’s had more women in his short life than Hugh Hephner, you sure seem to be clueless as fuck when it comes to Scarlett.”

“She’s different from any of the other women I’ve been with.”

“Yeah, and I’ll be honest. No one is more shocked than me with how you’ve kept your dick in your pants since you got back home. It was obvious that someone or something had gone down while you were here, and had a major influence on your man whore ways. But you’re so blinkered when it comes to her that you can’t see what’s right in front of your face.”

“She flat out told me to fucking leave.”

“JB, you’ve been gone what, six months?”

“Yeah, about that,” I agree.

“And in all that time did you call her, write her?” he asks, raising a brow and shaking his head, already knowing the answer. “In any way, did you show her that you were even thinking about her?”

“No, but I told her when I when I left that it wasn’t over. Not for her and me.” I’d whispered those exact words when I’d ignored Stone's warning and shot back inside to kiss Scarlett one more time before I was forced to leave her.

“When it comes to women like Scarlett, words need to be backed up with actions, and you, you did jack shit.” He pats me hard on the back. “So, what you got to do if you really want her is to work at redeeming yourself.”

“Smoke, he would never allow it.”

“That’s why you prove yourself to him first. Give him no valid reason why you’re not good enough for his daughter. Then the road is clear for you. Just make sure you don’t fuck it up, otherwise Smoke will have you buried alive, face down with your ass sticking out so he has somewhere to anchor his bike.”

“Fucking asshole,” I laugh at his stupidity.

“Right, I’m going up to our room,” Mammoth warns me, sliding off the stool. We’d been allocated one of the guest rooms with two singles beds, although I’m sure to fuck that Mammoth will more than fill the narrow cot. “Do me a favor and give me an hour or two.” He grabs the back of my neck and gives it a firm squeeze. “I gonna call my woman, and I’m hoping it will develop into some steamy phone sex.”

“Jesus, Mammoth,” I hiss back at his over sharing. “Come to think of it, thanks for the warning. The last thing I need to see after the day I’ve had is you with your fat cock in your hand while you shoot your load.” He sniggers as he turns to head in the direction of the room. “And make sure you keep your shit well away from my bed,

you dirty fucker.”

“You still not up for some company?” Ginger asks as she comes to stand in front of me, only the bar separating us. “No strings.”

“I thought you were hot on Stone?”

“He only has eyes for Oriana these days. Hasn’t tapped any of the club girls since she came on the scene,” she sighs.

“Is that a hint of sour grapes I hear in your voice?” I question. It wasn’t until I’d moved out of Velvet Reds and into the clubhouse that I’d seen the way Ginger looked at Stone. Whether he’d gone there or not, I couldn’t say for sure.

“Nah, maybe at first, but Oriana’s cool, and Stone is all in when it comes to her. And the way she momma’s little Sasha like she’s her own blood, ain’t no way anyone is ever gonna be able to take her place.”

“You’ll find the right man, Ginger, but it ain’t me, sugar. And when you do, you’ll be his everything and you’ll be like, Stone, Stone who? Never fucking heard of him.” A smile lights up her face and damn, she is a beautiful woman and a cut above the other available chicks that hang around here. But my head and dick are firmly in agreement with my heart. There’s only one woman for me and I’m going to work my fucking ass off to get her back.

Chapter

Thirteen

Johny B

“First of all, I’d like to express once again our gratitude to Mammoth, and the rest of our Florida brothers for the help you have given us after the explosion,” Smoke addresses everyone from where he sits at the head of the table. He’d called church thirty minutes ago, knowing that all the brothers were on site, as Smoke had the club on a temporary lockdown.

“After speaking to their Prez a few days ago, he’d agreed to send a few of our Florida brothers up here to help out with the Irish situation. I’d not mentioned this before because, to be honest, they got here a damn sight quicker than I’d expected.” He lets out a huge sigh. “As it turned out, that was a blessing. Having a second doc on hand has made it easier for us to get everyone the treatment needed without having to visit the local hospital.”

He shifts uncomfortably in his seat. “Of course, we can’t forget the loss of our dear brother, Cub.” He lifts his gaze to Wolf. A deep sadness lingers in his eyes. “I promise you this Brother, we will avenge his death with a wrath that will compare to no other.” Every man in the room grunts out their agreement. Wolf returns it with an emotional nod of his head. No words, as I’m sure it would break him.

“Now, to our number one priority.” Smoke leans forward. His normally expressionless face is like thunder. “How we slaughter Dunne and the fucking Death

Valley Irish.”

I push back in my chair; the wooden legs make a scraping sound across the floor. I don't get fully up, but lean my upper torso across the table, arm stretched out until my fingers touch the outer edge of the Young Outlaws MC emblem that's etched into the wood surface.

“You infiltrate them,” I say loud and clear.

“Just how the fuck do you think we will manage to do that?” Edge berates me.

“You send someone in under cover.” I drop back in my chair, crossing my arms over my chest.

“Don't you think that he knows every single one of our faces by now?” Stone laughs. “Even Ghost's, who might be able to work undetected but he's not faceless to them.”

“Any of the new prospects are far too green to send in.” Mayhem offers up to the conversation. “And it would take months to get them into any kinda capability.”

“Time we don't have,” Wolf growls. His need for vengeance is clear, which is understandable.

“They have no idea who I am.” I make eye contact with Smoke. He was already eyeballing me from the head of the table, but as to what he's thinking, other than possible wanting my head mounted on a stick, I have no idea.

“What the hell, JB?” Mammoth pipes up. “What kind of crazy, half-cocked plan are you concocting?”

“What makes you think that they haven't been watching us?” Smoke at last opens his

mouth to speak. “I’m as sure as fuck they’d have had eyes on us watching the chaos as the bomb went off.”

“Probably jacking off to it, too. The sick fuckers.” Hurricane slams his fist on the table, adding credence to his anger.

“Which, if they were, they’d have seen us arrive.” Mammoth shakes his head. “Too risky, JB, and I’m damn sure that Cannon wouldn’t allow it.”

“So, do we have any other suggestions on how we take them down?” Smoke addresses his brothers. Three or four of the guys start talking over each other, most of it negative.

“Hold on a minute,” I hold my hand up, shouting loud enough so that everyone halts, and heads turn in my direction. “Hear me out.” Again, I place my attention directly on Smoke, commanding his full acknowledgement. “Just picture this. I get rid of the hair, the leather and play down the swagger.” I switch up my accent and go with a not too exaggerated Irish twang. “Now you might not be aware of this, but my ancestors came here from Ireland back in the 1920s, fleeing from the political unrest and famine. So, as you can see, it’s not like I can’t add a recognizable lilt to my voice to make it more believable, now is it?”

Now I have everyone’s attention. Even Mammoth’s jaw is hanging slack.

“I can do this,” I say with utter conviction.

“Well, he’s certainly got enough arrogance and cockiness to pull it off,” Mammoth sighs. “Personally, I think you must have some kinda death wish, and I certainly can’t agree to his, not without the Prez, and the rest of the clubs backing.”

The noise in the room escalates. Each and every one of the brothers having something

to say, but as I continue to watch Smoke, his stoic expression gives nothing away.

“That won’t be necessary, Mammoth.” Smoke sits upright in his seat. “I’m not convinced. My contempt for you is no secret JB, and however much I’d take great pleasure in having your sorry ass obliterated off the face of this earth, you’re still a brother. A Young Outlaw, and I hold Cannon in great regard, and even if I thought that this charade would work, it would be too big of an ask.”

“Give me twenty-four hours,” I push at Smoke. “Twenty-four hours, that’s all I’m asking, and I’ll show you how serious I am about helping you and your chapter take down the Death Valley Irish.”

The whole room is silent while we all wait on Smoke.

“We’ll put it to a vote,” he barks. His eyes glide from one side of the table to the other, each of his members giving a ‘Yah or Nay’. Every one of them gives me the chance to prove myself. Mainly because not one of them has any alternative ideas other than to go in blasting, with a substantial risk of the club taking more casualties.

“You’ve got until 18:00 hours tomorrow, JB.” With that, the gavel comes down against the wood. “Church over, we meet again tomorrow, so get your thinking caps on, because when JB crashes and burns, we will need a realistic plan of action.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” I mumble under my breath while filtering out with the rest of the brothers.

“JB,” Mammoth grabs me by the arm and marches me across the communal area and straight out the front door. He doesn’t stop until we’re off the porch and a few feet away from the clubhouse. He releases me with a shove. “What the fuck was that? Talk about blindsiding me.”

“You’re the one who told me I should do something to prove myself to Smoke.”

“Not something so fucking extreme.” He hisses between his teeth, doing his best not to attract anyone else’s attention. He flexes his hands, clenched fists to stretched fingers, a sure sign that he’s trying not to punch the fuck out of me. He lets out a huge sigh. “You should have spoken to me first.” He lets out a huge sigh. “How the hell would I have explained that to Prez, if Smoke had taken you up on your offer?”

“Oh, Smoke will agree,” I say with a grin. “So, you better start practicing your negotiation skills.”

I turn away, leaving Mammoth gobsmacked, gaining enough distance between us before he gets the chance to say another word.

I hop on my ride, power her up and head off of the compound. I’ve got shit to do and only twenty-four hours to get it done.

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Chapter

Fourteen

Johny B

My skin stings like a motherfucker and if it wasn't for the heat of the day, I'd be heading for a head cold.

Duke, the owner of the tattoo joint, was reluctant to take me as a drop in. That was until he'd he paused from inking the pretty blonde chick's chest, lifted his head up and saw the brick of cash that I had in my hand. I stepped a little closer to check out his work. The pair of pink lips that were right above the nipple of the chick's left tit was crazy realistic, right down to the glossy sheen and pearly whites that were peeking between the plump mouth.

Duke still wasn't convinced, so I waited the few minutes it took for him to finish what he was doing before I grabbed him by the forearm, and dragged him through a door at the back of the room. Which turned out to be the cleaning closet, but needs must.

When I explained to him who I was, a Young Outlaw, and that the work needed to be done that day, off the books and with the utmost discretion, he was more than amicable. I returned later, but instead of going through the front door, I hung around the back and waited for the shop to close. When Duke pushed open the back door to let me in, it took a double take for him to realize it was me. My hair, now shaved at the sides, was barely a quarter inch on the top, a dramatic change from the thick dark

head of hair that I'd favored not more than a couple of hours before. Gone was my highly groomed quiff, that has been my pride and joy since I was a teenager. The bags I had clutched in my hands contained thick-rimmed glasses, V-necked t-shirts and skintight pants, that normally, I wouldn't be seen dead in. In fact, I was a little concerned that my future chances of producing any decent baby making juice might be at risk, with how snug the crotch of the pants were when I'd tried them on in the clothes store.

The transformation is incredible, even if I say it myself. No longer do I resemble a trendy throwback from the 1950s with virgin skin. And after Duke had finished inking me up, I barely recognized myself when I checked out my reflection in the studio mirror. Inked angel wings wrap around my neck, but instead of the center being an angelic goddess's body, in its place is an ornate cross. On my upper right arm is a pretty basic Celtic design. Although my skin is still flushed in places from the work, Duke has managed to make the ink seem faded, like an older tattoo that I've had on my skin for several years and not fresh, giving my overall appearance more authenticity. The work that he's done within the time restraint is impeccable, and he was generously rewarded with a chunk of hundred-dollar bills.

My main concern now is whether the Young Outlaw's compound is under the watchful eye of the DVI.

Without a doubt, it's reasonably easy to don my lid, wear a high neck sweater, my cut and ride in on my bike, because from a distance I don't look any different. I have no baggage. All the other items I grabbed while out, are waiting on me in a room I've rented in a cheap motel on the other side of town. But getting past whoever is on guard at the front gate, which is now repaired and keeping the unwanted out, might prove to be more of an issue.

Rex is manning the gate when I arrive, and thankfully a quick glance my way is enough for him to release the gate and wave me through. Rex had been around

Velvet's while I was holed up there and, being a brother, was privy to me being there. If it had been any of the other Nevada brothers, then I might have not been so lucky.

I cut the engine once I get in front of the clubhouse, kick out the stand and dismount. There's Diesel and one of the other guys on their knees, hands covered in grease and oil from working on an old chopper. I can see Mammoth leaning against one of the porch uprights, chewing on a fat cigar while chatting shit with Stone, but not one of them pays me a second glance as they go about their business. Yet, as soon as I pull my lid off, Stone is flying down the steps, taking them two at a time. Shoulders tight, face like thunder as he marches towards me.

"Hey, who the fuck are you?" he hollers when he gets closer. "Some stupid fuck if you think it's okay to walk in here and stay fucking breathing."

I drop my head. Not because he scares me. Well, he does a bit because he's a huge fucker, but I'm trying to hide the smirk on my face. When I lift my head again, I find Stone up close and personal, raging like a bull.

"Mammoth knows me real well," I snigger in his face before I train my gaze on my Road Captain, who is close on Stone's heels.

"The hell I do..." he wavers, then takes another huge stride forward. His brows knit together, his eyes mere slits as he focuses on my face. The minute his bearded mouth gapes open, I know that the penny's dropped. "... fuck. JB. Your hair."

"Mother... fuckering... shit!" Stone laughs out a gasp.

"That's nothing." I shrug my shoulders. "Let's go inside and find Smoke."

Stone hammers on Smoke's office door after Ginger points us in that direction, saying that he'd been in here for the last hour. Although Smoke is quick to respond,

shouting for us to come in, he doesn't raise his head from the papers he's got laid out in front of him to check out who it is that's entered.

"Smoke," Stone voices when his prez shows no sign of acknowledging us.

"What do you want?" he growls, throwing his head back. "I've got a lot of shit going on right now." His eyes are shut, jaw tight as he slams the palm of his hand hard onto the surface of the desk with frustration.

"Trust me, you really need to see this," Stone tries once more to get his attention.

"Jesus!" His eyes fly open, his lips open, teeth bared. "What's so fucking important that..." When his eyes eventually take me in, his words come to a sudden halt. He takes a long, strung-out breath before he gathers his composure and speaks up. "So. Fucking. What?" he gripes out. "JB got a haircut. Hardly fucking earth shattering."

"That's not all," I pipe up and quickly shrug off my cut, pull off my high neck sweater and reveal my inked skin. "Now, are you convinced that I'm serious about infiltrating the Death Valley Irish?"

"Sure, you look different," Smoke deadpans. "But it will take more than appearance to convince Dunne to trust you and let you into their fold."

"To be sure," I find my inner Irish and reply with a northern lilt, but when he raises a brow, I drop it just a quickly. "My family are Irish immigrants, so if they don't take me on face value and start looking into my past, then it's not going to be too far from reality that I wouldn't hold an alliance for my ancestral homeland."

"And when they see that you're linked to the Young Outlaws Florida, your pretty little head will be on a stake, even with your new skinhead cut," he counters.

“Not if I use my real name.” I fire back.

“We might call you JB, but everyone at the club knows your birth name.” Mammoth intervenes.

“No, you don’t,” I reply bluntly, not willing to go into it further. “Jonathan Bently is not my birth name. If I use my real name, no amount of research will link me to the club.”

“All this is irrelevant bullshit,” Smoke says, tapping a smoke from the packet on his desk and placing it on his lips. He flicks open his lighter, holds the flame to the tip and takes a long, deep drag. He leans back in his chair, letting the smoke slowly out through his nostrils.

“Your prez would never sign off on it, and I sure as fuck ain’t going to ask him to either. Cannon has already gone above and beyond, sending you guys over here to back up our situation with the DVI. To place one of his men in a position that can only be described as a suicide mission, despite my own desire to put a bullet in your head, ain’t fucking happening.”

“What if I ask him?” Mammoth suggests.

“I don’t expect you to do that either. It’s our battle to fight,” Smoke counters. “Not Florida’s,”

“With all due respect, Smoke, when Dunne and the DVI made you and your chapter a target, they didn’t just fuck with Nevada, they fucked with the whole fucking Young Outlaws. Every fucking chapter. Every fucking brother who wears the YOMC colors.”

“He’s right, Prez,” Stone adds. “This could be the one and only chance we get to

wipe out those motherfuckers once and for all.”

“Alright, alright.” Smoke pushes out of his seat and walks around to the front of his desk. “I’ll speak to Cannon, but I warn you now, I ain’t going to lay it on thick. I’ll give him the facts, and the facts only, as well as pointing out the risks. However, if he ain’t convinced, I ain’t going to try to convince him otherwise. You get me?” His eyes seek me out. “If he’s not interested, then that’s the last I want to hear of this shit, right?”

“Sure,” I say back cockily because, knowing my prez, he’ll be all in. Hell, I wouldn’t be surprised if he doesn’t start wanting in on the planning, too.

“Now get the fuck out of my office.”

Chapter

Fifteen

Johny B

As soon as I got the message from Mammoth that Smoke had called church, my gut started to bubble with excitement.

It's been three days since I walked back into the Nevada clubhouse looking like a totally different man. I've been going stir crazy while staying inside, keeping myself to myself, making sure that my new appearance is kept under wraps from the outside world. So, I pray that the summons is a sign that a decision has been made, and it's the right one.

When I walk into the room, I am not sure if the fact that not all the club members are in the room is a good or bad sign. Mammoth is here, along with three of the Nevada council and, of course, Smoke, but there's another guy sat at the back of the room that I can't recall seeing before.

"Why is this fucking thing not working?" Smoke grumbles from where he sits at the head of the table, shaking what looks like an iPad that he has in his hands, with frustration.

"Let me," I say, walking straight over to him. I can see the iPad has power, but the App isn't working. "Looks like the Wi-Fi signal has dropped out." I quickly get into the settings, press a few buttons and Cannon's face fills the screen. "Hey, Prez," I

say, and Cannon acknowledges me with a simple nod before I hand the gadget back to Smoke.

“Sit the fuck down, JB,” Smoke orders quickly before turning his attention to the screen. It’s not that I expected a thank you or anything, but... Rude.

“Cannon. Good to see you, brother. It’s been a long time since I saw your ugly fucking face.” Smoke sniggers.

“The feelings mutual,” Cannon fires back. “Considering that, most of your entire life, you’ve worn the same deadpan expression, you sure have a shit ton of wrinkles, old man.”

“Fuck you,” Smoke responds while propping the screen against a huge mug on the table, in a position where we can all see it. If you didn’t catch sight of the slight twitch at the corner of Smokes’ mouth, you’d think that he hated his Floridian counterpart. Yet it’s blatantly clear that they have mutual respect for each other. “I’d have preferred it if you were here in the flesh, but I get that you rocking up here would get back to the DVI quicker than a cheap shrimp dinner would hit the John.”

“Yeah, no doubt they’re already aware some of our brothers are there. That in itself is going to get them watching the shit out of you.” Cannon sits further back from the screen, and I can see that he’s sitting at the head of the table that sits in our own clubhouse. “I’ve taken on board your request for the utmost discretion on this plan of yours, not that I like keeping it from my brothers, but for now, I’ll go along with it. So, I’m the only one here.”

“I appreciate that.” Smoke nods at the screen. “I can’t risk this all going to shit because someone slips up, saying something they shouldn’t. Not when JB’s going to be in the heat of it all.”

“I get it.” Cannon nods in agreement. “So, I guess you’re keeping it to the chosen few that are here today at your end, too?”

“Yeah. You’ve met Edge, Mayhem and Stone, of course.”

“I have, but who’s the sketchy fucker at the back who’s trying to blend into the background?” Cannon sniggers.

“That’s Ghost.”

“Very apt. So, he’s the one who will be watching JB’s back?”

“I don’t need anyone shadowing me,” I interrupt. “For me to do this, I’ll need to immerse myself into my new identity. The last thing I need is an Outlaw distracting me from the sidelines.”

“Don’t give a fuck,” Smoke interjects. “Ghost got his name for a reason. Not you, or any of the DVI, will have an inkling that he’s there. Besides, that proviso is non-negotiable.”

“And who insisted on that?” I demand.

“I did,” Cannon’s voice comes through the speaker. “So, suck it up, buttercup.”

“Yes, Prez.” I might not like it, but there’s no way I’m going against him.

“Right, let’s get down to business,” Smoke leans forward, elbows resting on the solid wood tabletop. “After an intense discussion with Cannon, this is how we think this should play out.”

Forty-five minutes later, with everyone in agreement, even myself, the meeting starts

to draw to an end.

“I think we’ve covered everything,” Smoke concludes. “Cannon, you good?”

“Yeah, but if it’s okay with you, can I have a few minutes with JB?”

“Sure,” Smoke agrees. “Come on, brothers, I think a drink is in order.”

“Do you need me to stay, Prez?” Mammoth asks Cannon as he stands.

“No, man. I’ll catch up with you later. I just need a quick word, that’s all.”

I stay seated, watching as the guys file out of the room. Except, where the fuck has Ghost gone? Because I sure as hell didn’t see him go through the door. I check around the room, but there’s no sign of him. Creepy fucker.

“Here,” Smoke is standing beside me, holding out the pad for me to take. “Leave it on the table when you’ve done, then come join us.” I respond with a quick nod. Once the door has clicked closed behind him, I turn my attention to my Prez.

“I really don’t think it’s necessary to have…” I start.

“Non-fucking-negotiable, JB. End of. You get me?” he barks.

“Sure,” I bite back, knowing that Cannon is a stubborn ass, and nothing I do or say will change his mind.

“Now that it’s just you and me, I need to be sure that you’re serious about this, and it’s not some half assed attempt to impress Smoke, so you can get the girl.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t fuck with me, JB. The last six months you’ve been walking around like your dick’s retired. Not once have you given any of the bitches a second look or even got a blowy off any of them. If it wasn’t for the fact that Mammoth told me he’d walked in on you jacking off to pictures on your phone, I’d have changed your club name to Eunuch.”

“It’s not like that,” I try to defend myself. Although, he’s not far from the fucking truth.

“You might be thousands of miles away, JB, but I can still smell the bullshit from here,” he sniggers. “Look, just promise me that, whatever the reason, when you go in there, you make sure you think with your head and not with your dick because I don’t want to lose you, brother.”

“It makes perfect sense. I need to do this. Prove my worth as a brother of the YOMC,” I say with confidence. “I’m the one for the job.”

“Well, you sure as hell have gone all out to change your appearance.” He chuckles. He runs his hand over his own head, which is covered with a short crop of stubble. “You stealing my look, brother?” The cocky smile on his face has me laughing along with him.

“With all due respect, Prez.” I smirk back at him. “I was going for the crappy, skin-headed, deadbeat look, but if you wanna own it, then sure.”

“Fuck you,” he jokes. “Go piss off, I need to get back to my old lady who, at this very minute, is naked in my bed, and waiting for a good hard fucking.”

“Best not keep her waiting, then.” I go to cut the call, but stop when Cannon put’s his face closer to the screen.

“Keep safe, JB, and once this is over, I expect you to tell me who the real JB is.”

With that bombshell, he cuts the call.

Even though the Young Outlaws are my family now, they don't know everything about my past. They can't possibly. Those records are well and truly sealed. To go by my real name, when I infiltrate the DVI, could be one huge clusterfuck. But, if they try to delve into my past, it should only bring up information of my youth and nothing that would link me to the club or the part of my life, that if made public knowledge, could lead to my early demise.

I respect and trust Cannon like a real brother, but still I'm not sure I can, or want to, dig up a part of me that's been buried deep within my soul.

I find Smoke and Stone sat a table at the far side of the bar, deep in conversation. As soon as Smoke catches sight of me he beckons me over. Their discussion comes to an abrupt end as soon as I get within hearing distance. Stone rises up from his seat and as he goes to walk past me, his hand comes to my shoulder, giving it a firm pat, before he moves to where the others are standing further down the bar. Smoke gestures for me to take the now vacant chair opposite him.

“It's no secret that I don't fucking like you,” Smoke says before my ass has even had a chance to mould to the solid wood seat. “Personally, if you end up in an unmarked grave, out in the middle of the Nevada desert, I would give absolutely no fucks. But I have a lot of respect for Cannon, and for some reason he seems to want to keep you alive. So, with that in mind, I'm going to give you one final chance to walk away, take your cocky ass back to Florida. Guilt free, no repercussions. Away from Nevada.”

The short of it... Smoke wants me gone, and away from what he holds most dear. I've got to give Smoke some credit. He'd rather give up this chance of getting his

revenge on the DVI if it means me staying away from his daughter.

Even though it's not on the cards... yet. Staying away from Scarlett is not going to happen.

"Then what will you do?" I ask him. He bestows me with one of his expressionless stares. "Wait it out? Monitor their movements, in the hope that a chance will come along for you to go at them, all guns blazing with no real idea at what you'll be facing?" I don't give him a chance to reply before I hit him harder. "That will leave the club vulnerable. They've taken you by surprise once, the last thing you want is to take another hit like that." I rest my arms on the table and tilt my upper body nearer to him, dropping the level of my voice. "What if next time it's your girl, Tenley? Think about Stone. He's already lost people close to him. If anything happened to Oriana, or God forbid, that cute little girl of his, would you really want that on your conscious?"

"Guilt tripping me won't work, JB. I'd never let that happen. I'll protect them until the death." Smoke growls back at me, at last showing that under his stoic exterior is a heart that loves hard, and can shatter just like the rest of us.

"Then this is the perfect opportunity." I sit back in the chair, arms laying palm down, flat on the tabletop. "Inside information is paramount when it comes to bringing these fuckers down, so let me be your eyes and ears so we can get this shit done."

"You understand that doing this is not going to change my opinion of you?"

"Maybe it will, maybe it won't. One thing it will prove to you is that I'm true to my word. If I say I'm serious about something, then I will give it my all. I'll go to the very edge of hell, if needed."

"Well, I can tell you now, you and my daughter are never going to happen. I'll kill

you myself, and I won't give a fuck if Cannon wants my fucking head for it, because it will be worth the sacrifice."

"I'm always up for a challenge," I wink at him. "So, I guess it's up to me to prove you wrong, change your perception of the kind of man I really am."

"You're deluded, because that ain't ever going to happen."

"Time will tell, Smoke. Time will tell."

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Chapter

Sixteen

Johny B

T here are at least four in the bar that I recognize from the intel we have, that are known to run with the DVI, but as yet, there's no sight of Dunne.

It's been three weeks since I left my Nevada brothers clubhouse and moved into the shitty motel. I left my Harley behind, switching it out for an old Dodge Aeries, which seemingly belongs to Oriana, and holds some kinda sentimental value to her. Stone agreed she could keep the beater, as long as it got fixed up. Visually, it looks like it belongs in the junk yard. but Diesel has been working on it and, under the hood, the car is sweet. The paint job has yet to receive the attention it needs, but that's a good thing because it works perfectly for my cover.

So, every night I drive the few miles from my motel to the bar, string out a couple of beers and watch the cocksuckers drink and play pool. In the hope that these dudes will lead me to Dunne.

I notice a tall guy, out of a group of four, as he walks towards the bar. Fair hair, cut short around the ears and back, a little longer on top. He must be close to six-three in height and around three hundred pounds, and I'm talking muscle, not fat. After assessing the crew over the past weeks, my guess is that this guy is the leader of this small pack. My hope is when it comes to infiltrating the DVI, and getting an introduction to Dunne, he's a strong contender.

I take this opportunity to make my initial move, and walk towards the bar to grab myself another beer. I slide onto the stool right next to where he's standing, his huge hands with thick knuckles are curled over the polished wooden edge of the bar while he speaks to the attendant. When the attendant turns away to fill his drinks order, I make my move.

"You up for some competition?" I say to him, going in strong. No point fucking about with small talk. I'm hoping that, after seeing me around the place for the last few weeks, he's not going to think it strange.

He turns to look at me, brows furrowed as if I've asked him to explain the meaning of life.

"Pool," I offer quickly, because although I can't say I'd totally hate it, I'm sure his head will explode with the pressure of thinking if he has to do it for much longer. Lots of brawn but zero brain, and quite possibly he lacks the ability to converse with anyone other than his close-knit community. "Not knocking your buddies over there," I gesture towards the pool table, where one of them is racking up the balls for another game. "But they're not much competition. You've walked all over them every time."

"So, what you saying?" His thick, nasally New Jersey accent tells me he sure ain't local. "You think you can beat me?"

"I can give you a better game than they can."

"You willing to put your money where your mouth is?" he challenges me. "Say fifty bucks?"

"Let's say a hundred, make it a little more interesting," I counteroffer. "In fact, I'll even cover this round of beers to sweeten the deal."

For a moment or two, with the way he's shaking his head, and his attention moves to the uncapped bottles of beer the bar attendant has just place in front of him, it looks like he's going to knock me back. He laces his fingers around the bottles, two in each hand and turns to walk away.

"Pay the man," he hollers back at me as he makes his way back to the others.

Quickly, I order one more beer for myself, pay and walk towards the pool table. The rest of the guys are watching as I get nearer. I see the distrust and annoyance. at my injecting myself into their group. clearly in their eyes.

"This is Carl," he points out the smallest of the group, who has a mop of curly brown hair on the top of his head. Around five-seven, medium build, but his wide silver, gray eyes have a hint of crazy that even gives me the shivers. "And these two, fuck knows who's who. I've known them for years and still can't tell them apart, are Rory and Nolan." The twins are most definitely identical. Blazing red hair that, if let free from the top knots their sporting, must fall to their shoulders. Two sets of sage green eyes stare at me with a hint of apprehension. Even me, being a hundred percent heterosexual man, can appreciate how fucking handsome these two are. Why on Gods earth they're not hitting the catwalks in Milan, or plastered over billboards in the latest designer gear, rather than walking in the shadow of Dunne, is beyond me.

"Hey," I offer in response.

"And what will we be calling you?" he side-eyes me. While tipping his beer bottle to his lips.

"Jackson. Jackson Byrne."

"You don't sound Irish," he squints back at me, his head on a tilt.

“Great-grandmother,” I explain. “Came over here late 1940s after finding an American soldier that was stationed in the south of England. She was working there, their paths crossed, she got knocked up and decided to come looking for him.”

“So, how come you ended up keeping the Byrne name? Did she not get her happy ever after?”

“Turned out he was already married, so she ended up fending for herself. Not like she could go back home, now, was it? Young catholic girl, unmarried and pregnant. She’d have been disowned by the family and sent straight to a home for disgraced women, and her baby taken off her as soon as it had taken its first breath.”

Giving up my families past doesn’t sit well with me, because what I’m spurring out like verbal diarrhoea is the truth. If they look back into my life, this is exactly what they will find. A woman who struggled to survive, to bring up a child, my grandfather with literally nothing. Not the best start, and one that led to a life of hate and punishment. But that’s another story, that for now, I’m keeping firmly under wraps.

“Are you going to break, or am I?” I ask gesturing to the pool table in an attempt to steer him away from more invasive questions. He continues to eye me up for a few more moments while continuing to sip from his bottle.

“Malachy,” he suddenly holds out his hand to me. “But most call me Mal.”

I reach out and slap the palm of my hand against his. “Nice to meet you, Mal.”

There’s no doubt that Mal is a good player, yet I’m better, but I take it right up to the last two balls on the table before I take a bum shot on purpose, letting him win the first game.

“Double or quits?” I offer, at which he instantly takes me up. I knew he’d wear his

arrogance like Superman wears the letter 'S'. Bold and proud.

This time, I take it right to the black ball and looking like it's a done deal, but the shot I make sends the white ball following into a pocket that looks like a fluky move. I'll admit it's not an easy shot to make, unintentionally or not, but it's one that I can pull out of the bag if the right situation requires it.

"Fuck," I shout out throwing the cue onto the table, faking frustration.

"Damn." Mal chuckles with relief. I saw him getting worked up the further into the game we got, with all signs of me coming out on top. "You're good, that's for sure. But your finishing is shite."

"Don't suppose you want to go again, do yah?" I grumble when I see him checking out his watch.

"Sorry, Jackson. Playtime is over. I gotta get back to work." The rest of the guys start finishing off their beers, grabbing keys, cigarette packets, lighters and anything else they'd left on the round table nearby.

"You all work together?" Mal gives me a curt nod. "What is it that you all do at this late time?" Immediately, I'm hit with an icy stare, his friendly exterior stripped away with that simple question.

"Why you ask?" he steps up a little closer, his hackles up as if ready for a fight.

"Hey, no reason other than I'm looking for work myself," I hold my hands up defensively, despite my need to cave his arrogant face in. "Didn't mean to get all up in your business."

"Why are you in town, anyway?" One of the twin's pipes up.

“Exactly that reason.” I take a step back, looking submissive goes against the grain, but I do it to show that I’m not looking for trouble. Not yet, anyway. “I was working construction in Oregon but had a disagreement with the site manager.”

“Disagreement?”

“Yeah.” When he raises a brow at me wanting more, I expand my reason. “I slit the fuckers throat when I found him trying to fuck a local girl around the back of the local bar.”

“Was she your girl?”

“No!”

“So, what was your problem?”

“She was barely fifteen, and far from willing. He was fucking raping her.” I growl back at him.

“Then why not report him to the cops?”

“Because the two guys that were getting their kicks watching him attack the defenceless girl were his paid lackeys, and they’d have given a different turn of events. One that would have found me facing the death sentence.”

“And what about those two? Surely, they didn’t stand there with a handful of candy-corn watching the show. Didn’t jump in to help him?”

“Sure, they did.” I smirk back at him. “I ended them, too. Then left town, jumped state and ended up here.” The room goes quiet. Only the sound of the retro jukebox, that sits opposite the bar pulling up its next play, can be heard. “I covered my tracks

and got rid of the bodies, but you can never be too careful.”

“Violent little shite, aren’t you?” He says finally breaking the silence. “So, what happens now?”

“I go wherever the work is, and stay the fuck out of Oregon.”

“Meet me here tomorrow at eight-forty-five. I might have something for you.” With that he nods at the rest of the guys to follow him towards the door, and they disappear out into the night air.

I step into the bar at eight-fifty-five, ten minutes after the agreed time, simply because I don’t want to look too desperate. Thankfully, Mal and the guys are still here.

“You’re late,” Mal snaps at me when I get within earshot.

“Yeah, was planning on getting here early so I could grab food before you came, seeing as I ain’t eaten since this morning. But the fucking car had a busted tyre, so I had to change it out and it took far longer than it should have.” I’m conscious that I’ve started to babble, so I shut the fuck up before I end up looking like a total dipshit.

“Well, if your belly’s more important than work,” he throws up his hands and begins to turn away. “Don’t let me stop you.”

“Nah,” I say quickly. “Truth is, if I don’t start earning soon, I ain’t gonna have money to eat.” He turns back towards me. “You said you might have something for me?”

Instead of answering my question, he takes his time perusing me, drilling me with a stare as if trying to work out if I’m trustworthy or not.

“Let’s grab a seat and I’ll fill you in.”

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Chapter

Seventeen

Johny B

The burner phone I call from is basic, but crucial for me to be able to keep a secure line of contact with the YOMC. It only rings out twice before I hear Mammoth's deep rumble of a voice filter down the line.

"How's it going?" he enquires immediately. Cannon had agreed for the guys to stay up in Nevada while the covert operation was in play. Also, it left the chapter with a few extra men if or when shit went down.

"Is Smoke around?" I reply, wanting to make sure that the Prez is in ear shot.

"He's right here. I'll put you on speaker."

"Talk," Smoke barks, making me aware that he was listening. Ever the abrupt asshole.

"I'm in." I inform them. "Not sure what it is that's going on, but Mal wants extra bodies on the job, and by all accounts we're meeting at an old warehouse out in Yerrington, which is where you thought they were holding up."

"Do you think Dunne will be there?" Smoke's voice is full of hope.

“I believe there’s a good chance, especially if something big is going down.”

“Watch your back, JB. Don’t take any unnecessary chances, and don’t forget to keep in touch. Okay?” Mamma Mammoth warns again, making me feel like a teenager about to go off to college, but all the signs are good.

Over the last four weeks I’ve gained Carl, Rory and Nolan’s trust, but more importantly, Mal’s. I’ve been working with them, mainly chauffeuring them around in a black ford pickup, staying in the car while they went about their business, but last week, things changed.

We’d pulled up outside a strip club on the east side of town, and while I was ready to wait for them out in the car, Mal had instructed me to follow them, but to stay at the back, and to watch their backs. I was buzzing. It was a major step closer to getting in with the DVI.

Mal was talking to what looked to be the manager of the joint when things got a little heated. Luckily for me, Carl, Rory and Nolan were too busy eyeing up the pussy. So, when Mal got all up in the guy’s face, and one of his heavy’s made a move towards Mal, I was ready.

Although the heavy was a good six inches taller and wider than me, I didn’t hesitate. The element of surprise is always a bonus, and gave me the upper hand. A swift and powerful kick just above the back of the knee instantly put him off balance, giving me the perfect opportunity to blast a powerful punch to the back of his head. He’d hit the floor like a sack of shit. With another firm kick to the side, he’d rolled onto his back. With my boot pressing firmly on his throat, his eyes bulged, and tears streamed from his eyes, like a chicken-assed pussy. I kept on the pressure until he was rendered unconscious. At that point, I’d asked Mal if he wanted me to finish him, but he shook his head. However, my actions were enough to prove to him that I wasn’t just trustworthy, I was lethal, too.

“I’m meeting up with Mal later tonight,” I offer up the limited information that I have to Mammoth and Smoke.

“How do you know that your cover hasn’t been blown, and you’re not walking into a trap? Mammoth voices his concern. As hard and scary as my brother looks, he’s got a softer side, and can be a bit of a worrier at times.

“Only time will tell,” I reply nonchalantly. “But I don’t think so. These guys aren’t clever or skilful enough to hide it if they had sussed me out. I can read them like an open book.”

“You sure you want to do this?” I’d expected that question to come from Mammoth, but it’s Smoke that’s offering me the chance to cut and run. “It’s not too late to pull out.”

I’m not sure if it’s out of concern for my welfare, that he’s giving me the option, or if it would give him the perfect excuse to keep me away from Scarlett, and send me packing back to Florida. Then again, if I am walking into a trap, Smoke will get his wish of me ending up dead.

“Like fuck I’m going to walk away after the time and effort I’ve put in over the past few weeks,” I huff. “I’m doing this.”

“Then be careful,” Mammoth sighs, reacting to my air of determination. “Report in as soon as it’s safe and don’t take any crazy assed risk trying to impress Dunne. It’s information we need, not heroics.”

“Noted.”

“We need you back in one piece.” Mammoth adds, to which I’m sure Smoke mumbles in the background ‘speak for yourself’. Guess he doesn’t care if I don’t

come out of this at all.

“I better go. It’s a thirty-minute drive, and I don’t want to be late.” I offer up a quick goodbye before cutting the call.

I snatch my gun from the dresser and tuck it into the waistband of my jeans, flipping the bottom of my t-shirt to make sure it’s covered. Grabbing a light jacket and my keys, I head out to the car. The buzz of excitement soars through my veins, along with an equal level of apprehension in my gut.

Tonight could go two ways, but I’m hoping it’s not going to end with me face down in a shallow unmarked grave.

A car pulls up alongside mine in a deserted car lot, half a mile from the bar where we normally meet. When I glance over to check out the occupants, I see Rory and Nolan are sat up front, Nolan in the driver seat. The back looks to be empty.

Rory glances over and greets me with a blank expression, while his twin gets out of the car and beckons me over with his hand. I climb out of the car, closing and locking the door behind me.

“Get in,” Nolan gestures to the seat he’s just vacated. “You’re driving.”

I do as he asks while he gets in the seat directly behind me. He leans forward through the small gap between the headrests, which is unnerving, but when the nuzzle of a gun is pressed against my cheek, it takes all my resolve to keep my fears in check. Have they realized who I am? Is this it? The end of me. If it is, I ain’t going out with fear on my face.

“Shit, Nolan.” I turn sideways in my seat so I’m facing him, despite the gun now pointing square in my face. “What the actual fuck?” I keep my voice as calm as

possible. “Get that fucking thing out of my face, asshole.”

“Aw shit,” Nolan drops the gun and sits back in his seat. He shoves his hand into the front pocket of his jeans and pulls out a twenty-dollar bill. “Here,” he grits out, handing it to his brother who is looking as smug as hell.

“Told you he wouldn’t freak out,” Rory laughs snatching the money, kissing it and stuffing it into the top pocket of his dark green cotton shirt.

“You two are fucking jerks,” I shake my head and snigger. “What if I thought you were being serious and tried to disarm you? Your stupid wager could have all gone to shit.” I rebuke them. “What if I’d have pulled this out?” Faster than they have a chance to blink, I pull out the black shiny Glock 17 from my waist band, and point it at Rory’s head. “And this fucker doesn’t have a safety catch.”

They both stiffen as they realize I could take out both of them before Nolan would have a chance to raise his hand towards me. I hold my position for a beat before I lower my weapon and tuck it back where it was. I’m hoping that it’s enough to calm the situation, and the crazy fucks chill the hell out, taking it as a sign that we’re all on the same side. So they think, anyway. For now.

I turn back in my seat and fire up the engine of the car, bringing my hands up onto the steering wheel. “So, where is it we’re going?”

It’s around forty-five minutes before we pull up outside a four-story building on the outskirts of Yerrington. We all pile out of the car, and I follow the twins as they walk past the boarded up front of the building, turning down the side toward what looks to have been an emergency side exit, that sits underneath old fire escape steps, that are a hazard in themselves.

Nolan raps his knuckles against the door. A square window at eye level, that I hadn’t

realized was there, slides open so that the person at the other side can see who's here.

"What the password," the guy asks with all seriousness.

"Feck-off, Col," Rory shouts over Nolans shoulder. "Let us in, ya eejit." The trapdoor shuts, the sound of metal on metal follows, which can only be the bolts being released before the door swings outwards.

"You know you're meant to give the password," the five-foot nothing dude that stands in the entrance gripes out. He might be lacking in stature, but the scar that curls up from each side of his mouth tells me that he's no doubt seen his fair share of trouble. He has an air of 'give no fucks' about him, which no doubt means he's dangerous. "Who the hell is this?" he barks when he catches sight of me behind Rory.

"Chill your shit, Col. This is Jackson, and do you really think I'd be stupid enough to bring someone here without Paddy's approval?"

"Nobody told me." He huffs under his breath as he steps outside, holding the door fully open to let us in. All the while, his eyes are surveying the surrounding area, before he finally closes the door behind us.

"Where is the boss, anyway?" Nolan asks, as we stand in what appears to be the stairwell to the building. A set of dirty stone steps lead up to the levels above, metal handrails with peeling paint hang loose, where the bolts are starting to come away from the concrete wall. The whole area is windowless, the only light comes from a single bulb hanging from the ceiling, casting shadows against the dirty gray walls. I'm still unsure what this place is, or used to be, because it's obviously been left to rot for quite some time.

"In his office, but he's in a shitty mood," Col warns him.

“What’s got him all pissed?” Rory and Nolan ask at the same time.

“He’s restless. Waiting until the dust settles so we can...” Col stops suddenly, his brow creasing, eyes spearing me, remembering that I’m in clear earshot and he could quite possibly be talking too much. “Best speak to him yourself.”

“Maybe later,” Rory sniggers. “Chances are he’s online gambling, so hopefully he’ll win a few dollars and be in a better mood by then. Come on Jackson, let me show you around, introduce you to some of the guys.”

I follow the twins through another door and the space opens up dramatically. The fluorescent fixed lighting that’s set into the ceiling is bright, and a strain on the eyes after being in the darkened stairwell, and it takes a few minutes for my eyes to adjust. But when they do, I can see that this was once a productive manufacturing company. The huge machines, that I’ve no idea what they produced, take up most of the floor space. Long conveyor belts, connecting one contraption to another. Two round vats the size of the hot tubs seem to be where the process starts, but still doesn’t give me a definitive answer. Everything is covered in a thick layer of dust. Even the floor, except for a clear used track that leads further down the side of the factory floor and towards another door at the end.

My curiosity would normally get the better of me, and have me asking questions about this place, but that’s not why I’m here, so I keep my trap shut.

“It’s an old candy factory,” Rory pipes up as if reading my mind. “Closed down about ten years ago, after they got called out for using an unregulated chemical in the process that was toxic. The legal case bankrupts them and the place got left to rot. We moved in here a few months ago. No one’s got a clue that we’re here.”

I nod my understanding, but snigger inside knowing that the YOMC know that the DVI are holding out here, and Ghost has had eyes on the place for quite some time.

As yet, he hasn't had the opportunity to penetrate the building.

My being here now, gives me that much-needed chance to see this place from the inside, giving me the capability to feedback detailed information on the interior layout of the building. Which I'll do as soon as I get back to the motel.

Nolan, who gets to the door first, pushes it open, and it brings us to another room that must have been the worker's area.

The room is narrow, one end consisting of a kitchen area with a sink set into yellowing counter tops that have clearly been cleaned up, and now hold the usual tea and coffee making paraphernalia. Two coolers sit under the counter containing various beers and soft drinks. There's a trash can in the corner overflowing with empty bottles.

I eye the room. Four guys are sitting around one of the round tables playing cards, but instead of laying bets with dollar bills, they're using bottle tops.

As we get nearer to the players, Nolan comes to a stop, while Rory keeps on walking, making a beeline for the coolers.

"Anyone need a beer," he shouts out to everyone, which is met with a collection of positive grunts and hand waves. Not one of them taking their attention off the game.

"Assholes," Nolan calls them out to get their attention. "This is Jackson, He'll be joining us." All eyes come to me. Guess I'm more interesting than the cards their hands are holding,

"Hey!" I simply offer in return.

"You've got, Dean, Brian, Oli and the skinny one at the far side, that's Fox," Nolan

points out each one of them. They all look similar. Short, cropped, dirty brown hair, and green eyes. Even though they're all seated, they look to have good height and stature. Except for Fox, that is. He's slight, narrow shoulders, and it's difficult to judge his height because he's hunched over the table, as if his backbone is made of flexible rubber. Again, as if reading my mind, Rory comments while placing a handful of bottles on the table, "Don't let that fucker fool you," he nods toward Fox. "He's a wily fucker. He'd sneak up on you, rip out your liver, sauté it with a handful of shiitake mushrooms and a nice merlot before feasting on it."

"Thanks for the heads up." I take the bottle that Rory holds out to me.

"Do you play Poker, Jackson?" Nolan pulls out one of the free chairs, offering for me to join the group.

"Cards has never been my thing," I lie. I'm quite an accomplished player, but having them think otherwise can only work in my favor.

"Well, you better learn because it's a requirement," he jokes.

"Really?" I raise a brow at Nolan in question.

"No," Fox says, his voice a higher pitch than you'd expect for someone who exudes an air of menace. It's one pitch off being squeaky. "But there's a lot of hanging around in this game with not much else to do, so it fills the void while we wait for our next job."

"Okay, that makes sense." I slide into the seat offered, bringing my elbows onto the tabletop, my hands up and fisted, I bring them together and rest my chin on them. "So, whose gonna teach me how to play?"

I was really hoping to get eyes on Dunne tonight, but realistically, I'd be stupid to

think that it was going to be that easy. I need to find my place here. Become part of this group. That means spending time getting to know these assholes. Letting them think that they have the upper hand, for a while anyway, is an effective way to build their trust in me. Enough that they will open up to me, and hopefully let me in on what the hell actually goes on here.

When it comes to the game, I'll let them think I'm as green as a one-dollar bill. And if it consists of them taking the piss out of me, I'll take it. It's a means to an end. To get close to Dunne, and find out what he has in store for the YOMC. This sure as fuck ain't going to be easy, but I'm up for the challenge, and one I'm determined to conquer.

I simply need to bide my time, play the game, and then do what's needed to bring these fuckers down.

Brian, who's sat next to me, is the one who takes the time to explain the game, all while they still play on, giving me a view of his hand. Because I know the game, it gives me the opportunity to watch the other players, reading them and identifying the telltale signs of when they are bluffing or not.

Fox is the one who's the hardest to read, but the way his left eye opens a smidgen more when he's holding a strong hand, is something I pick up on, despite it being undetectable by most. I do, however, take my time in asking questions at legitimate times to reinforce my lie at being clueless at Poker or any card game come to that. Sure, they snigger, and I even become the butt of their jokes but it's all in good humor, and expected.

About half an hour in, they agree to deal me in. After a handful of rookie mistakes, again to make it look more believable, I win a lucrative game. Well, it would have been if we were betting with dollars rather than bottle caps.

“Are you sure you’ve not played this before,” Nolan laughs from where he’s leaning back against the countertop watching the game, when I win another hand.

“Maybe he’s a hustle,” Rory implies.

“Nah,” Fox chips in. “Beginners luck, that’s all.”

We carry on playing for an hour or so, and I’m trying my best not to show my disinterest in it all. All I really want to do is get to meet Dunne. The fact that he’s in close proximity is as frustrating as hell.

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Chapter

Eighteen

Johny B

A fter five weeks of doing pretty much nothing, I'm starting to think that this plan of mine ain't going to cut it.

Sure, the guys have a level of camaraderie, that on reflection, is not so dissimilar to what I have with my MC brothers, and they have welcomed me in without much resistance. The problem is, it's left me with a nasty taste in my mouth and a heavy feeling in my gut, which I can only assume is disgust at my disloyalty to my club. I know deep down that it's unwarranted, because when it comes down to it, my allegiance to them is the reason I'm here.

I've already sent detailed information about the layout inside the building, and the number of men that are usually on site at certain times of the day and night, but that's all I've got.

It's become obvious, while I've been spending time here, that Mal is respected amongst the group, and has a level of authority over them. Although, not Dunne's go-to person, it's clear he's up there.

So, without actually sticking my tongue up Mal's ass, I try to stay close, build up a rapport with him, and show him that I don't bat an eyelid when they do discuss things that have gone down in the past. They're pretty well convinced that I'm ruthless, with

an element of psychopathic tendencies. Especially after stepping up to protect Mal, and then not even breaking out in a sweat when they'd put a gun to my head. The type of man who was willing to do whatever is needed to be done for the cause. Whatever the fucking cause is, because as yet, no one has even mentioned the Young Outlaws.

That is until today.

It's late, around twelve-thirty, when I step out of yet another poker game. It's getting boring, especially now that I'm winning most of my hands. I leave the room and go in search of Mal; he's been MIA since we got here over three hours ago to drop off the cash we'd collected from various places throughout the day. I don't get far before I spot him at the back of the factory.

"Jackson," he shouts over. "Grab Rory and Nolan, and then get your ass over here."

"Sure thing, Mal," I holler before making my way back into the chill room to grab them. When I tell them Mal wants us, they don't hesitate, and drop their beers to the counter to follow me out and over to where Mal is waiting.

It's not until I get nearer that I notice a large opening at the back of the building, a large, blue shutter door, three quarters open. A loading bay that I'm sure would have been used for deliveries back in the day, when this place was the hive of activity and production.

A van is slowly backing up into the open space.

I instantly recognize the decal on the back of the vehicle as one that I've seen not that long ago.

It had only been a few days after I'd arrived at the Nevada clubhouse, that I'd notice a

van parked down the side of the building. I'd asked Stone, who was making his way towards it, what they were having delivered from a printing company, as the signage depicted. He'd explained that they have an agreement with the owner of the company who gives them free use of his vehicles whenever the YOMC required it.

Apparently, the deal has been going on for some years after the club got him out of a life-threatening situation. Seeing as they are the perfect cover, the club uses them to transport guns and drugs while conducting their own 'business' deals.

So, why was one of the vehicles pulling up to the loading bay now?

Once the van is fully backed up into the bay, the engine cuts. Both cab doors fly open and out fall three guys, one of them being Fox. I've seen the other two guys hanging around here, but other than a nod of the head in acknowledgement, I haven't spoken to them. Both of them are bloodied up. One is cradling his arm against his torso, his face screwed up in pain. It's clearly dislocated.

It's obvious they've been in some kind of fight, although Fox doesn't look to have a scratch on him. That is until he walks towards us and, once closer, I can see a puffiness around his left eye, that in a couple of hours is going to be as black as coal, and a deep split to his bottom lip.

"I guess you came up against some resistance?" An unfamiliar voice comes from behind us. I hadn't even heard the footsteps against the concrete floor. The Irish lilt to the voice, and the way all the guys seem to straighten up, even Mal and Fox, and their eyes instantly focus past me, and I know it's him.

At last, I get to meet the elusive Paddy 'Jimmy' Dunne, and the head honcho of the Death Valley Irish.

"Then again, I didn't think for one minute that Smoke's lot would have handed over

the goods without a fight.” My ears prick up at the mention of the Nevada Prez, but I keep my face stoic. “How many were they?”

“Two in the vehicle,” Fox replies, wiping the blood that’s started to ooze a little from his lip, with the sleeve of his black hoodie. “They had a couple of guys on motorcycles as backup, but Daryl managed to shoot out their tyres when they came up level with us, and before they’d managed to get off a shot. The speed we were all going at, they went down hard, I’d be surprised if they got back up.” Fox sneers. “Dirty fucking bikers.”

It takes all my strength to stop me from clenching my fist and burying it into Fox’s fat mouth, making that split twice as wide. I want to make him bleed.

“Good work.” Dunne slaps Fox on the shoulder, showing his approval. “Mal, make sure, once the van is offloaded, there’s nothing that can lead it back to us, then dump it. When the cops find it in a couple of days and check it over, only Outlaw evidence will be detectable. Might as well rub some salt into the deep cut we’ve just hacked into their business.” He waves a hand towards the two injured guys. “Get cleaned up, and for fuck’s sake, get someone to drop him at the hospital to sort that arm out,” he points to the one groaning in pain. “Get them to pop that fucker back in.”

“I can do it,” I intervene, moving forward and nearer to Dunne. “I was forever throwing my shoulder out back in my college football days. It’ll be quicker and less painful than making the drive.”

Dunne eyes fall to me as he tries to weigh me up. Mal shows his displeasure at my speaking up by scowling at me. I ignore him and keep my attention fixed on Dunne.

The air is thick with tension. Dunne’s eyes are still rigidly fixed on me, but his expression gives nothing away.

“You’re Jackson,” he barks harshly. “The new recruit that Mal brought in.” It’s not a question. More of a statement.

“That’s me.” I throw back a little cockily.

A deep crevice appears between his eyebrows. His eyes stormy, and I brace myself for an onslaught. Suddenly, he wastes no time closing the gap, his forehead smooths out and his mouth curls, opening into a toothy smile.

“Cocky shite aren’t ya now?” he laughs, swinging his arm around my shoulder.

“I prefer confident to cocky.” I lift my chin a little higher, showing that I’m not the slightest bit intimidated by him.

“Jesus!” he laughs again. “Do you know how fucking refreshing that is?” He leans in closer and mumbles under his breath so that only I can hear him. “I’m sick of these arse lickers. Not got a decent set of balls between em.” He takes a step back and points his index finger at me. “You on the other hand, seem different. I like that. I think we’re going to get on.”

“And who are you exactly?” I enquire with little facial expression and a slight tilt to my head. I come across as an arrogant ass, but then again, I am.

His eyebrows shoot so far up his forehead that they nearly disappear into his hairline. His mouth falls open in surprise, and an equal amount of annoyance as his eyes roam my face, trying to decipher who the actual fuck I think I am.

“Only joking,” I give out a hearty laugh. “It’s nice to meet you at last. Now, do I call you Jimmy, Paddy or Mr. Dunne?”

“Fucker!” he chuckles, giving me a slap on the back. “You, my friend. You can call

me Paddy like all the rest of these reprobates. But don't think just because I like you it gets you any special privileges."

"I wouldn't want it any other way, I'm just glad that I'm part of all this." I wave my hand towards Deck, who is still pathetically whimpering in pain. "You want me to sort this?"

"No!" Deck snaps at the same time as Paddy nods, before turning and walking back to where he'd appeared from. From here I can see a set of metal stairs that lead to what must be where he hangs out while here. The wall is a bank of glass windows giving a perfect view over this side of the warehouse. What goes beyond that wall, I intend to find out in time.

"Buddy, just give me your hand," I turn my attention back to Deck, holding out my hand to him. "Trust me."

"Deck, just let him do it," Mal speaks up. "Turning up at the ER at this time of night, there's going to be questions, and we can do without the fucking hassle."

Deck huffs out like a reluctant kid but holds out his arm toward me, albeit tentatively. I wrap my fingers around his wrist, taking a firm hold. "So how the fuck did you do this?" I ask, distracting him.

"I hit the edge of the cab door frame awkwardly after one of those Young Outlaw fuckers punch...Arghh, holy fuck!" he screams out.

Before he'd had a chance to finish his sentence, I'd jerked his arm straight out and up, applying traction as I did. The bone jumped back into the socket without any resilience. I could have shown him mercy and done it nice and slow, but when faced with a chance to cause one of these fuckers some pain without suspicion, why the fuck not.

“Motherfucker!” he curses, grabbing me by the collar of my t-shirt with his uninjured arm, his head coming forward, as if he’s about to butt me for causing him pain. Then realization hits him and he quickly lets me go. Instead, he runs his hand over his upper arm and shoulder. “Shit, the pains gone,” he blurts out, his eyes wide in surprise.

“You’re welcome,” I snip back with a hint of sarcasm in my tone. “Just take it easy, though. It will be tender for a couple of days. After that, it should feel fine. Until the next time.”

“Next time?”

“Sure, that sucker will be a weak spot now, so if you’re going at someone, lead with the other shoulder, otherwise you’ll be right back to square one.”

“If you’ve finished playing Doctor J,” Mal grumbles at me. “Help Rory and Nolan offload the rest of the stuff from the van. They’ll show you where to stash it. You, Deck, get yourself off home. Take a couple of days. I’ll call you when I need you back here.”

Deck gives a quick nod towards Mal, but before leaving he reaches out, bringing a hand to rest on my forearm. “Thanks,” he simply offers before turning and walking away.

I turn away from a scowling Mal, and make my way to where Rory is taking hold of boxes as Nolan hands them down from the back of the van. I guess that Mal is pissed with me. His nose a little out of joint maybe from the way Paddy has received me into the fold, and maybe he sees me as a possible threat to his position within the crew.

“Grab a couple of boxes and follow me,” Rory instructs. “We need to put them in the lockup.”

The boxes are heavy, especially two at a time. What you'd expect with the markings on the side, A4 recycled paper. But I know exactly what's inside, and it ain't no photocopier supplies.

Chapter

Nineteen

Scarlett

It's unusual for me to take a trip to see my dad at the club house. In fact, I can count on one hand the number of times I have, and still have enough fingers left to give an insulting hand gesture.

My impromptu visit directly after the explosion had surprised and scared me, but also left me with a warm fuzzy feeling. Although I've grown up aware of the dangers that come with club life, death, destruction and mayhem being par for the course, the direct hit they'd taken had shaken me to the core. The loss of Cub was heartbreaking, but I'm no fool. It could have been much worse. I could have lost my dad. The only true family that I have left. And despite our unorthodox life with the secrecy of me being his daughter, I love him deeply, and losing him... I couldn't bear it.

I had been out of my mind with worry once I'd heard about the explosion, so I'd gone straight to the club, demanding to see him. I was told he was at Stone's cabin and immediately made my way there. When Stone finally admitted that he was in the downstairs bedroom at the back of the house, the fear that he was severely hurt infected my brain, and I'd forced my way past my need to see him. The shock of walking into room and finding my dad in a compromising position with a woman blew my mind. A woman who wasn't a club whore. It was a little amusing that she was instantly green with jealousy when he'd put his arms around me, thinking I was competition. However, the way my dad was so uneasy about the situation, obviously

at a loss of what to say, I'd stepped in and introduced myself. It was then that I'd notice how he looked at Tenley. I'd not seen that in such a long time. Not since Mom, and it had filled me with a warmth that made me want to shout out with utter happiness.

If I'm not mistaken, my dad may have at last found love again, despite his thought that it would never happen, as true love could only be experienced once. Not true. Not always, anyway.

I'm so intrigued by Tenley, but I've had no time to get to know her as Dad had shooed me off the premises as quickly as he could, stating that it wasn't safe for me to be there. Not quick enough to avoid a blast from my past, though.

On the odd occasion that I've seen or spoken to Dad since, every time I try to get him to talk, tell me more about her, he either clams up like an oyster and no number of attempts at prizing more out of him works, or he quickly changes the subject.

The one thing that he has mentioned, that had taken me by surprise, was me moving out of Velvet's. It's not something he'd even entertained in the past, but with recent events he was adamant. The sooner I was away from there the better, as the risk of it being the next viable target for the DVI was high.

I'm still not sure if it was coincidental, or if Smoke has pulled some strings, but the offer of a job in the city had come exactly at the right time. The apartment was perfect, not too far from the offices of Vista Legal, where I'd gained my internship.

The only problem is... I get lonely.

At Velvet Reds there was always someone around. The girls, or one or two of the YOMC brothers covering security. Now, it's just me.

Don't get me wrong, my neighbors are friendly enough, but passing the time of day when I see them in the hallway, or picking up my mail from the mailbox is as far as it goes. Mostly city workers, too. They tend to keep themselves to themselves.

Thankfully, my work, and raging thirst for knowledge keeps me busy. Knowledge is power, and I'm constantly striving for improvement. To be the best.

Yet today, I need a break from these four walls, and the highly charged, historical child abuse case that I'm using for research. I hope that it'll help in a major case one of the top lawyers of our firm is prosecuting. The more I get into it, the more I want to track down the pedo, cut off his dick, coat it in shit and sugar, and feed it to him until he chokes on it. Or, alternatively, I'll end up rocking in a corner a blubbering mess for the victims.

I'm desperate to find out more about Tenley, who turns out to be the stepsister to Stone's woman, Oriana. I've not known of any other women even piquing his interest, let alone sharing a bed since Mom passed. At least not in the way Tenley has.

Leaving the apartment, I drive to the club. Despite my request for Dad to make it known to everyone exactly who I am, he refused but agreed to make a handful of the council aware. So, as I pull up to the gate, I'm grateful that Edge is there talking to a prospect who's on guard. Without question, he lets me in, and I drive straight to the clubhouse, because if Smoke's not there, whoever is will be able to point me in the right direction. It's Tenley that I'm really here to visit, but if he found out I was on the grounds without him knowing, he'd be pissed. So, best make my presence known. Convincing him to let me see Tenley, now that might take a little bit of daughter persuasion.

I cut the engine, grab my purse and exit the car. My heeled pumps slip on the gravel a little before I regain my balance. Once I get nearer the building the ground levels out

from the constant footfall, but I'm still relieved when I get to take the first step up to the front porch. The door opens with ease, and I step inside making a beeline for the common room, knowing that if Dad there, someone will be.

Ginger is behind the bar, elbows planted on the top, her chin resting on the knuckles of her clenched fists. She looks miserable, and I'm pretty sure I know why. With the VP, and now potentially the Prez of the club, off the market, her chances of bagging one of the council members, and 'Old Lady' status is dwindling.

"Hey," I call out to her as I get closer. Immediately she straightens up and plasters a fake smile to her face.

"Hey, Scarlett. How are you? Is everything okay at Velvet's?"

"As far as I'm aware, it is." I could fill her in more, let her know that I no longer run Velvets, but I'm not sure I can trust her to keep it on the low. Smoke is determined to keep my connections to the club to a minimum. For now, I'm happy to play along.

"That's good. Can I get you something?" she indicates to the row of liquor bottles on the shelf behind her.

"No thanks, it's a little early in the day for me. I'm actually here to see Smoke. Do you know where he is?"

"He's in his office. Give me a second and I'll let him know you're here."

"No need." I wave her away. "I know where it is." I turn away, ready to move.

"But he's in a meeting," she shrieks out, panicked.

"Don't worry. I'll knock." I glance back at her and start to move quickly towards the

door that leads to the office, ignoring the way she's chewing on her lip. The concern is clearly written across her face. I'm not sure if it's for me or for herself. If it is for me, then it's unwarranted. He's my dad. What's he going to do? Shoot me?

When I step through into the hallway that leads to the office, I see that the door is slightly ajar. As I edge myself closer, I hear voices. When I look through the gap, I can see two people stood at this side of the desk. One is Stone, and even though his cut gives it away, I'd still recognize his stance and broad shoulders. I also have a side view of one of the Florida club members, who turned up in town at the time of the explosion. I can't see the back of his cut, but I'm almost sure it's Mammoth, due to the fact that he's one huge motherfucker. His shoulders are way broader than Stone's. Long dark wavy hair falls loose down his back, and his deep baritone voice bellows loudly in the room, despite him trying to talk quietly. He's the epitome of tall, dark and broody.

"Jesus Christ. Of course he had no idea." Mammoth grits. "You seem to forget that he's putting his life on the line, Smoke. For fuck's sake, give him a fucking chance."

"He's right, Prez," Stone adds to the mix. "Going behind enemy lines like this is risky. If they..."

"Scarlett!" My dad's voice booms over whatever it was that Stone was saying, when he catches me watching through the gap in the door. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Oh, yeah, hi," I push the door open fully and step inside. When I take a better peek at Mammoth, I can see that there's blood on his face and matted in his facial hair. A glance further down his huge body, shows the jeans he's wearing are ripped with cuts to his knees. I'd love to ask what the hell has happened, but as you'd need a chainsaw to cut the tension in the air, I think better of it. "I thought it was about time I got to meet Oriana and Tenley properly."

“It’s not a good time,” he growls back at me. He gets to his feet and comes around the desk and stands in front of me. “Maybe another time.” Taking my arm, he starts to walk me back towards the open door I’ve just stepped through.

“But it’s a good time for me,” I hit back. I step in closer to him, put my hands on his chest and look up at him with puppy eyes. “Dad, please. I really need a break from sickos, rapists and psychotic killers before my mental health takes a nosedive. What better than a couple of margaritas and female trashy talk. Please, I promise I won’t make a habit of it, but other than the girls at Velvet’s, I don’t really have any girlfriends to hang out with.”

I plead my case, holding my breath while I wait for his decision.

“Stone, are the girls up at the cabin?”

“Sure are. I think it’s an art day today.”

“Wow, that’s great. Sounds like a lot of messy fun.” I add quickly, hoping it’s enough to tip the balance.

“Okay,” Smoke huffs out. “Stone, take her up there while I talk to Mammoth.” His VP nods his agreement. “You make sure you let me know when you’re heading back out, and when you’re back home safe. You hear me?”

“Sure Dad,” I whisper to him, pushing up onto my tiptoes to place a kiss to his cheek. “Thank you.”

With Stone beside me, I leave the club house with a mix of nervous trepidation, and a bubble of excitement, at getting to meet the two women that could possibly be my friends and biggest allies, when it comes to being an integral part of the club and not a hidden secret.

“Do you realize what you’re getting yourself into?” Stone asks me as we walk the short distance up the hill, to the cabin where he lives with Oriana and Sasha. I still find it quite amazing how Stone has adapted to being a father to his adorable little niece. The beautiful child has the ability to render the grumpy monster of a man into a squishy marshmallow, with a simple batting of her super long eyelashes.

“What do you mean?”

“Oriana and Tenley have a kinda love hate relationship, being stepsisters and all. Believe me, you have no idea what it can be like, if you get caught up in the middle, when they get into it.”

“I’m sure they’re not that bad,” I laugh off his dramatics. Then a thought comes to me. “Has Smoke said something to you?”

“Now you got me puzzled. What you getting at?”

“You. Trying to put me off spending time with Tenley, and your old lady, in case I get to know both your softer sides.” I accuse him. “Did Da... Smoke put you up to it?”

“No, he didn’t, and it’s okay for you to call him Dad when you’re around me, you know. It’s not like I don’t know who he is to you.”

“I know. Just trying to keep it low key like he wants. Less chance of slipping up if I stick to using his club name.” He curls his hand around my bicep and gently pulls me to a stop, turning to face me. The scowl on his face tells me that he’s picked up on the sadness in my voice.

“He loves you, Scarlett. Don’t ever doubt that. He wants nothing more than to celebrate you, tell the world about his beautiful, intelligent and strong daughter. But

while ever there's a chance of you be being targeted because of who you are to him, then it's not going to change. He's already sacrificed one great love of his life because of the club, your mother. Losing another would kill him."

"What about Tenley? How does she fit into his life? Does she mean enough to him that she will also end up being another secret for him to keep?" I ask, trying to get something from him that will validate what I already suspect. That my dad is falling for a pretty news reporter, who had been hounding him for an exclusive.

"I think that Smoke's concerns about you and Tenley meeting are unwarranted." He replies diplomatically, a slight swerve in the topic of conversation. "I think all three of you are going to get on just fine. It might possibly be a major mistake, because I think you'll end up being nothing but trouble, but it will be good for you all."

"That doesn't answer my question." I snigger.

"Let's just say that if, or when, she's going to be with Prez and take on club life, you'll be the one who'll help her on the way."

"Jeezee! You really think that?" I shake my head. "Stone, I've still got a lot to learn when it comes to life with the Young Outlaws."

We find Oriana, Tenley and Sasha on the floor around a coffee table, getting extremely messy, painting with their fingers. An array of purple, pinks and blues, along with a dash of sunflower yellow are blotched over the surface of large white sheets of paper.

All three of them look in our direction with wide eyes, laughter still lingering on their lips when they notice us.

"Daddy Gabe," Sasha squeals, as she jumps up and takes off towards us.

“Wait, wait,” Oriana shrieks quickly getting to her feet. “Let me wipe your hands first.

“Don’t panic,” Stone assures her. “Just don’t get any paint on my cut, Angel. Or Uncle Smoke and the guys will rip the fu-,” he coughs, “fun out of me and make me look silly.” He catches Sasha in his arms, bringing her up against his chest, but Sasha holds her hands far out by her side, making her look like she’s about to take off in flight. He makes up for the lack of her embrace by planting a smacker of a kiss to her cheek, and in return is gifted with one right back.

“Scarlett!” Tenley’s voice quivers in greeting from where she sits. “Are you here to see me?”

“I’m actually here to see you all. I thought it was about time we got to know one another.”

“So, you’re not here to question me on my intentions?” She’s apprehensive, that’s for sure. The hand that is covered in paint has a subtle shake. Her other I can’t see, as her arm is hidden under the table.

“How’s the arm?” I ask, genuinely concerned, as I know she hurt it quite badly when she took a fall during the blast.

“Much better, thank you.” Her mouth curls at the edges, but she struggles to keep eye contact.

“Well, I’m going to leave you ladies to get acquainted.” Stone places Sasha back on the floor, and she immediately runs back to her painting activities, giving Stone the opportunity to grab Oriana around the waist and bring her close. He instantly covers her mouth with his, and holy hell! The kiss is so fucking passionate it steams up the whole room with its palpable heat.

Damn! It gets my heart racing just watching them and makes me feel a little uncomfortable, seeing as Stone has always been like an uncle to me. However, it's so sweet when I catch him mouthing those three little words to her before walking away.

"Right, I'm out of here." Stone announces loudly. "Try not to get into too much trouble, ladies." And with those last words, or warning, he's gone.

"Oh Lord," Oriana flings her still paint covered hands up into the air. "Where are my manners? Scarlett, can I get you something to drink?"

"I'm good, thank you." I slip out of my shoes and place them beside the door before making my way over to where Tenley sits, still on the floor. Even without my heels on, it gives the impression that I'm towering over her. With a straight face and firm stance, I ask her sternly. "So, Tenley. What exactly are your intentions when it comes to my dad?"

The look on her face is priceless. Mouth gapping open, eyes wide, beads of perspiration start to pop up on her forehead.

Oriana looks on, fidgeting as if ready to pounce in order to defend her sister if needed. The tension is mega high.

"Oh my God," I laugh out loud. "Your faces." I double up at the waist, unable to control my laughter. "I'm kidding." After a moment of hesitation Oriana joins in the joke. Even Sasha lets out a girly laugh, although I doubt that she's fully understood what's so funny. Mind you, with the cheeky expression on her face, maybe she's savvier than her tender years would have you think.

Tenley eventually lets out a nervous chuckle, at which I respond by eyeballing her. I point my fingers to my eyes then flick them back in her direction, back and forth making sure she knows I will be watching her. "Although, if you hurt him, I may well

have to kill you.”

“Hey, stepsister or no stepsister,” Oriana stands with hands on hips. Thankfully, she’s just finished getting washed up and her hands are now clean. Otherwise, paint disaster. “I’d be right beside you handing you the gun. No one hurts our Prez.

“Spoken like a true ‘Old Lady’” I salute Oriana.

“I ain’t Stone’s old lady.” She sniggers.

“Who are you trying to kid? The way he talks about you, there’s no doubt that he’s totally in love with you. He’s made his claim clear with all the brothers in the club. You are strictly off limits. It’s only a matter of time before you’ll be wearing a ‘property of Stone’ cut on your back.”

“He never?” she chokes on her own words.

“Well, what do you expect?” Tenley speaks up. “He won’t have a single word said against you. Just the other day he shot Smoke down because of something he said.”

“Oh God, what have I done to upset Prez?” she cries out.

“Nothing bad,” Tenley reassures her. “It was some throw away comment about nothing important. In fact, Smoke meant it as a joke, but you know how straight faced he is. Sometimes it hard to tell when he is or isn’t being serious. That’s why Prez was shocked when he bit back so quickly.”

Oriana’s face transforms from worried to relaxed, instantly.

“Uncle Smoke likes you, Mummy.” Sasha jumps to her feet and comes running full speed towards her. Oriana catches her wrist just before she tries to fling them around

her legs. “He told me so.”

“He did, did he?” Oriana smiles the biggest of smiles that reach right up to her eyes, glowing with love as she looks down at the little girl who now calls her mummy.

Although she might have started off being Sasha’s nanny, it’s blatantly clear their relationship has morphed into something quite special. And with the connection she now has with Stone, from what my dad has mentioned, they have become a strong, perfect family.

“Why don’t you tell me exactly what Uncle Smoke said to you while we give your hands a good clean?”

“But I’m still painting, Mummy,” Sasha grumbles.

“I think that’s enough for today, besides it’s lovely outside, so once you’re cleaned up we can go into the garden and get some fresh air.”

While Oriana takes Sasha off to clean her up, Tenley goes behind the kitchen counter and opens up one of the cupboards. Placing three wine glasses onto the countertop, she then goes to the fridge and brings out a bottle of white wine.

“I have a feeling that I’m going to need this,” she sighs, hooking the glasses between her fingers, her other hand firmly gripping the neck of the bottle.

“Let’s go sit outside and I’ll crack this baby open.”

I follow her down the hallway that leads from the far side of the living area, past the bedroom where I’d witnessed her cozying up with my dad, and out through the back door. Which brings us to a quiet, good-sized patio area. There’s also a grassed space that holds a dual swing, slide and two or three other play items. The area is

surrounded by a white picket fence, which I'm sure is all Stone's doing. Making sure that Sasha has a safe and secure place to play. Beyond the fence is a thick wooded area that's still part of the overall compound, as the land that comes with the clubhouse is a substantial amount. I know that Smoke originally planned on having this cabin as his home, but when Stone's situation changed unexpectedly, and he needed a good living environment for Sasha, he had selflessly given it up. The last thing any Prez wants is to lose his VP, so giving Stone the use of the cabin was a small price to pay.

Now Tenley is on the scene, and the way my dad seems to be all enamoured with her, I guess that the plan he already has for a new smaller cabin for his own use, might have to be reworked to a larger building.

"Take a seat," Tenley offers, pointing to one of the eight oak chairs, set around an oblong shaped table.

She waits until I take a seat before she places herself directly opposite me. The door swings open and out comes Sasha at a trillion miles an hour, causing a waft of air to brush my skin as she runs past me, making a beeline for a sandbox over near the far fence.

"Wow, she's full of jumping beans today." Oriana puffs out air from between her lips before falling into the seat next to me. "Thanks," she responds to Tenley when she fills the empty glass placed in front of her. "I really fucking need this." Grabbing the stem of the glass, she brings it to her lips and takes a good, long sip. "Sasha loves building sandcastles, so the good news is, we have a good hour before she gets bored and wants to do something else. She's a bit of a perfectionist, even at her age." She lets out a long, relaxed exhale. "Let's talk."

The chat goes well once Tenley realizes that I'm seriously not here to give her the third degree, and that I truly want to get to know her and Oriana. With us all now

relaxed, thanks to the wine, the conversation flows.

It's not until Sasha starts to get restless, now on the swings after finishing her sand masterpiece, that Tenley starts to make a move. Sasha has already had me check out her handiwork, but to me it looks like a pile of sand with a naked Barbie sticking out the top, from the waist upwards, circled by a number of colorful building blocks pushed into the perimeter. It was then that I realized that I'm a little tipsy, but it wasn't enough to stop me. We'd already drunk a lot of wine between us, and I'd already come to the conclusion that I was no longer fit to drive myself home so it won't hurt if I have a little more.

"Shit," I giggle when I get to my feet again, now having to hold on to the edge of the table to steady myself. "How did that happen?"

"What?" Tenley smirks. "You mean the putting of a glass to your mouth, and knocking back wine like you've just spent hours in the Nevada Desert, and it's the only liquid refreshment available?"

"I blame you," I point a shaking finger towards Oriana. "You should have listened to me when I said it was a bad idea to open that third bottle."

"Oops!" Oriana looks back at me all innocently, holding the neck of the bottle, and tipping it upside down. Not a single drop falls from the opening. She then starts to snigger behind her hand. "I think we have another bottle in the fridge, should I go get it?"

"No!" both I and Tenley shout out at the same time.

"I think you've had enough." Tenley walks around and removes the bottle that Oriana's now swinging from side to side before it flies off erratically.

“Party pooper,” Oriana fires back at her stepsister.

Despite me having my share of the delicious vino, I have noticed that Tenley has mostly nursed her glass throughout the conversation, and has only topped it up the once. Which can only mean that both Oriana and I, have had the lion’s share. Damn! I’m way over the limit and Oriana is in no fit state to be in charge of Sasha either. Oriana is now slumped down in the chair. If she slides down any further, she’ll be on the floor, and is struggling to keep her eyes open.

Sasha, now bored with the swings, comes running towards us but Tenley is quick off the mark, stepping between her and her Oriana, so she can’t see the state she’s in.

“Hey Sash, let’s go wash up, and you can have some TV time. Would you like that?”

“What’s up with Mummy?” she asks, trying to see past Tenley.

“She’s tired, that’s all. So, I thought it would be nice to let her have a bit of a nap.” Tenley explains. “So, TV?”

“Okay,” she replies, heading off towards the house, seemingly placated. “Can I have cookies?” I hear her ask Tenley as they enter the house.

Before Tenley closes the door, she gestures back to me, her hands moving fast, directing me to move Oriana into her room.

Tenley must have more faith in my current ability than I do, because my head is spinning, and my body is swaying. However, I guess I’m not as bad Oriana.

I wait until the door is firmly closed before I suck in a deep breath, grab Oriana under the arms and pull her to her feet.

“What... what’s going on?” Oriana slurs. “Where’s Sashhhsssa?”

“With Tenley.” Now on her feet, I put her arm around my shoulder, and although not the easiest of maneuvers, I do manage to walk her towards the door. “I’m going to get you somewhere comfortable so you can sleep it off.” I use the wall as a support while I get the door open, holding it back with my foot while I move us both over the threshold. Thankfully, Tenley’s bedroom door is ajar, so a quick push with my hip we’re in. A few more steps to negotiate and I’m able to drop her onto the bed, her body bouncing she lets out a soft ‘harrumph’. When her back hits the mattress, her eyes fly open.

“This isn’t my room,” she mumbles, her head moving from side to side taking in her surroundings. She grabs the collar of my cotton shirt, and pulls me nearer to her, my face hovering above hers. For a moment I think she’s going to kiss me but instead she whisper-shouts.

“This is the room where Stone fucked me for the first time.” She looks right, then left as if checking no one else is listening. We are the only ones in the room. “Lots of times to be honest, but don’t tell Tenley. She might get the ick sleeping in the same bed if she found out what freaky things we’ve done in it.”

“I won’t,” I assure her.

“Pinky promise?” She holds up a hand, little finger jutting out. This girl needs to get out more, she’s spending far too much time with the kid.

I go to do the only thing I can, even though I feel like a total dick. I hook my little finger with hers. Before I manage to do it, her arm falls to her side, and she leaves me hanging. A soft snore escapes her slightly parted lips. She’s out of it.

For a moment, I consider laying down beside her, taking advantage of the

comfortable bed and chance a quick nap myself, but then I remember what she hinted about her sexcapades with Stone, and I shudder.

I'm not naïve. I know that Stone's no angel, but he's also like an uncle to me. So, the visual of him, my dad or any of the club brothers in the act of coitus is a tad disturbing. I've grown up being around these guys, even though they had no idea how I truly fit into the YOMC family.

I step out into the hallway and go in search of Tenley. I really need to be heading home but driving my car is out of the question. The sound of the TV and Sasha's giggles point me in the right direction.

Tenley has her phone to her ear, and is in the middle of a conversation but beckons me over to her using her free hand.

"Yeah, but Scarlett needs a ride home." I wait while she continues. I guess she's got me covered. "Yeah, I get that. Okay, I'll let her know." She cuts the call.

"Was that Smoke?" I enquire.

"Yeah. He's sending Stone up in your car, so he can drive you home."

"Doesn't Stone need to be here for Sasha? I'm sure Smoke can take me. Or even one of the other guys."

"I'll take care of her." Her eyes quickly flick towards Sasha, who is quite happy watching a kids show and demolishing the cookie that she's gripping in her tiny fist. "Scarlett, your dad is tied up, which means that if he can't take you himself, then it has to be Stone. He trusts him more than anyone else. Of course, he's going to call on his VP to ensure that you get you home safely, especially with all that's going on at the moment." I can't deny that I'm a little disappointed that it's not Dad. I feel like I

hardly get to see him, and with the amount of liquid courage I have inside me right now, it would have been the perfect opportunity to find out exactly how deep him and Tenley are. Although, thinking about it, Dad is the king when it comes to dodging questions on his personal life. Chances are I'll get more information out of Stone.

Speak of the Devil. The sound of the door opening, then slamming shut, rings through the house.

"Where is she?" he asks when he comes in and, after scanning the room, doesn't see Oriana.

"Daddy Gabe," Sasha squeals and comes running towards him. With a dip down he scoops her up onto his hip, her little legs coming around his body, arms hooking around his neck. "Mummy's sleeping. She drank too much of that special juice. You know, the one I'm not allowed because its only for grownup people."

"Yeah," he tickles her under her chin. "It makes children sick. Even adults need to be careful not to drink too much." Sasha's lashes flutter quickly, her mouth dropping into an O shape as concern for Oriana hits her. "Don't worry, baby girl. She's going to be fine once she's rested up some." A kiss to her cheek puts a smile back on her face. As soon as he places her feet back to the floor, she goes off like a firecracker, zooming back to watch her program.

"Where is she?" Stone asks again.

"In my room." Tenley captures his hand before he gets to move away. "Go easy on her, Stone. She rarely gets a chance to let her hair down these days. I made sure that I stayed sober so I can watch Sasha."

"Hey, I'm not mad. I only want to check on her." He pats the back of Tenley's hand to reassure her. "I'm pretty bummed that I missed seeing her drunk, though."

Laughing, he starts to walk away but hollers over his shoulder. “Give me five, Scarlett and I’ll take you home.”

Once he’s safely down the hall and out of ear shot, I take advantage of the limited time I have left with Tenley.

“Think hard, Tenley,” I address her. Her eyes switch from where Sasha is now dancing along with the characters on the TV show to me. She doesn’t ask what I’m referring to. She knows.

“Look, Scarlett, it’s early days. Too early to know what Smoke and I have, or the longevity of it. We’re still getting to know each other.”

“But I do know him. I’m his daughter.” I counter. “Since my mom passed, he’s not once, to my knowledge, shared a bed with another woman. That part of his life is sacred, and he wouldn’t share it easily. Yet I walk in to find you cozying up with him. I won’t lie, it took me by surprise.” I hit her with a steely glare. “I hope this isn’t just some crazy-assed plan to get a scoop for the tabloid you work for.”

“Now you’re being ridiculous.” Tenley hisses back at me and fires a venomous glare, that easily rivals my own. I have to give her kudos for standing up for herself, that’s for sure. “I don’t know what to say to you Scarlett, other than things got crazy, and it just happened. But to think for one minute that our actions were premeditated by either of us, quite frankly, is insulting to us both.”

The air around is charged. Each of us waiting for the other to speak.

“Don’t break his heart,” I warn her, but in a soft tone.

“What about my heart?” she replies with a similar subtle voice. “What you don’t know is the reason I’m here is because I’ve been working with the club.”

“What do you mean?” I scowl at her.

“I went undercover, got close to Dunne so I could try to get information. So, tell me Scarlett. When it comes to matters of the heart, how can I be sure that Smoke is not going to cast me away once this feud with the DVI is done, and I’m the one being played?”

“Smoke might be the prez of an outlaw motorcycle club, have this hard persona that everyone sees and a no fucks given attitude, but it’s all fake. Inside he has a huge heart, and when he lets himself love, he loves hard.”

“That maybe so, but...”

“Tenley. I’ve seen the way he looks at you, his body language says it all. He cares for you deeply, even if the stubborn old goat hasn’t let himself fully acknowledge it yet. There’s no doubt in my mind. What you need to ask yourself is, could you see yourself living club life? You’ve done your research; you know exactly what goes on. Like I say, think hard, because if you can’t love him for who he is and what he represents, then you need to walk away now.”

Tenley doesn’t get a chance to respond, as Stone comes walking towards us. He’s all gooey eyed. No doubt from watching his old lady while she sleeps.

“Come on then. Let’s go grab your cage and I’ll take you home.”

The fresh air and short walk to my car is enough to sober me up somewhat, but I still ain’t risking getting behind the wheel, so I let Stone take the driving seat.

“How are you going to get back?” I ask, slipping into the passenger seat while Stone fires up the engine.

“One of the prospects in going to follow us in a club cage.”

We pull out of the yard and silence falls between us.

It's not until we're almost at my place that Stone eventually speaks.

“You girls have a good time?”

“We did, thank you.” I turn my head to face him and smile. “How adorable is Sasha?” I coo. “She's such a sweetie, but I have no idea where she gets all her energy from, and geez, she's as sharp as a tac.”

“That girl is wiser and smarter than her years, that's for sure. Has the hearing of a bat and doesn't miss a single trick,” he smiles. “Can't deny it though. I was scared as fuck when I first gained guardianship of her. Now, I can't imagine life without her or Oriana. They're that special part of my life I never realized I was missing, until they both came crashing into it. I can only hope that I'm good enough for them, because they both deserve only the best.”

“Well, I do know that when it comes to the parenting part, you and Oriana are doing a fantastic job. Sasha is so happy, confident and loving and it's clear that you both love the bones of her.” The way Sasha runs to him as soon as he walks into the room, and how Oriana's eyes heat up at the sight of him, it's blatantly obvious to me that their one amazingly happy family unit.

“Hey,” I swiftly change the subject. “So, Tenley...”

“Don't make this awkward, Scarlett,” he warns. “If you think I'm going to rat on my prez, you'd better think again.”

“I'm worried, that's all.” He glances my way, one eyebrow raised, lips pressed tight,

not believing my shit. “He’s never acted this way before when it comes to women. At least, not since Mom. Dad lived for Mom, even after she’d passed. I’m sure he got his cock sucked on occasion by one of the club whores, but the way he was, anything more was unthinkable in his eyes.”

“He loved Violet deeply,” Stone confirms.

“Exactly, yet Tenley comes along and he’s all goo-goo eyed over her. In bed with her,” I emphasise on the last bit by turning more towards him and slinging my hands into the air. “What’s that all about?”

“You know how close Smoke and I are, and I must admit, at first it took me by surprise, too., But just watching them butt heads, argue like hell, yet look at each other like want to rip off each other’s clothes, it was obvious to me early on that there’s one hell of a connection between the two of them. Fireworks, Scarlett. Fourth of July worthy fireworks.”

“Wow,” I snigger at his outburst. “I thought you said you weren’t going to give me anything?”

“Fuck,” the scowl lines that appear on his forehead make me snigger some more, knowing that I got the better of him. “Look, I don’t want to disrespect Prez, or Violet, come to think of it, but Tenley is perfect for him, and I’m not saying that just because she’s related to Oriana.” His face softens. “It’s what he needs, and has done for a while. Fucker just need to finally realize it for himself.”

“That’s all I need to know,” I sigh, a soft smile on my lips. “If he’s happy, then I’m happy.” Stone nods his approval.

As I watch Stone climb into the car driven by the prospect, and wave him off from where I stand in the foyer of my apartment block, I can’t help but think that this could

be all a little too late. If Smoke had Tenley in his life six months ago, would his reactions to JB being in my life be different? If he'd been all loved up himself.

Chapter

Twenty

Johny B

It's late by the time I get back to my room at the motel, but the first thing I do is grab the burner phone from where I'd taped it to the back of the wooden headboard, at the top of the bed. Once powered up, I hit the buttons to call Mammoth, who is still staying at the Nevada clubhouse. The fact that he's stuck around, after the others have gone back down to Florida warms my soul. Cannon was getting antsy over the lack of brothers on hand back home. It's understandable, as the number of club brats seem ever increasing and keeping the family safe has become not just a priority to him, but a worry, too.

The click of the call been picked up brings me back to the here and now.

"Who was on the run?" I ask before I even hear his voice.

"So, it was Dunne that was behind the ambush." Mammoth growls down the phone line at my words. "Thought as much. Did you know it was going down?"

"What the fuck? Of course not," I snap back, annoyed at his assumption. "If I had, I would have got a message to you. The first I knew about it was when the van was backing up into the bay. I recognized the decals, so instantly knew it was one of ours." The line goes silent for a few moments before I ask, "How bad?" The club has had enough pain with the loss of Cub. It has really hit the brothers hard, as it does

when you lose one of your own. Especially someone as young and as vibrant as him.

“It could have been a lot worse,” he sighs. “The prospect who was in the van with Hurricane is in a bad way. The fuckers pistol whipped him to the side of the head. The doctor in the ER thinks he’s got a brain bleed, so they’re talking surgery.”

“Fuck,” I growl into the phone. “Poor fucker. What about Hurricane?”

“He’s beat up to shit. But what do you expect? He’s not the type to go down easy. He put up one hell of a fight, would have got a bullet to his head, crazy fucker, but he caught sight of the prospect, saw that blood and backed off so he could be there for him.”

“What about the other two who were escorting the van?”

“Crave. He’s a bit bent out of shape but nothing that a couple of days rest and some club whore attention won’t fix.” he sniggers. “And me, I’m fine. With my build it takes more than a road tumble to put me out of action. My bike, that’s gonna need some TLC, but Deisel is already on it.”

“Why the fuck were you on the run?” I pant out my fear. The thought of my club brother and VP being involved in a situation that could quite easily have ended him, has me not just shocked but fucking angry. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

“Say’s you who is playing spy games with the DVI.” He throws back at me. “Shit, JB. I’m going stir-crazy stuck here, not knowing if you’re still breathing. I also miss my wife and my brothers. I miss home so bad that I was desperate for a distraction.”

“A fucking stupid risky one.”

“Yeah, but I was fucking buzzing. Anyway, this convo has gone on too long, it’s not

safe. Is there anything else you need to report before you ditch the burner and grab a new one?"

I quickly tell him about the van, and that they need to track it down and make sure that the risk of anything coming back at the club is eradicated, before I give up the most important titbit of news.

"I finally came face-to-face with Dunne, and he's intrigued by me, and the fact that I'm not just another brainless yes man. Watch this space, because it won't be long before he's telling me exactly what retaliation he's got planned against the Young Outlaws."

On that note, I cut the call after promising to contact Mammoth as soon as I have any more news. I clear the data from the phone then drop it to the floor. I bring my boot down hard. It only takes one time for the case to break open, the sim card popping out beside it. I scrape up the plastic bits and toss them into the trash can. The card, I snap in half between my teeth, then head into the bathroom. Dropping to two tiny pieces down the John, I take a long piss right on top of it. I shake, then flush, checking that it's not hovering in the bottom of the bowl, before washing my hands. Restlessness consumes my bones along with my simmering anger.

With everything that's come to light tonight, and the uncertainty of what's coming, the reality that the club has taken another major hit from the DVI, not to mention the fear of what the results could have been, has me spiralling into the darkness. Drinking myself into oblivion is not an option because I need to keep a clear head, not only in case I get a call from Mal, but more importantly, my brothers. If push comes to shove; I'd ditch this crazy in a heartbeat if something went down and they needed me. Undercover be damned.

There's only one thing currently that I crave. The one thing that just can't happen. It's too risky; too stupid. But however much I try to tell myself that, I find myself quickly

changing into sports gear. Then I snatch up my keys from where I'd left them on the bedside cabinet, and storm back out into the darkness of the night.

When I get outside the back of the building, I'm on foot after dropping the car about a mile away. The place is starting to wind down for the night, or should I say morning. There're only three cars parked in the lot at the front, so minimal chance that I'll be seen. I hover in the shadows until I see the lights go on for the upstairs living quarters then make my way over to the door that accesses it. I rap my knuckles against the solid wood and wait. It's not long before the door swings open, but who opens the door is not who I expected.

"You shouldn't be here," Rex fills the doorway with his huge body.

"Damn, have they still got you doing this gig?" I snigger, trying to push past him, but he just body blocks me.

"JB, what the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"I need to see her, Rex." I try reasoning with him. "I only want to talk to her. Nothing crazy, I assure you."

"Scarlett doesn't live here anymore. She no longer runs the place. Harmony is in front of house these days." I take a step back, hand going to the back of my neck.

"Since when?"

"Been about four months now. She got herself a job working for one of the big law companies in the city. Has her own apartment and everything." Why didn't I know this already? Oh yeah, because I was an asshole, and didn't keep in touch with her.

"What's the address of the apartment?" I ask Rex.

“Aw come on, JB,” he groans. “You know I can’t tell you. Smoke would have my head if he found out I told you.”

“I won’t tell him, if you don’t,” I joke. “Come on brother, you know how I feel about her and the truth behind why I had to leave. I respect Smoke, haven’t I proved that by going into the DVI’s snake pit?” I reason with him.

“Fuuuckkk,” he hisses as he glares at me, and I can see in his face that he’s torn. “Damn-it. Canyon Lakes Apartments over Stonegate parkway, number 26.” Rex points his finger at me. “Promise me, if you get there and she don’t want to see you, you fucking walk. Don’t make me regret this, JB.”

“Deal.” Launching towards him I wrap my arms around him and give him a good old man hug. “I owe you big time, and I won’t let you down.”

“Now fuck off, and let me go close the place up so I can get some shuteye.”

I walk backward, throwing the big guy a salute before turning, and jogging back into the shadows and to where I left my car.

My stomach aches, the butterflies in there going crazy at the thought of seeing my woman soon. Don’t be fooled in any way, because there’s no doubt in my mind or my heart that Scarlett is mine, and I’ll move hell and earth to make sure that she knows it, too.

Chapter

Twenty-One

Johny B

I take the drive towards the city; the navigation showing that Scarlett's place is on the perimeter, an area known to be where many of the higher paid city workers live. I drive past the building and park up nearby, leaving me a short walk to the entrance. The five-story complex looks both new and expensive, with its state-of-the-art security intercom cameras, and the shine on the exterior shimmers, reflecting the distorted globes from the fancy exterior lighting. Ornate, oblong boxes line the path to the entrance, containing lush displays of sweet-smelling blooms.

Announcing my arrival via the intercom isn't an option I'm willing to take, because chances are, Scarlett won't let me set foot in the building. So, I hang around outside, standing back in the shadow, out of camera range and wait it out.

After an hour, I resign myself to the fact that I'm going to have to take a chance and press the goddamn intercom buzzer. I start to move towards it but then falter when a cab comes to a stop at the roadside and a chick gets out. She's a young blonde, petite little thing, and very unsteady on her feet. She's obviously had her fair share of liquor, moving slowly as she makes her way to the entrance.

I grab a handful of flowers from the nearest box, and then move quickly to the doorway.

“Hey!” I say loudly when I step out in front of her. She jumps so much that if it wasn’t for my quick response, catching her arm to steady her, she’d have fallen on her ass. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.” I quickly remove my hand as soon as she’s found her balance and hold up my hands in surrender. “Do you live here?”

“Yes, why?” she slurs, looking up at me, her eyes blink rapidly, as if fighting off sleep or unconsciousness.

“I’m wondering if you could do me a huge favor?”

She doesn’t respond, just weaves from side to side and squints.

“I’m here to see my sister. I’ve been overseas for quite some time.” I bring the flowers from where I was hiding them behind my back, around to the front of me, to further justify my lie. “I want to surprise her, you see. You might know her, actually, although she only moved in here a couple of months ago. Scarlett’s her name. Red hair, slim build, about five feet five?”

“Oh yes,” her eyes go wide, no longer any signs of suspicion. “I know Scarlett. You want me to let you in?”

“That would be amazing.” I hit her with one of my ‘panty dropping’ smiles, not that I want her to drop them, but needs must.

“Are you sure?” she questions me. “It’s a little late to be visiting, isn’t it?” she checks her wristwatch, but I’m not convinced she can actually focus on it. “Maybe you should come back tomorrow.”

“Yeah, it’s late, but my flight just got in and... well, to be honest, it’s been so long since I’ve seen my baby sister, I can’t wait any longer. Plus, she’d kill me if she found out I was in town and didn’t go to her straight away, whatever time of day.”

“That is so sweet.” With one hand on her heart, she sweeps an escaped tear from her cheek with the other. “Okay, I’ll let you in. Anything for a military man.”

Whoa! Where the hell did that come from? I never said I was a soldier boy, but at this moment in time, I ain’t going to correct her assumption, it might jeopardize me getting into the building.

“Bless you, darlin’” Once she’s keyed in the code and the lock disengages, I grab a hold of the door, opening it for her like a true gentleman, and follow her into the building.

She stumbles again, and I quickly slide my arm around her waist to support her.

“Whoops,” she giggles. “Maybe I shouldn’t have had that last dirty martini!”

“Maybe, but did you have a fun night?” I ask, looking down at her as she clings to me to keep her stability.

“Oh yeah. I swiped right, and for once the guy was as hot as his profile picture, but I don’t put out on the first date. I don’t even give head, so if he’s truly interested in me, then he’ll ask me out on another date. If not, he was only after sex, and I’m looking for more than a fuck buddy.”

TMI, but who am I to judge, with my illicit past? For once, I’m not sure how to respond, so I just go with, “Do you need help to get to your apartment?”

“No, I’m good. I’m only here,” she points to a door a few feet down the corridor. “Kind of you to offer, but no need.”

“Well, you take care of yourself, and make sure you get some water down you. Maybe have a couple of Advil handy for when the headache kicks in.”

“I will.” She lets go of me, wobbles, but then straightens her back, standing tall and heads towards her apartment. “Now go see your sister,” she shouts over her shoulder with a wave. “Good luck to you.”

I hold back until I see that she’s safely entered her home. The door shuts and I hear the sound of the lock falling into place. It’s then I find the stairs, taking them two at a time, following the signs to the number of Scarlett’s apartment. When I get to the second floor, my confidence wains, my stomach is in knots. The fear of rejection real, but my need to see her, to reassure her and admit that I fucked up, has me stepping up to her door.

I have to take this chance to turn this around and win her back.

I suck in a deep breath before rapping my knuckles against the wooden door. On getting no response, I go in harder, so much so that the door rattles within the frame. It takes yet another attempt before I hear the muted sound of movement from inside.

“Okay, okay, I’m coming.” The sound of metal-on-metal sliding and the click of the latch has my nerves once again jangling, but I suck it up.

“Where’s the fire...” she mumbles, cracking open the door. It’s enough for me to catch a glimpse of her, causing my heart to flip a beat or two. Scarlett is standing right in front of me, looking so fucking cute. My cock, already semi-hard at the thought of seeing her, is now hard and unashamedly pushing against my jeans.

Everything about her is fucking beautiful, from her flaming-red, bed-hair, to her pouty mouth at being woken before her time. A mask of both confusion and fear veils her face but soon disburses as she takes in my altered appearance.

“JB!” she gasps when she realizes it’s me standing at her door, and not one of her neighbors. It kinda gives me a thrill that it’s only taken a beat for her to recognize me

despite my dramatic transformation. “What the hell are you doing here?” She pulls the door fully open, takes a step forward and looks left, then right, checking out the hallway. I’m not sure if it’s to see if I have anyone with me, or to check that none of the neighbors are witnessing her late-night visitor, being it such an ungodly hour. Especially one with a buzz cut and neck tattoos.

The way she rubs sleep from her eyes with the back of her hand causes the nipples of her round, firm breasts to push against the cotton of the tiny tank top she’s wearing. The matching shorts are well short, and I just know that her perfect little ass cheeks will be peeking out from the bottom of the hem at the back. Sweet, ripe, and perfect for my mouth.

“How did you find me?”

“If you don’t mind, so as not to get anyone in the shit, I’ll plead the fifth on that.” I take a step closer so my foot breaches the threshold. “I needed to see you.”

“I have nothing to say to you.”

“But I do, and I ain’t leaving until you hear me out.”

“I don’t want to listen to your lame excuses, JB. Leave.” When she pushes against the door to try to close it in my face, I push back, laying my palm against the top of the door and my boot firmly at the bottom, blocking her attempts to push me away.

“Like I said. Not happening.” I lean in, placing my face closer to hers. Fresh linen, vanilla and the memory of warm cozy sheets fill my senses. I want to sweep her off her feet and take her back to bed, but this time, I’ll be there, too, and taking her lush body in every way possible. I drag my mind back to the task at hand.

“I could make a scene right here in the hallway. Wake up all your neighbors. But I’m

sure you'd prefer that not to happen." I lay on my cockiest of smirks before leaning in even closer, my head aside hers so I can whisper into her ear. "Let me in, Scarlett," I purposely let my lips brush against the shell with the lightest of touch. I take advantage of the situation and breathe in more of her natural perfume, and fuck, if my cock was hard before, now it's steel. Her body reacts, too. Short, sharp breaths fall from her lips. Tiny beads of perspiration pop up on her top lip. Her head unceremoniously tilting to one side, offering me her slender neck, yet I don't even think she knows that she's doing it.

I want nothing more than to place my mouth against her delicate, heated skin. Kiss and suck her tender flesh. But if I do, I know that I won't be able to stop. That could set me up for a fall, because going all in, taking what I need from her now, could ruin any chance I have of making this right. Making her mine. That would kill me.

"Come on Scarlett, let me in. Hear me out, at least give me that."

A long shaky sigh leaves her, and for a few seconds, I think she's going to reject me. So when she turns and walks further into her apartment, leaving the door wide open, with me still lingering, I drag in a huge breath of air, relieved that at least I'm getting my chance. I just hope to fuck I don't crash and burn.

I follow her inside. The narrow hallway opens up into an open-plan living area. It's all clean lines and predominantly white with minimal furniture to one side, couch, tv, side table with a modern lamp; what you'd expect to see. On the other side is the kitchen area. High-gloss, white cupboard doors, and brushed silver appliances. The two zones separated by a long, dark slate countertop with two high stools tucked up close. Against the far wall, under a large picture window, is a desk that has papers and open books covering the surface, and a high-backed swivel chair. The mess on the top is in total contrast against the neatness of the rest of the place, which makes me think that her working day spills over into her downtime. The stark white of the room is warmed with a rich gold and red fabrics, and wall art.

Everything is spotless, from what I can see and, except for her workspace, perfectly orderly.

“Shit, Scarlett. This is nice,” I compliment. There’s a spiral staircase that, from what I can only assume, leads up to the bedroom and bathroom facilities, although we did walk past a door in the hallway which might be the John. Sure, from the outside it looks like one hell of a place, but inside, it’s more than I expected. Everything is to a high standard and must have cost a lot of bucks.

“Stop with the pleasantries, JB. Tell me what it is that you’re so desperately wanting to get off your chest, then fuck off and let me get back to my bed.”

“I’m sorry,” I blurt out, because, well, how else am I meant to start?

“Yeah, sure...” she interrupts. “If that’s it, then you can go now.” She turns to go back towards the door, but I grab a hold of her arm to stop her.

“Scarlett, please.” She stops, but sharply pulls her arm free. She moves over to the counter, putting space between us, and rests her back against it. Her arms tightly crossed over her body. For a split second, her eyes meet mine, and I see the defiance in them, but quickly she looks away, as if it hurts too much to keep eye contact.

“Go on then,” she sneers. “Speak.”

I take the footsteps needed to bring me closer to her, leaving not much space between us. My girl’s not stupid by any means, but I’m sure she’s now realizing that she’s made a rookie mistake. Standing here with her back against the counter, she’s giving me the perfect opportunity to crowd her, cage her in and giving her little room to run. At least not before I’ve had my say.

“I’m sorry.” I say again because when it comes to her, despite my reputation at being

able to talk the pants off any woman, I find myself almost tongue tied.

“You keep saying that, but what for?” She fires back at me. Her arms are still tightly crossed over her body, a barrier against my closeness. Her eyes still refusing to meet mine.

“I’m sorry,” I say once more.

“You keep saying that, but I’m not even sure you know exactly you’re sorry for,” she fires back.

“For leaving. For being a fucking fool. A total asshole.” I drop my eyes to the floor for a moment, because seeing the hurt on her face pains me more than I can bear. But I deserve it. I should suffer for the lack of respect I’ve shown her. So, I lift my head and focus back on the beauty of her face. I needn’t have worried, because she can barely look at me.

“I should have contacted you as soon as I got to Florida. But instead, I immersed myself into club life, took on every run, every task. Anything that would keep me busy and my mind occupied. Otherwise, my head would’ve been consumed by you.”

Tentatively, I take a lock of her hair between my finger and caress the silky red strands between my fingertips. My other hand falls gently to her hip. The urge to grab hold of her, bring her body to mine, is real strong, but I keep my palm light, grazing the cotton fabric, my fingers itching to slide up to touch the slither of flesh showing above the waistband of her shorts. Fuck knows what that would do to me, because these simple touches have electricity surging through me like a lightning strike.

“The nights were the worst.” I confess. “Constantly fighting the urge to make those thousands of miles journey to get to you. But I knew if I did, Smoke would trip out, ruining any chance I had of ever getting back to you.”

“If that’s truly how you feel, why didn’t you at least call? Instead, you ghosted me. Not a word. Nothing.” Her eyes look glassy with unshed tears. A stab of pain sears my heart.

“I wanted to call you, but to hear your sweet voice would have been hellish.” I give in and pull her closer into my arms. “I’m not good with words, Scarlett...”

“Liar,” she hurls back at me as she wiggles to try and escape my hold “I know all about you, and your history with women. The way you sweet-talk them into your bed and have them falling to their knees. You’re a player, Johny B, and I’m just another mark on your tally.”

“That’s where you’re wrong.” I growl at her, tightening my hold on her. I’m pissed that she thinks that’s how it is with her, when it couldn’t be any further from the truth. “I don’t deny that I have a shady reputation, but hell, Scarlett, what do you expect from a hot-blooded man when sex is obtainable with no ties and little consequence?”

“With you, it’s different.”

“Meeting you... Damn woman, you make me feel things that I didn’t even think I was capable of.” I let out a deep sigh. “It’s hard to explain, because when it comes to love talk, you make me tongue tied.”

I bring my hand to her face, cupping her chin, tilting her head until her eyes meet mine. “Fuck, Scarlett. I’ve missed you so much. Not one hour of the day or night has gone by without my thoughts turning to you.”

“I’m sure you managed to fill your bed at night with women more than willing to keep you company,” she snaps back at me, turning her head away in an attempt to free herself from my hold. I let her, but I don’t give her space to move away from me.

“You jealous?” I tease.

“Don’t be absurd.” Tilting her head back, she looks to the ceiling, as if searching for God’s intervention, before dropping her head back down, focusing on anything but me. “I don’t care one iota what you get up to. What you do is of no concern to me.”

“I think the lady protests too much.” I crouch down a little, bringing me down to her eye level. I weave my head from side to side as she tries her absolute best to avoid my gaze. “Look at me, Scarlett.” With an air of reluctance, her eyes meet mine. “There’s been no women since the day I left you with the promise that we weren’t over, by any means.” She blinks rapidly. “I confess that the muscle in my right arm is a bigger than my left now,” I smirk, flexing my arm to prove it before placing it firmly back around her. “My thoughts were of you only, when I was jerking off.” A slight upturn at the corner of her mouth encourages me to go on. “Not sure I should be telling you this, but every time I had time to myself, whether it be in my room at the club, or a motel while out on a run, I needed to ease my permanently blue balls because you never left my thoughts. Fuck, right after seeing you with Smoke at the club, I had to whack off in the downstairs John at the clubhouse. Even though you shot me down. Do you realize how fucking sexy you are when you’re all riled up?” Her eyes go wide and when her mouth opens to say something, I lay the palm of my hand against her cheek, my thumb grazing her bottom lip. She stills.

“Do you know what my favorite is? When I’m in the shower, water hammering against my skin. The memory that has me losing all control, coming so hard that I can barely see?” I can tell by the dark arousal in her eyes, the pout of her open mouth, the way her tongue peeks through and wets her lips that she knows exactly what I’m referring to. “That was so fucking hot. Knowing that you were watching me. Do you know what I was thinking while I was getting myself off?” She shakes her head, her breathing now short sharp breaths. “I was imaging how your clit would feel against my tongue. How fucking good you’d taste, and how tight your sweet pussy would be when I slipped my cock inside you.”

“Oh fuck,” Scarlett exhales against my lips when I bring them close to hers.

“I need to kiss you, Scarlett.” The seconds feel like hours as I wait for her to agree to my request. “Let me kiss you.”

She doesn’t reply. Not with words, anyway. Her hands fly around my neck, pulling me against her and her sweet, soft lips. But the kiss is anything but soft. It’s hard, passionate and as needy as fuck, and I meet it with the same uncontrollable need.

With our lips tightly locked, I grab hold of her ass with both hands and lift her onto the countertop and find my place standing right between her open legs. Soft moans rumble in her throat when I suck on her bottom lip, nipping at the tip with my teeth. My cock is so hard and desperate for tenure.

I bring her legs around my waist, and grab her ass again, but this time I lift her, bringing her flush with my body. My cock hits the apex of her thighs, only the thin cotton of her shorts protecting her pussy. Still, I struggle to raise the friction needed, so I turn and walk us both back against the nearest wall. With her back flat against the firm surface, I push my cock hard against her cunt and rotate my hips, giving us both the contact that we crave.

“Oh my God...” Scarlett whimpers as the bulge of my hard cock rubs against her, hitting the spot that has her eyes rolling back into her head. “J... B...” she stammers, her cheeks flushed, fingernails digging into my shoulders, as she thrusts her hips against me, seeking more and more of the friction needed to have her clit pulsing. I drop my mouth to one of her hard peaked nipples that is clearly outlined against the fabric of her tank and cover it, sucking hard, then biting with just enough pressure to cause a surge of heat to her core. “Oh fuck... I’m going to come.” Her voice is thick and husky with arousal and damn it, don’t I nearly come in my fucking pants. But this is about her, not me.

Scarlett's head bangs against the wall, her eyes flutter, and her mouth falls wide as her orgasm hits. Her body tenses while she rides out the wave of ecstasy. I kiss along her exposed neck, sucking on the skin at her racing pulse. When she goes limp in my arms, I hold on to her tighter and take her mouth once more, kissing her deeply, showing her exactly what she means to me.

"Bedroom," I enquire as I brush my nose against her unruly hair, breathing in her essence.

"Upstairs," she whispers.

I carry her to the spiral staircase, and carefully negotiate the curvature of the stairs one at a time until I get to the landing at the top. The door to what is obviously the primary bedroom is open, revealing its soft colors, and cream carpets. It's not pink and girly, but warm and feminine. I head straight for the white framed bed and lay her on top of the covers. Uncurling her arms from around my neck, I sit on the edge of the bed facing her, letting my hands rest on my thighs. Our eyes connect, hers steeped with contentment. I look away, knowing that I've fucked up.

Sure, I was desperate to see Scarlett, to try and make her understand my intentions were nothing but sincere. That I want her, need her and I'll do whatever it takes to regain her trust. Giving her an orgasm, coming close to fucking her, was never my plan. Not yet anyway. In fact, kissing her wasn't on the agenda either, but my need to taste her sweet lips consumed me and was the catalyst to me losing control.

The silent tension between us is palpable.

"You're not staying, are you?" she accuses.

"Scarlett," I groan out. "Coming here was a stupid mistake."

“Fuck you,” she lashes out, slapping me hard across the face. I snatch hold of her hand before she goes in for a second hit.

“Damn it, Scarlett.” I bark back at her. “It’s not that I didn’t want to. Haven’t I already made it clear to you that I want you more than my next breath?”

She pulls her hand free and snaps both her arms around herself, partly in annoyance, partly to give herself comfort, I’m sure.

“I’m deeply involved in something for the club, and being here could put you in danger. That’s the last thing I want. Not only that, but your dad will also have my head if he finds out, and would kill any chance of me proving myself worthy of you.”

“What are you talking about?” With furrowed brows, she searches my face for more. Suddenly her eyes go wide, her brows now toward her hairline. “Has this something to do with the MC’s feud with the Death Valley Irish?”

“Once again, I need to plead the fifth.”

“Fuck you and the fifth.” She snarls. “I knew my dad was up to something when I overheard him talking to Stone the other day, when I called in to see Tenley, but now it makes sense.” Bringing herself up onto her knees, she grabs hold of the fabric collar of my shirt. “That explains the tattoos and the buzz cut.” She lets out a long, shaky breath. Her eyes are fearful as her grip on me tightens. “You’re the one that they have on the inside.”

“You need to stay out of this, Scarlett.” I growl my warning, taking both her hands and placing them firmly back in her lap. “It’s too dangerous.”

“Exactly, and you’re right in the fucking middle of it.” She cries. “JB, you need to get out. Tell Smoke that you’re not doing this. You’re going to end up dead.”

“I’m not going to do that.” I say sadly, because I would do anything for her, but going back on this when I’ve got so far isn’t an option. “I’m sorry,”

“Then get the fuck out of my home,” she says with fierce determination. “Because if you think I’m going to spend my time worrying what the fuck is going on with you, not knowing if you’re dead or alive, then you’re wrong.” She jumps from the bed; grabs hold of my arm and pulls me to my feet.

“Scarlett,” I beg.

“Don’t fucking Scarlett me.” she pushes me, with more strength that I would have given her credit for, towards the door and down the stairs, until she’s swinging open the front door and giving me one final push. I turn to take a last look at her before I leave, make one final plea for understanding, but when I see her face, I know that at this moment, it’s pointless. “You’re right, JB. You should never have come here, but not because of some bullshit excuse, but because you’re an asshole who gives absolutely no fucks about the consequences of your actions.” With that, she slams the door in my face, hard enough that even the heaviest of sleeping neighbors will now be wide awake.

Chapter

Twenty-Two

Johny B

My encounter with Scarlett didn't end as I'd hoped. Staying had been a big mistake. Although, I fucking wanted to more than anything else. But staying and fucking her would have been one hell of a mistake. For now, anyway.

Sure, I could have explained to her that I was doing this for her, for us, but the timing was all off. If Smoke ever got wind of me paying Scarlett a visit he would take his time with me; he'd start with castration, and let me bleed out. Then, he'd move on to a heap of torture that would give him immense pleasure. If he finally took mercy on me, he'd finish me off with a bullet to the head. Not to mention how he's probably going to knock my teeth out simply for fucking up and letting slip what is currently going on with the DVI.

Fucking hell!

I'm too fired up to go back to my motel room, I'd only sit and stew over what a fucked-up mistake I've made. So, I drive over to the factory to see if anyone or anything is going down. My face now known at the place, no one asks questions if I turn up on my own unexpectedly. Not that there's usually many hanging around at this ungodly hour. I park up and make my way into the building after punching in the security code.

After walking around for a while, I check over in the loading bay area where they'd unloaded the gear that had been highjacked from the Young Outlaws, but still there's no one. I find myself at the bottom of the open metal stairs that lead up to where I think Dunne's office is. The temptation is too much, and I end up taking the rungs two at a time, still checking around that no one is about, until I get to the top. I slip through the unlocked door at the top of the metal gantry and find myself inside a large room that, as suspected, is the office.

Three, four-drawer, gray metal cabinets are lined up against a wall. A large, chipped wooden desk holds center stage with a high-backed swivel chair behind it. Two old wooden kitchen chairs for the menials to sit on the opposite side. Against another wall is an old fabric-covered couch that's stained, with the inner stuffing escaping from one of the arm seams. It's well past its best, and one can only guess how rancid it smells if you get too close.

I can safely say that Dunne is not one for extravagances, at least not in this office. Maybe his private space is at the other end of the spectrum.

I make a beeline for the desk first, but all the drawers are locked. When I check the papers scattered on the top of the desk, nothing jumps out. Even the ones weighted down by a large, clear, round paperweight with a real four-leaf clover set in the center of it. I do, however, find what will come in extremely handy. Paperclips.

I straighten on of them out, the other I pull open, but leave the end in a hooked position. Kneeling in front of the desk drawers, I work the lock.

It takes a little time, but eventually I hear the satisfying sound of the lock giving way and the drawers free.

The contents I find inside the drawers themselves don't give up anything of interest. However, they do hold a set of keys on a silver ring. I take them over to the filing

cabinets, checking the individual keys in each lock until one gives way.

The first cabinet that opens yields a multitude of files, each marked with names. Some of which stand out amongst the rest.

My eyes are immediately drawn to three files that, although don't seem to hold much inside other than a few loose leaves of A4, have my blood boiling.

Colt, Wesson and Smith Gunner. My Prez, Cannon. Mammoth and their brother, Brick. He has eyes on the Florida chapter.

Then I find Ronan Hale and Gabriel Linus Parish, which I do know are Smoke and Stones' legal names. Jacob Ezra and Savannah Parish, I assume, are Stone's brother and wife who were tragically killed. Dexter Maine, Kit Blackmore, and a few more that must belong to other members of the Nevada chapter.

This dude is not only looking to bringing down the Nevada chapter but the whole of the Young Outlaws network.

What I find next makes every hair on my body stand on edge. A cold chill rolls over me when I flick open a file with no markings, and my eyes find a collection of pictures. The subject: Scarlett.

Scarlett leaving Velvet Reds. Scarlett walking into the building where she now works. Scarlett drinking in the coffee shop down the street. An image of her car, car registration and make, model and even a picture of the chassis number.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," I bite out in quick succession. This bastard knows more than we thought. Smoke's attempts to keep his daughter's identity covered have failed, and although it's not one-hundred percent clear that Dunne has made the connection, it's likely that he's put two and two together and come up with the right calculation.

I quickly take shots of the files on my phone, including the one holding pictures of Scarlett, and shoot them over to Mammoth, before checking to see if there's any paperwork showing plans or information on how they are going to target the MC next.

The sound of distant voices stops me in my tracks and cuts any chance of me delving further into the cabinets. I quickly slot everything back where it came from, wiping any surfaces with the cuff of my jacket. Next, I move back to the desk, placing the keys back, closing all the drawers, and again wiping away any possible fingerprints or evidence that I've been snooping.

By the time the voice is right outside the door, I'm laid flat out on the worn couch, the stench clogging my throat with bile, but I push back the urge to vomit and close my eyes, feigning sleep.

The door whooshes open, followed by the rustling sound of moving bodies as they enter the room. But I don't move a muscle.

"What the fuck?" I hear Mal hiss, followed by the squeak of sneakers moving across the concrete floor in my direction. "Hey, motherfucker." My body jerks from being pushed hard by what feels like a foot. "Wake the fuck up."

"Mmm. What?" I open one eye, quickly bringing my hand over to shield my face from the blaring, bright overhead lighting that now illuminates the room. "Oh crap." I push myself up into a seated position and squint up at Mal. "What time is it?"

"Who cares what fucking time is? What the hell are you doing in my office at stupid o'clock in the morning?" Paddy demands from where he rests with his butt against the side of his desk. I train my gaze on him, but if he's really pissed, he's not advertising it. Nolan is also here, but Rory's nowhere to be seen, and that makes me twitchy. The twins are always together.

“Sorry Boss, I came in here to find you but when I saw that you weren’t here, I thought I’d stick around and wait.” I try to explain. “Must have crashed out.”

“This is my office, not a fucking B and B.” He growls, finally showing his annoyance at me invading his space. “What’s so fucking important, anyway?”

I stare at him for a few moments. My brain ticks over so fast, trying to come up with a feasible reason, it almost makes me dizzy.

“Truthfully,” I pause, giving myself a few more seconds to decide whether to come up with some bullshit answer, or go down the less complicated route. “I’m fucking bored out of my skull. I’m crawling up the walls in that motel room, so I thought I’d seek you guys out, see if there was anything you wanted taking care of? Break a few bones, smash a few heads?”

“Why is it that you’re still living in that crappy motel? Anyone would think that you’re not planning on staying in Reno.” Mal steps closer, his eyes narrowed, top lip slightly curled.

“You’re right. I need to find a decent place, because I’m here to stay,” just not because of the DVI. Something, or should I say someone else, is the true reason I’m planning to stick around. “But the place is cheap. It’s not like I haven’t been looking, but have you seen what those robbing bastard realtors are asking these days?”

“You know, JB, that is your ‘biker’ name, isn’t it?” My eyes instantly connect with Dunne’s the second he mentions my tag. He taps his clenched fist against the surface of the desk where his hip rests. “I truly believe, that under different circumstances, we would’ve gotten on like a house on fire.” There’s no doubt by the cocky smirk on his face, and the pure delight that radiates from him like a spooky aura, that he knows exactly who I am, but to what extent, I’m not yet sure.

“You know, you biker club boys are nothing but a group of feckless eejits,” he sniggers. “Did you really think that we weren’t watching you?” Pushing up from the desk, he moves around it, grabs up a pen from the top and drops into the chair behind it. He leans back into the seat until it tilts bringing his feet up on top of the desktop until he’s not far from being horizontal. A few of the loose papers fall from the edge and float down to the floor from the force of his boots. “Hanging around, watching as those cunts ran around like scared rats when the bomb went off was so exhilarating. Not to be missed, but if we’d have left not one minute earlier than we did, we would have missed the arrival of you and your Floridian fellas. It was almost Oscar worthy, the way you rode in, all in black, through the plumes of smoke and mayhem. Spectacular.” He flicks the pen from side to side between his fingers, his expression dreamlike, enjoying the replay of every sick moment in his head. “I must admit, you did have us fooled for a while, with your new hair and ink, but it didn’t take us that long to realize that you were one of the Florida lot.”

“You motherfucker,” I growl, getting to my feet only to be smacked back down by a heavy punch to my shoulder.

“Sit the fuck down,” Mal seethes. “Don’t you get it, fuckface? We know exactly who you are and what you’re trying to do here.”

“And exactly what is that?” I ask cockily, trying to push up again, only to be pushed back down.

“We have a good idea,” Mal snorts. “But we’d prefer to hear it from the horse’s mouth.”

“If you think that I’m going to tell you cunts anything, then you’re very much mistaken.” I bare my teeth at him, and spit the nasty taste in the back of my mouth at him. “Bring it on.” I push out my face, gesturing him to take a hit, but the sound of Dunne’s laughter has me looking his way.

“Jesus, JB. We’re not going to torture you for information,” he almost singsongs at me, but the muffled feminine cry that catches my ear has me already turning towards the open doorway. “We’re going to torture her.”

The sight of Scarlett, blood oozing from the corner of her puffy lips, tears glistening on her cheeks, and eyes wide with fear, lights a fire in me like never before. She’s still in her sleep shorts and top from when I left her. Feet bare and bleeding.

The need to bolt to my feet and rip out Rory’s throat for not just touching her, but for the tight grip he has on the chain that’s looped around her neck, and looks to be cutting into her delicate skin. All it would take is for one more tug to tighten it further and her ability to take in air would be cut.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I’ve catastrophically fucked up. I know they have photos of her, but have I led them to her? Have I now made her a more valuable target? That’s last thing I ever wanted to do. Have they made the connection?

“Can’t deny that it took us by surprise who we came across while following you. Your girlfriend’s place was very enlightening. Very enlightening indeed.”

Chapter

Twenty-Three

Fifty minutes earlier.

Scarlett

The loudness of the door banging shut in JB's face was nothing compared to the high-pitched scream of the voice in my head, telling me to go after him. Yet the pain in my heart, and my stubbornness wouldn't let me. The last few months have been hard. I've conditioned myself not to think about him every second of the day. It's been near on impossible, not to mention the dreams that have haunted me every night. Seeing him has demolished the walls that I'd managed to build, leaving me once again feeling vulnerable and foolish. I had fallen once again. His touch putting a flame to the fuse that would undoubtedly lead to one hell of a fire. My heart can't take him leaving again; but can it be strong enough to stay away? Should I live for today and fuck tomorrow? Because who knows what the outcome will be, especially if JB is involved with the Death Valley Irish?

I go and grab my cell phone from where I left it earlier on the kitchen countertop, and move to go back to my bed, only I'm halted in my tracks by the firm knocking on the door. He's not giving up easily. He's fighting for me, but I'm not going to make it easy for him.

"For fuck's sake! Can't you just leave?" I shout as I walk back to the door. "Go home, JB."

Another knock, but this time louder. I tell myself that the reason my hand is on the lock, ready to release it, is because I don't want him to wake the neighbors. The real reason is that I want him here. In my home. In my bed. In my life.

"What is wrong with you?" I release the catch. "I thought I made myself clear." It takes mere seconds for me to realize my mistake as soon as I catch sight of the redheaded twins taking up all the space in the doorway. I push hard on the door to close it, but it's futile. They're bigger, stronger, and the door bangs against the wall with the force they put behind it. I turn on my heels, ready to flee towards the bathroom, the only internal room with a lock. If I can just get there and lock myself in, it will give me time to make a call on my phone that I still have clutched in my hand. My plan doesn't get a chance to come to fruition as I'm grabbed around the waist, a hand is slapped hard against my mouth as my feet leave the ground, and I'm carried inside. I'm thrown facedown onto the couch, and I scurry around until I'm sat upright, knees tucked up close under my chin, as I take in my assailants. I count four in total crowding the room. The twins stand back, covering any possible escape routes. The other two hover over me.

"So sorry for the intrusion." A tall guy with red hair standing in front of me, says with not much sincerity. "But it has recently come to our attention that you could be of great help to us."

"Who are you?" I try to sound unaffected by their intimidation, but there's a slight waver to my voice.

"Excuse me," he places his hand on his chest and bows his head. "I'm Jimmy Dunne, but you might know me as Paddy. I'm sure your boyfriend will have mentioned me, seeing as he's been working for me."

"You must be mistaken," I reply with a tight smile. "I don't have a boyfriend. You must have the wrong apartment."

“Now let’s not be telling lies,” He sighs. “That will only make things more complicated. I heard you shout his name, JB... you remember?”

“You’re still very much mistaken,” I drop my feet to the floor and try to stand, but the big oaf that carried me in here is still holding guard, and pushes me back down into the seat. “I won’t deny I know a JB, but he’s nothing but a casual hookup.”

Dunne starts to pace the floor in front of me. “Still, you lie to me,” he tsk’s. When he gets near to the bookshelf, that holds my small collection of favorite books and framed photographs, he stops suddenly. I take the chance to quickly fumble with my phone, slipping into the small pocket inside the waistband of my shorts. Thankfully, nobody notices.

“What do we have here?” First, he picks up the picture of my mom and looks at it closely. He turns his head and looks at me intently, before turning around and replacing it back onto the shelf. He checks out the next photo, and begins to shake his head from side-to-side. “You’ve done well here, Mal,” he lets out a loud guffaw. “Your hunch that this was worth a further look was a cracking call.”

“How’s that?” the one who had manhandled me asks, looking rather smug.

“You’ve struck fucking gold, fella.” He turns brusquely towards me, picture still in his hand, pointing at the image. “What does daddy Smoke think about you fucking a Young Outlaw, especially one from out of town with no ranking within the club?”

“You’re fucking with me?” Mal gasps. “So, she is the Prez’s daughter and not just the chick who ran the whore house?”

“She’s also our ticket to bringing down the Young Outlaws, once and for all.” Dunne throws the picture frame across the room. The sound of splintering glass as it hits the wall follows, and then a thud, as what is left of the wooden frame hits the floor.

“No,” I scream, jumping to my feet. Mal is still preening from his pat on the back, giving me the chance to elbow him in the ribs. A whoosh of air noisily spills from him at the impact, but he quickly recovers and grabs my forearm. Dunne quickly steps in front of me, and before I have a chance to scream again, he backhands me across the face. Fire blooms across my cheek, my teeth clash and a metallic taste coats my tongue from my now busted lip. “Fuck you,” I spit red across his face, but the bastard just laughs.

Mal raises a hand, but it’s quickly halted by Dunne, despite him just doing the same to me. “You’re a feisty one. Can’t say I’m that surprised with Smoke and Violet as parents. The apple never falls far from the tree, is that not so?” I don’t answer him, but the glare I give him... if looks could kill, he’d be dead, buried and riddled with rancid worms. “Find something to gag her with and then get her downstairs. Stick her in the trunk of the car, less chance of her attracting attention, and do it quickly and quietly. If you do encounter any problems, make sure that Carl takes care of it before he leaves.”

“Sure, Paddy.” He pulls me to him, tightening his hold on me further, his fingers crushing my bones. “Nolan, tape her mouth up. Rory, make sure the coast is clear.” Last of all, he turns his attention back to Dunne. “Are we heading back to HQ?”

“To be sure. Let’s see what our newest recruit has to say for himself when he realizes that we are, and have always been, steps ahead of the fucking MC.”

As soon as the silk scarf, that’s been hanging on one of the coat hooks by the front door, is shoved into my mouth and tied tightly at the back of my head, the reality of the situation hits hard. My heart starts to race, and my skin chills, yet beads of sweat pearl on my forehead. Every needed breath I try to take in, is restricted by the fabric, even my nose is partially covered, leaving me boneless and woozy. As they drag me across the room towards the front door, I pool the little strength I have, and sweep my arms over the side unit, sending the cherished ceramic bowl, that belonged to my

mother, crashing to the floor, instantly fracturing it into pieces. The framed photograph of her holding me in her arms as a baby, also hits the ground. Shards of glass scatter amongst the short fibers of the carpet. I hiss out as they pierce the underside of my bare foot like tiny knives as I'm pushed forward and out of the door. I'm held back for a moment until one of the twins check the hallway. Then they quickly bundle me into the lift. With blurred vision, I cast my eyes over each one of them, but come to a sudden stop when I find Dunne.

The smile on his face, and the way his eyes gleam with pure satisfaction that he's got one up on the Young Outlaws fills me with anger and fear. In my mind's eye, I'm launching myself at him, fingernails gouging out his green eyes, my knee hitting him hard in his junk. In reality, if it wasn't for the firm grip that they have on me, and the support of the lift wall behind me, I'd be slumped on the floor, fear and panic wiping any strength that I have to fight back. And I hate myself for it.

The cool air hits my damp skin as soon as we leave the building, making my already trembling body shiver. The black sedan is waiting, the trunk already open. With a surge of energy that seems to come from nowhere, I pull my arm free and try to run, but before I get more than a couple of steps, my feet lift from the ground and I'm unceremoniously dumped in the trunk of the car.

"Please, no!" I scream, but it comes out nothing more than a screechy moan, the scarf muffling the majority of the sound. I try to kick out, but all that does is earn me a punch to my stomach. My body instantly curls into a protective ball, giving them the opportunity to slam the trunk shut. Leaving me in the dark, scared and struggling to control the fear that is threatening to take control. When I try to kick out against the metal side, shockwaves of pain travel up my leg and through my body. Tears fall easily down my cheeks when I squeeze my eyelids tightly together, not wanting to see, not wanting to believe, yet the rumble of the engine and the sway of the car does nothing to ease the hopelessness that is about to consume me.

Present time

Johny B

“Let her go, Paddy,” I sigh. “You’ve got it wrong. She’s nothing more than a casual hook-up. If you think that you can use her to get to me, you’re deluded. She means nothing to me.” The words are like acid on my lips, but needs must.

“You two,” his pointed finger flicks between me and Scarlett. “You must have gone to the same school for shite liars, because neither of you are convincing.” He stands and comes back around his desk until he’s stood in front of me. “So, JB, I have this dilemma.” He goes down on his haunches, so we’re face to face. “Do I punish you by making you watch as my men take a turn with her? Or do I let you defile her in the most heinous ways while holding a gun to your head?” I keep my expression as nondescript as I can, but inside, I’m at the complete opposite end of the spectrum.

“Would you take a bullet for this pretty, red-headed siren? I think you would, because we all know that once Smoke finds out you’re the one that led us to her, he’ll hunt you down and gut you for it, anyway.” He slaps the palms of his hands down hard onto his thighs. “My men it is then.”

I lunge forward, but my attempt is quickly blocked by Mal, his forearm at my throat, pushing me back into the couch.

Dunne raises to his full height and taps his bottom lip with his index finger. “What do you think, Mal? You want to be the first to fuck the Prez’s daughter in the arse?”

“I’d rather slit her throat,” he responds.

“But what’s the fun in that, now? I want to make sure that Smoke suffers for the devastation he caused my family, and what better than to send him video evidence of

how we ruined his precious princess?” He walks towards his desk, and with one quick sweep of his arm, he clears everything from the top. “Get her up here,” he directs at Rory, pointing at the desk. Rory yanks on the chain, tightening the grip around her throat, leaving Scarlett no option but to follow his lead, until she’s leaning against the short side of the wooden surface.

“I should have put a bullet in yours and your brothers head when I got the chance,” I spit out at him.

“But you didn’t, did you,” Rory sniggers. “Must admit, I thought you’d realized that we were on to you and you were going to take us out. But no. Big mistake. Huge mistake.” He gives one more tug on the chain to fuck me up even more.

Dunne grabs the old wooden chair from the near side of the desk, scraping the feet across the floor until it’s around eight feet away from it. “And you, JB, get to have a front-row seat.” Nodding his head at Mal, I’m pulled to my feet and pushed the few paces before I’m forced to sit down in the chair. “Secure him,” is the next instruction Mal gets from Dunne. My hands and ankles are cable tied to the chair.

Dunne walks towards Scarlett, stopping right in front of her as he leans in a little closer. “You know, seeing as I’m the one that your daddy hates the most,” he sneers. “It seems only right that I’m the one he first sees fucking his precious princess.” He slams his hand into her chest, Scarlett falls backwards, her back hitting the surface of the desk. “Take the chain from around her neck.” Dunne instructs Rory. “We wouldn’t like to choke her out too much. I want her conscious while I mutilate her delicate cunt.” While Rory removes the chain, Dunne tugs at the fabric of Scarlett’s shorts, dragging them over her knees, down and over her blood covered feet. He lets out a growl of approval at the sight of her nakedness. Now free of the chain, and vulnerable, Scarlett lashes out, but Dunne leans back and out of reach. “You’re a feisty bitch, are you not,” he sniggers. “Let’s see how much fight you have with a gun to your pretty little head.” Rory drops the chain to the floor, pulls a gun from the back

of his pants and places it firmly against her head. Scarlett's eyes bulge wide, and even from this distance, I can see that her whole body is trembling. "Now, I can promise you..." Dunne rags her legs wide open. "This is going to ruin you. Not only your flesh, but this is going to be the hell in every nightmare and waking thought for the rest of your life." With one hand he fumbles with the fastening of his pants while the other thrusts hard between the apex of Scarlett's legs. The way her body jerks, a cry muffled by the gag, and tears springing to her eyes, I know his fingers have penetrated her.

Damn it. While the horror plays out around us, I've been working on the tie around my wrist and I'm so close to loosening it. Not being quick enough to get to her is killing me, but the need to get Scarlett away from that fucker spurs me on. Anger threatens to engulf me, as Dunne continues to defile her while still struggling to release his cock from his pants.

Even though I can't take my eyes from Scarlett, I keep working, working the plastic looser. Scarlett's head tilts to the side, her eyes connecting with mine. It's as if I'm reading written words on a crisp clear piece of white paper. 'I can't go through this. I'd rather die than live with the memory of what he's about to do.' I plead with her, trying to communicate with my eyes. 'Hold on. Please. Just hold on.' A quick shake of my head, but her eyes are now glazing over, I'm not sure she sees me or understands what I'm trying to convey, before she turns her head away.

Her fingers twitch, and her hand begins to rise from her side, but the crashing sounds and gunfire from below is enough to bring us all to a stop.

"Go, see what the fuck is going on." Dunne shouts. "I'm not done." With determination, his fingers rip at his zipper, his hard cock instantly shooting free from its confinement. The room empties, leaving only the three of us. Scarlett, laid out on the desk top, hands now free, but held in place by Dunne's powerful grip on her hips as he yanks her nearer to him so he can line himself up to penetrate her.

“Rrrawww,” Scarlett’s muffled scream shrills louder than anyone could imagine, her hands clawing at Dunne. Her whole body coming to fight off her assailant. Dunne, still determined to have his way, fists his hand and smashes it into Scarlett’s face. Instantly, she falls hard back against the desk, her head bouncing off the wood. She doesn’t move.

Dunne laughs out loud like a demented movie villain, so intent with his need to get revenge and using Scarlett as his ultimate tool, that he doesn’t see me stand, arms now free, until I launch myself towards him.

I get intense pleasure from the shocked look on his face before my fist connects. My movement is restricted because my legs are still attached to the chair, so where I go, the chair goes with me. Dunne turns awkwardly, so I use my full body weight to bring him down to the floor. As we roll around, each getting in punches, the chair starts to break into pieces, giving me that bit more freedom. Each piece of splintered wood a possible weapon.

For a second, I’m distracted by the sound of gunshots closer than before, giving Dunne the chance to whack me at the side of the head with one of the chair legs. I scoot back on my ass to try get away, my hand finding the scattered items from the desk that had been discarded earlier, but he continues his pursuit, giving me no time to try and get back to my feet.

Standing above me, looking down, he bares his teeth, snarling. Spit and saliva coating his mouth. He swings back the wooden weapon still in his hand, ready to take another blow, but the rage that has been building from the moment I saw Scarlett scared, bloody and captured, explodes through my veins. Like a raging animal I jump to my feet, a dark veil over my morals, sense, or humanity and I pounce.

My body weight, and fire in my belly, are enough to unbalance Dunne and has him falling backwards on his ass. Before he has a chance to comprehend what the fuck is

going on, I sit on him, bring my hand up and with the heavy, round object I hold, I pound it once, twice... again and again, until his features are gone, his skull caved in, not a breath of air left in his lungs.

My hands are coated with blood and brain matter, as is the paperweight I'm still clinging on to. My heart rate is skyrocketing, my breathing hard and fast. The dark haze slowly receding with each deep intake of air that is laced with the smell of blood and death.

"Scarlett!" I crawl on all fours across the floor to get to her, using the desk to slowly heave myself up onto my feet. I'm exhausted, but the fear that I've lost her is enough to keep me moving.

"Scarlett?" I quickly put two fingers to her neck, growling when I see the red welts there, left by the chains, but then I exhale with a thankful moan when I feel a pulse. I quickly pull off my t-shirt and despite it being splattered with some Dunne's blood, I lay it over her exposed pussy, tucking it under her hips to anchor it in place. Whatever happens, no fucker is seeing her in that way, and if any one of them try to touch her, I'll fucking gut them with my bare hands.

"Scarlett, darlin'. Wake up for me, baby." I wipe the cleaner of my two hands on my pants then run it gently behind her head looking for signs of blood, but I don't find any.

The door crashes open. I glance over my shoulder and find Mammoth filling up the doorway. He's quickly pushed aside, and Smoke is there, closely followed by Stone, but I ignore them all and turn back to the woman who is my only concern. She owns my heart. To me, the room is empty apart from us, because that's all I care about.

"Come on, baby. Please. I need to know you're okay." I drop my head to her chest, ignoring the surrounding shouting. "I love you, Scarlett. Please, please." At first, I

think it might be Smoke trying to pull me away from her, but the touch is soft, caressing and everything Scarlett is. I raise my head to look at her, her eyelashes fluttering as she comes back to me. I go to place my hand gently against her bruised face, but I'm hauled backwards before I get to touch her.

"Get the fuck back," Smoke growls loudly. "Scarlett, sweetheart?"

I try to fight my way back to her, but Mammoth is holding me back, holding strong but not without an air of understanding and gentleness.

"Give them a moment," he warns. "You need to back off. For now. Let the shit settle."

"You don't understand, Mammoth," I cry. "I need to be with her."

"Believe me JB, I know." He oozes compassion. "But for now, you need to let Smoke have time with his daughter."

"But..." A flash of heat suddenly surges through me. I can hear the accelerated beating of my heart in my ear. A wave of dizziness flows over me, my knees buckle and despite Mammoth's hands coming out to grab me, I hit the floor, and then everything goes black.

Chapter

Twenty-Four

Scarlett

I vaguely remember JB looking down at me, begging me to wake up and telling me he loves me. I'm still unsure if it was real or just my wishful thinking while still semi-conscious.

Then my dad was there, and in true Young Outlaw style, everything went crazy.

Smoke fussing by my side, but with what minimal energy I still had, I'd pushed up onto my elbows, and skimmed the room to find JB but with all the brothers in the room hustling around, pulling open cabinets, arms flaying as they showed their anger, I didn't catch sight of him at all. I want him so badly. I needed to know he was okay, and I had unashamedly screeched at them, demanding to know. They gave me nothing in return, other than the odd sympathetic glare. No one was saying anything. My efforts zapped my last bit of energy, and I felt myself drifting off again to the sound of my dad shouting orders to his club brothers.

My dreams while unconscious were vivid, of Dunne, his hands around my neck, violating me as I choked. Gasping, desperate to get air in my lungs so I could fight back. My mouth was wide with the fear of what was about to play out, but the sound of my screams were silent. JB's watchful eyes, steeped with pain, begging me to stay, but all I wanted to do was die. The pressure of the gun barrel pushing against my skull. Pull the trigger, pull the trigger. I love you JB, but I can't survive this.

Everything is behind a red haze. As it clears, all I see is JB, holding his blood-soaked arms out to me, smiling, and I fall into them, knowing in my heart that Dunne is dead and it's all over.

Smoke

We were in the midst of discussing how we were going to handle Dunne and the DVI at church when my phone had pinged. Normally, I'd ignore it, but my phone was set up to give out a specific notification sound for only two people in my life. Tenley, I knew, was up at the cabin with Oriana, and as both of them were under strict instructions to let Stone or I know if they wished to leave the compound, that only left Scarlett.

Instantly, the hairs stood up at the back of my neck. Scarlett is a stubborn and independent woman, so there's only one reason why she would ping my phone. She was in trouble.

"Church, suspended." I growled when I checked my phone to find that it was indeed an SOS signal from Scarlett, but the tracker I'd installed, showed that she was at home. Still, I needed to check on her, make sure that everything was okay, that she wasn't hurt. "Stone, Edge, Mayhem, we're riding out now," I'd barked at them.

"What's going on Prez?" Stone quickly asked, already up on his feet and ready to move.

"Scarlett might be in trouble. We need to get over to her place, see what the fuck is going on."

"Fuck," Mammoth's loud outburst quickly grabbed our attention. "JB's just sent me these." He'd handed me the phone, and as I flicked through the pictures, as soon as I got to one of Scarlett, my heart shot up into my throat.

“Rex, I need you to get to the cabin now, check on the girls, make sure they stay put. The prospects on the gate have orders to shoot to kill if anyone tries to get into the compound without my direct permission.” I’d shouted out the orders fast and furiously. “The rest of you, arm up, be outside in five and ready to ride out.”

We had ridden at a ludicrous speed, that would have made it hard for the Sherrif to turn a blind eye, to only take us fifteen minutes or the abouts, to get to Scarlett’s apartment. When I found the door still ajar, and the sight of Violet’s pot broken on the floor, I’d lost my shit. Stone quickly reasoned with me, shaking me out of my rage and grasping for my phone to check the tracking. It showed that she was on the move, not far from where JB had reported the DVI’s were hanging. It was quickly confirmed when my phone rang.

Ghost, who had been watching the place in case we needed to go in and grab JB out of there in a rush, was telling me that after seeing a woman being pulled from the trunk of a car, he’d moved in for a closer look, only then had he realized that it was Scarlett. He’d wanted to go in there and then to get her out of there, but the numbers were against him, however good the fucker is, so I told him to wait, that we were on our way but would need his input as soon as we got there.

We’d all scrambled back onto our rides and taken off like the devil, in seek of the guilty who would be destined for hell for this.

Breaching the premises was easy, especially as Ghost had a clear layout of the building. The two guards that they had circling the perimeter were easy targets. Ghost seeing to one, Mayhem the other, while the rest of us made our way inside. Their job done both followed behind, covering our backs when the shit started; fist fights, gunshots, breaking down doors. The tracker showed Scarlett was here, but it wasn’t clear exactly where. It didn’t take long for us to deduce that she must be on an upper level.

Three guys had come bursting out of a door at the top of the stairs, firing shots off erratically. We took cover, but it soon was clear that Dunne's men were amateurs with zero weapon skills. They couldn't hit a cow's ass with a banjo, so it wasn't hard for us to pick them off, one by one quickly.

At first, I thought of nothing other than getting to Scarlett. Although, finding JB laying with his head against her chest, pleading with her, his devastation almost choking him while he blurted out his love, had me stumbling for a moment. But my need to get to her was strong, so I pulled him away and took his spot. When she pushed herself to the limit, searching for just a glance of him, I was no longer blind to what I had desperately tried to ignore.

What we saw in that room had even my stomach rolling. The air had a metallic smell, and blood and brain fragments splattered the floor. Paddy (Jimmy) Dunne, was now barely recognizable after JB had pulverized his face with the Shamrock-encased paperweight. Talk about the luck of the Irish. Dunne had found his lucky charm in a rather unconventional way.

Dunne was fucking dead. JB had made sure of that. Although I hate to admit it, JB had done good, but I can't deny that I'm also as pissed as fuck with him for robbing me of the chance to make Dunne suffer by my own hand.

It wasn't until I'd shouted out orders, moving a foot or two away from Scarlett after realizing that she needed medical attention urgently, that I became aware JB was down too, and being hauled off the floor by Mammoth and Edge.

I'd grabbed Stone to find out what the fuck happened, but he'd just shrugged. Fortunately, Ghost had shot Doc a message once things started going down, so he'd been pulling up outside. After checking them both over, Doc concluded that nothing was life threatening, and neither were in need of hospitalization.

Scarlett had a slight concussion, emotional trauma and exhaustion, and required observation and pain meds. She was up and stubbornly wanting to see JB within a few hours. It was clear that she was bottling up her emotional pain at what she'd been through, the need to see him taking precedence.

JB's diagnosis was somewhat of a surprise to us all, and not something we had heard of or would have guessed at either.

The strong adrenaline surge had caused his body's 'fight or flight' response to overreact to an emotional trigger, causing a condition called vasovagal syncope. I think that's what Doc called it. That, as well as the puncture wound on his side from a chunk of wood where Dunne had hit him, had put him into a state of unconsciousness. Although normally only for a short time, in his case, his brain had put his body into a temporary shutdown, to rest and recharge, and it was more than forty-eight hours before he'd started to come around and then only momentarily before he'd slip back into a deep sleep.

Scarlett had stayed by his bed as much as I'd allowed because she was still recovering, so I'd begged her to let Mammoth take up some of the vigil.

I checked in too occasionally, but only Mammoth was privy to that, and sworn to keep his trap shut.

Now JB is up and moving around, I'm giving him another twenty-four hours, but after that, we need to talk.

Chapter

Twenty-Five

Johny B

The cool shower I'd just taken had cleared the last of the haze, that had been filling my head since I'd finally woken up early yesterday. Every joint of my body ached like a motherfucker, now I'm just stiff, much like my dick has been. Guess even when your brain needs to take a time out, you can still have morning wood.

I wrap a fresh, clean towel around my hips, then use the back of my hand to swipe the steam from the mirror and look at my reflection.

At least today, my complexion is less pallid than yesterday. When I lean closer to the mirror, I can still see the yellow remnants of bruising on my cheekbone, but that should be gone within a day or two.

I squirt a ball of shaving foam into the palm of my hand and start to work it over the stubble on my chin right up to my ears. I contemplate shaving my head too, but as I turn my head from side-to-side surveying how it looks now it's grown out some, I decide I kinda like it. Picking up the cutthroat razor, I slide it open, and with it held firmly between the tips of my fingers, I push up my jawbone, ready to start. I'm about to make the first sweep of the blade when I hear a loud knock at the door. Mammoth mentioned last night that he wanted to talk now that I was clear-headed, I just didn't expect him to come this early.

“Come on in,” I shout out. “I’ll be out in a minute.” I add when I hear the door open and close again. When I don’t hear his heavy footsteps, I hesitate further.

“You need a hand with that?” I use the reflection in the mirror to see if it’s really her and not my mind still playing tricks on me before I turn to face her. Red hair loose and cascading around her shoulders, eyes sparkling like precious stones, lips framing her perfectly white teeth. She honors me with a heart-splintering smile, looking absolutely stunning and hot as Hades leaning seductively against the open-door frame.

“You’re so fucking pretty, the sight of you might throw me back into a catatonic state.” I take a step towards her with every intent of kissing the fuck out of her, but she places a hand on my bare chest, keeping me at arm’s length. She slips the cutthroat from my fingers, flips the lid down on the toilet and points to it.

“Sit,” she demands. I don’t argue, I slip my ass onto the top, not once breaking eye contact with her. She steps into the space between my open thighs and pushes back my head, ready to start. “I’ve kinda got used to the new rugged, unshaven, tattooed version of you. I’m not sure I want you to go back to how you were before.” She pouts her lips and tilts her head to one side as her eyes roam my face, taking in every inch. Her fingers run over my head, fingernails scratching my scalp just enough to light a fire within my belly. “This look is much more fitting for a badass biker dude.”

I snatch the razor from her hand, giving no fucks if I nick myself with the sharp edge, and toss it into the sink.

With my hands firmly on her hips, I pull her down to me, my mouth covering hers. I break just for a second. “Whatever you fucking want, you’ve got it.” She slides into my lap easily, and it feels like she’s made specifically for me. I quickly get back to devouring her mouth. My hands skim across her warm skin, up under the olive-green t-shirt she wears.

“Fuck...” I hiss out against her lips when, instead of finding another layer of clothing to breach, I touch the naked rounds of her breasts. “You want this?” I question, brushing my thumbs over the already hard nipples, hoping to God that it is and that I’m not going too fast for her. But when I’m met with a breathy yes, I grab the bottom of her top and pull it clear from her body. “Jesus, Scarlett, you’re fucking breathtaking.” I grab a washcloth and wipe some of the shaving foam from her cheeks where it’s transferred from me before swiping it over my own face. “Is this crazy?” I suddenly gush. “We’ve never actually fucked, yet I’m so stupidly in love with you that I know I don’t think I can live without you, Scarlett. I sure as hell don’t ever want to try.”

“Then don’t,” she cradles my head in her hands, brushing a gentle kiss across my lips. “I hate you,” she blusters. “Hate you for the time we lost, the time you stayed away when all I needed was the tiniest of contact with you. A call, a message, anything to stop my heart from hurting, but I forgive you.” Tears fall from her eyes and roll down her cheek. I lean forward and catch them on my tongue. “Don’t ever do that again, because I love you JB, and I don’t care what we have to do to make this happen, but I’m not letting you go, ever.”

I push up onto my feet, taking her with me, carrying her out of the bathroom and over to the bed. When her back hits the mattress, I’m right there over her, kissing her, caressing her cheek, soothing the remnants of her attack.

“Fuck me,” she whispers, tugging off the towel from my hips in one easy movement, tossing it to the floor. Her hand reaches out for my cock, which is standing proud, showing her exactly how hard and needy she makes me.

“Scarlett, are you sure you’re ready for this?”

“Yes. Yes,” she grips me harder. “I need you to touch me. To wipe away the memory of any other, so I have only you and you alone. Please, just fuck me.”

“Oh baby, I ain’t going to fuck you,” I place the palm of my hand flat on her stomach, slowly sliding it up between her tits, over her delicate neck until I’m cupping her chin. I lean in, my lips brushing hers as I speak. “I’m going to worship every inch of you, make you come so hard that you’ll be dizzy, then I promise to make love to you so that you understand you are mine, and mine alone.”

I kiss her tenderly, letting my tongue sweep against hers with so much heat and passion it has her back arching off the bed. Leaving her lips, I run the very tip of my tongue across the welt marks that still linger on her throat from the chains, before moving down to her tits. I give each nipple equal attention, nipping and sucking them into my mouth until her body starts to quiver with arousal.

“This is our true beginning baby; this is the start of us.” I kiss a trail further down her stomach, slowly pushing down the sweatpants she’s wearing, along with the black lace panties as I go, over her hips and down to her knees. When I get to kissing her pelvic bone, I use my feet to push the garments further down, and over her feet, letting them fall off the end of the bed. Tentatively, I slide my hands between her thighs, fearing that this may trigger her. But I need not have worried, because the caress by my hand, her legs open, welcoming me without hesitation. I can’t help but smile, and when I look at her face, she’s watching my every move, her eyes steeped with arousal, and lips parted as she rapidly intakes air.

“Don’t stop,” she pants out. “Just fuck me now.”

I shake my head, a mischievous smile on my lips as I drop my mouth to her glistening pussy. The palm of her hands slap against my head, her nails desperately trying to gain tenure, but it just makes me more determined to pleasure her. She comes, covering my face with her sweet nectar. I lap it up and give her zero time to catch a breath.

The noises that fall from her parted lips, when I suck on her clit after giving it lots of

tongue action, is like a symphony of pleasure. She's close. I can tell by the way her legs quiver. Doing this to her, is pushing me nearer to shooting my load that I'd have thought, but fuck, I can't mess it up now.

I start with a single finger, working up to three, slowly stretching her wet, tight pussy so she's ready for me. Her body starts to writhe across the sheets, her head moves from side to side, but I hold her down. Suddenly she sits up, throws a few 'fucks' my way before falling back to the bed when she peaks, hit with another powerful orgasm.

She looks so fucking sexy with her skin flushed pink, and her hair sticking to her sweaty face, eyes closed, lips parted, the rapid movement of her chest as she takes in air, trying to slow down her racing heart. God, come hell fire, death and damnation, she is going to be forever mine.

I lean over to the bedside drawer, reach inside, and snag a condom. I don't waste time ripping the packet open and rolling the rubber onto my throbbing, needy cock.

I position myself between her thighs until my tip is touching the lips of her pussy. I bring up her knees, letting them fall outwards before taking my cock in hand and sweeping it over her swollen clit, coating it with her juices, and causing her to wriggle beneath me. I push a little closer until the round, swollen head breaches her entrance. I wish I could say that I went in slow, but the warm, tightness of her cunt is too much, and I push in to the hilt.

"Oh, fuck Scarlett." I hold my position, not moving, just revelling in the sensation and utter euphoria I feel being inside her. It's almost too much. I'm sure my head is about to explode from the pure pleasure consuming my whole being. "So, so, fucking... good."

"J..., J..." she whispers on a breath. "Please."

Once I start to move, I can't stop, but I keep it slow and precise. All the way out, before pushing slowly back in. I promised to make love to her, and despite my wanting to surge forward and grasp my own release, a promise is a promise.

"Jesus, JB," she pushes up onto her elbows and casts me a dangerous look. "Faster, harder. Make me fucking scream."

"Whatever you want baby," I snigger, thanking the Lord in my head because fuck, I'm so ready to spill my seed inside her warm, tight cunt. Not just today, but every fucking day until I take my last living breath.

I grasp hold of her ankle and rest it on my shoulder, opening her further, place a kiss to the inside of her leg, and on my next push in, I go deeper, hitting a spot that makes her eyes roll back into her head and purr like a pampered kitty-cat. I hammer into her hard. The head of the bed banging against the wall, the rhythm gaining speed rapidly, unable to hold back any longer.

"JB... ooh... J...J... ahhh." She screams out as she comes hard. The inner walls of her sweet cunt pulsing around my cock. My balls tighten, one or two more thrust and I'm gone. Wave after wave of ecstasy roll over me, leaving me exhausted, heady and euphoric.

I fall to Scarlett's side, instantly pulling her into my arms, and despite needing air in my lungs to clear my head, I take her mouth, kissing her like she is the air I need to live and breathe.

"I love you," I whisper against her lips, unable to hide the emotion that is bursting through every pore of my skin. I even shed a tear or two, but quickly sweep them away.

"I love you, too," she responds, her hand also coming to my face, making it known

that she's not oblivious to my show of emotion.

"You're mine. You know that, don't you. Whatever it takes."

"On one condition," Scarlett tilts her head to look me straight in the eye. "You understand that you're mine, too. Only me." A hard pat of her hand on my chest emphasizes her final words. I catch her hand, holding it securely to my chest.

"Only you," I affirm and seal it with a long lingering kiss. I'm about to confirm it in other ways but as I go to move over her, there's a loud knock at the door.

Chapter

Twenty-Six

Johny B

“S hit,” I growl, running my hand over the top of my head with frustration. “I forgot about Mammoth. I thought it was him earlier when you came by, but I’m sure as fuck happy that it wasn’t.”

“JB,” Mammoth’s deep, distinctive gruff voice comes from the other side of the door. “I know you’re in there. You’ve got two minutes to make yourself decent and open the door before I break the fucker down.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m coming.” I shout back, before placing another breathtaking kiss to Scarlett’s lips. “Or should I say, I just have.” I snigger. “Here,” I scoop up her panties and sweatpants from where I’d tossed them on the floor. “Go into the bathroom and get dressed. I need to let him in before he trashes the place.”

I wait until Scarlett is safely behind the closed door, then grab the towel from the floor and secure it around my waist before opening the door to Mammoth. He immediately pushes his way in, eyeballing the room before focusing on the bathroom door.

“Please tell me it’s not Scarlett hiding in there?” he demands, scowling at me.

“It’s not Scarlett hiding in the bathroom,” I snigger. “Fuck, now you went and made

me a liar.”

“For fuck’s sake, JB. Don’t be fucking with me, because if it is you and her that’s been rutting like rabbits, slamming the bedhead against the wall, being heard all around the club house, then you’re dancing with the devil, brother.”

“What can I say,” I shrug. “Slap me stupid and point me in the direction of Hell, but damn, it was worth every fucking second! If I have to face Smoke’s wrath, then so be it.”

“Jesus, JB,” Mammoth groans out as his ass hits the bed. The bed that is as messy as shit and coated in my ladies’ juices. “I knew you wouldn’t be able to keep it in your pants. Cannon is going to go ballistic.”

“Just a fucking minute,” I growl back at my superior, “Don’t you dare disrespect what Scarlett and I have. I’ll take on anyone who stands in the way of us being together if I have to. You, Cannon, even Smoke, but I sincerely hope that it doesn’t come to it, because the club is my family, my life, but now, so is Scarlett. So, don’t ask me to choose, because you might not like the answer.”

“Calm the fuck down, will you,” Mammoth jumps to his feet, quickly taking the few steps needed to close the distance between us. His big hand comes down on my shoulder. “If that’s truly how you feel, then I’ll back you one hundred per cent. And I’m sure that Cannon will, too. Hey, it’s not like we’ve had the easiest of rides when it comes to matters of the heart, so believe me, we get it. But Smoke, fuck. You’re going to have one hard as shit fight to get him on side.”

“But he won’t be doing it alone,” Scarlett announces, stepping out of the bathroom. “I’ll be right beside him.”

“No, Scarlett,” I walk to her, holding her by the shoulder and look deep into her eyes.

“I need to face Smoke alone. How much of fucking pussy would I look if I drag you in there to fight my corner.”

“He’s right,” Mammoth backs me up. “You know your father better than anyone. At times, Smoke is a closed book, giving nothing away. One thing I do know, is that he’ll have more respect for JB if he stands his ground alone, rather than going in with half a dozen brothers vouching for him. He’d take that as him being a ball-less cunt, lacking a backbone.”

“I’ll ask to see him today,” I stand tall, determination in my voice. “The sooner we get this done, the better. First, I need to speak to Prez. It’s only right he knows the situation before anyone else does.”

“Well, you better get on it now, because Smoke wants to see you this afternoon.”

I kiss Scarlett one last time and watch as both her and Mammoth leave the room. Grabbing my phone, I quickly punching out my Prez’s number. It’s coming up to ten-thirty here in Nevada, so Florida being in front by three hours, at least I won’t be dragging Cannon from his bed. Unless, of course, he’s having some afternoon delight with his old lady, Leah, because he can barely keep his hands off her most of the time.

The phone rings out, but it’s picked up before it hits voicemail.

“Johny B,” Cannon’s voice filters down the phone line. “How you doing, Brother?”

“I’m doing good, Prez. Thank you for asking. I’m sorry to disturb you, but I need to talk to you.”

“The talk...” the line goes silent for a matter of seconds. “I was wondering how long it would be. Must admit there was a point when I thought it wasn’t going to happen,

especially when you came up with the crazy idea of inserting yourself amongst the DVI. At one point I wasn't sure you were going to come out of it alive. Thank fuck you did."

"Sorry, Prez." I'm shaking my head, confused. Not that he can see that, but what the hell is he talking about. "How long? I'm not sure what you mean."

"Before you rang me to tell me that you've found your woman, and you're asking for my approval."

"You knew?"

"Of course I fucking knew," he chortles down the line. "You were the most miserable motherfucker when you came back from Nevada. A quick call to Stone and my suspicions were confirmed."

"What suspicions?" I question yet again.

"Son, whenever a brother is acting like his dick is in a clamp, his head is in the clouds and doesn't even blink when a chick is parading around in the clubhouse naked, you know there's a woman behind it." He lets out a huge sigh. "Can't say I was impressed when Stone let it drop that it was Scarlett. Talk about the heart wanting what it shouldn't."

"But I love her." I sound soppy and pathetic. The most vulnerable I've ever felt and it's while vomiting my feelings to my President.

"Then you have my blessing if you want her as your old lady." Cannon replies. "And you can tell that to Smoke when you go plead your case, but know this JB, it's not going to be easy. Good luck." The call drops and I count my fucking lucky stars that Cannon is my Prez, and hope to fuck that my luck doesn't give out with the other

president prominent in my life.

Johnny B

“He’s in his office waiting on you,” Stone flicks his head towards the back room.

“How’s his mood?” I ask him. Can’t deny that I’m nervous as hell. Not because I’m scared of Smoke, but because of how important this is. My worry is, that although I’m willing to go up against anyone and everyone, when it comes to Scarlett defying her dad, I’m not sure I’d even want to push her into doing that. He’s her only true family.

“Grumpy, but that’s nothing new when it comes to Smoke,” he replies.

“Not helpful,” I snigger back.

“Suck it up buttercup, and get your ass in there, because the longer you keep him waiting, the angrier he’s going to get.” Stone gives me a firm pat on the back before making his way out of the clubhouse.

He’s right. I need to fucking do this.

With every step, I suck in a deep, calming breath so by the time I get to the door of the office, I have on my game face. I rap quickly on the door and wait.

“Yeah!” Smoke’s voice bellows from behind the door. I grab the handle and fling open the door, stepping inside, showing confidence and determination that I don’t really hold. “Sit your ass down, JB.”

I grab the back of the chair and swing it around before straddling it, my chest to the back, and my arms resting across the top.

“You wanted to see me, Prez?”

“Cut the cocky bastard shit, JB, that won’t cut it with me,” he warns. I search his face for any signs that will give me a clue to how this is going to go. “It’s no surprise to you, or anyone else, that I’ve never liked you, JB. You excrete arrogance, insolence and self-importance, and it fucking riles me.”

“Or you would look at it as confidence, bravery and audaciousness,” I offer in defense.

“What the fuck? You check that out in a dictionary before you came in here?” He accuses. He taps out a smoke and brings it to his lips, but surprises me when he doesn’t go to light it. “No less of the cockiness. For once, shut your mouth and listen to what I have to say before I lose my shit.”

I mime closing an imaginary zip at my mouth and tilt my head, waiting for him to continue with his character assassination. My guts are rolling like a milk churn. If my stomach wasn’t empty, I’m pretty sure it would have been by now. The contents littering the floor.

“You’re fucking infuriating, do you know that?” he hisses, shaking his head at me. “Yet, you’ve gone way beyond any brother’s expectations for this club, and despite the earlier misgivings I had when it came to you and my daughter, it’s clear that you care for her.”

“I fucking love her,” I can’t help blurting it out, regardless of Smoke’s previous warning.

“You say that, but how do I know this is not just another challenge for you. Reel in the daughter of the president, then drop her and move on to the next pretty girl who shows you attention?”

“Because that’s not who I am anymore,” I growl at him, pushing up out of my seat, my body tensing as a mix of anger and fear starts to grip me. Anger at his ignorance and a fear of losing Scarlett. “Fuck, Smoke. You don’t get it, do you? Not once have I even looked at another woman since you fucked me off back to Florida. Jesus...”

“Then help me understand,” he cuts me off, leans back in his chair, rolling the unlit cigarette between his teeth, unfazed by my outburst. Oblivious to my internal torment. “Tell me, how do you know you love her?”

“The pain... the pain I feel when I’m not with her. The utter euphoria I feel when I am.” As the tension begins to ease from my body, an uncontrollable smile takes over my face. “She’s so beautiful, so incredibly astute. She lights up the darkness, erases the bad and has the ability to bring me to my knees. The months away from her have been nothing but a living hell. I walked around in a haze going through the motions, doing what was needed for my club, but I sure as hell wasn’t living.”

Getting to my feet I do a one-eighty and walk the few spaces to the door, but needing to say more I turn back to face him.

“I’m addicted to her. Don’t you see that? And when you’re addicted to something, that’s all you want, all that you crave. Scarlett is my addiction and like any addict, when I’m not with her, I’m not a complete man.”

Silence falls over the room. Smoke finally flicks open the lighter that he’s been playing with, and puts the flame to the tab still in his mouth. He takes a deep draw, filling his lungs with the nicotine, holding it there before releasing it through his nose and mouth. The tension rises along with the plume of smoke.

“You can have my blessing to date my daughter, but it comes with conditions,” he says firmly.

“Anything,” I quickly respond, not quite believing what I’m hearing. His ultimatums don’t faze me, because I will do anything for Scarlett. Anything other than give up and walking away.

“You patch over to Nevada, because if you think I’m going to let you take her away from me, you’re deluded.”

“Done.”

“Hold your fucking horses, that’s not all. You let her continue with her career, and if you do make her your old lady, you wait until she’s established before you put any babies in her belly.”

“Sure thing, I will support her in every way she needs me to, and more.”

“Last but not least,” he points the two fingers holding his now half-smoked cigarette at me. “You treat her like the precious woman she is, because that’s what she deserves.”

“Nothing less,” I confirm. “Thank you,” I choke out, moving around to his side of the desk, I grab him by the shoulders, bringing him to his feet before wrapping my arms around him. I hug the fucking life out of him. Smoke doesn’t realize it, but he has just given me the world. A life where I will give and receive love that I never had before, and only ever dreamed of.

Smoke doesn’t hug me back. His arms stay exactly where they are, by his side, cigarette butt still cradled between his two fingers. I let him loose when it becomes obvious that he’s uncomfortable with the situation. With my arms relaxed, he pushes me away and waves his hand towards the door.

“Now fuck off out of my office, because if you start blubbing like a fucking baby,

you're not man enough for my girl and the deals off."

I laugh because I'm fucking ecstatic.

Once I'm in the hallway, the door to his office still ajar, I can't resist having the last word.

"So, will I call you Prez now, or Daddy?" I say with a deadpan expression.

"Fuck you," Smoke shouts back at me.

I just manage to shut the door before something hard hits it from the inside, but I'm not out of range to hear the laughter come from inside, too.

Three years later

Stone.

N ever would I have believed that the call, that had interrupted me watching the Montana Longhorns game all those years ago, would have influenced my future. A future that is so unbelievably good that I can barely keep a stupid smile off of my face. Sasha is growing up into a beautiful, well-adjusted girl. Strong-minded with just enough attitude and confidence, I'm sure she'll never let anyone take advantage of her empathetic nature. I can't take credit for how well balanced she is. That's all Oriana. Every day, I question what I could have possibly done in my past to warrant the blessing of having her in my life. Maybe this is only a dream, and I'll wake up from a drug infused stupor. The club, Smoke, Oriana and Sasha just a crazy assed trip. I hope to fuck it isn't.

My love for both my girls is so deep, so strong, that when I look at them... Jesus, I can barely think straight, never mind see through the misting of my tears. And now that Oriana is pregnant, a precious baby boy due in eight weeks, the fear of something coming and taking it all away, is real.

I'm not stupid. I understand the life I lead. Dunne and the Death Valley Irish are no longer a threat, but when you take out one lot of vermin, it's only a matter of time before another comes crawling out of the woodwork to try to infest your world. But believe me, I'll be waiting.

I'll protect my world, my family and our future by any means required. No one is ever taking them away from me.

Smoke.

Life is a little easier without the shadow of Dunne and the DVI looming over the Young Outlaws, but my position as Prez is still as ball-breaking as ever. At least at the end of the day, I get to go home to Tenley.

The cabin we share ended up being bigger than I originally intended when it was just me. It's still on YOMC grounds because it's safe and secure. Our cabin is not far from Stone and Oriana's, but with enough distance so they don't hear Tenley. She must have bottled it up when still under their roof, because I had no idea until we got into our own place that Tenley...well, she's a screamer. When we fuck, she lets rip like a banshee, letting the whole world know exactly what we're up to.

It wasn't long before Tenley became restless. Her need to get back to work was obvious. I'll admit I wasn't happy; my overprotectiveness increased to a level that even I knew was ludicrous. So, I agreed to a compromise. Tenley switched to freelance. A lot of her work was done on the internet and video calls. She wasn't confined to the grounds as such, but to placate me, she agreed to take a brother with her when she does need to leave the grounds for meetings. It's not that I don't trust her. Far from it. It's all the other fucking assholes I can't tolerate. I'm sure, in time, I'll become more relaxed on that score.

The one thing that raised its head recently, making me wonder if we had any longevity in our relationship, was when the subject of kids came up.

Tenley is as broody as fuck since Oriana became pregnant. It's not like I'm in the throes of youth anymore. I'm not even sure the swimmers are still packing enough punches to get to the destination needed. But fuck me. Some things are just meant to be, I guess, because two nights ago, a very scared, teary-eyed Tenley, dropped the bombshell that, after missing her last period, had taken a test which, if accurate, indicated that she could very well be pregnant. It wasn't until that moment I realized, more than anything, I wanted to be a dad again. I was ecstatic. Two more tests later,

and we were having our own private celebration.

Did I question if this had been an intentional slipup by Tenley? Not for one minute, because she had been a mess, worried that it would end us. Even if she had planned it, I can't say that I gave any fucks.

I'd always been a little jealous of Stone and Sasha's connection. Not that I don't have it with Scarlett, but our relationship was, up until a couple of years ago, under wraps. So, I feel like I missed out on so much, because of my fears after losing Violet, but I only have myself to blame.

I'll admit, for a while, seeing her with JB pissed me off no end, but after a pep talk from Tenley, telling me to ignore the past, check out how they are when together, I saw things in a different light.

JB adores her. Damn, he risked his life for her and not once, but twice. He saved her from what would have been so much worse than she'd already had to endure. Scarlett? She's always beautiful, so much like her mother, a ray of sunshine. But with JB, she's the Aurora Borealis. Dynamic flickers of brilliance that light up the entire sky.

To know she's happy, safe and loved is all any father wants, and now I realize that JB is the one to provide that. Because of that, I accept him wholeheartedly.

Johny B

Fuck. The last three years have been incredible. I won't deny that leaving Florida and my brothers wasn't easy, but finally being with Scarlett, soothed that ache until it became nothing but a collection of awesome memories.

If ever there's a need for the Nevada chapter to make a call on our Florida brothers, I'm always the first to volunteer, and Smoke, accepts that I need to keep a connection

with them. At least once a year, Scarlett and I take a two-week vacation to the area. We take one week of recreation at the sun-drenched beach of either Clearwater, Daytona or Cocoa Beach. No disruptions, no drama, just the two of us and sex so hot that it nearly burns the house down. God, my red-headed woman is an absolute siren, in and out of the bedroom.

The second week we spend with Cannon, Mammoth and the rest of the club, which is always at a faster pace, and usually leaves us needing another vacation to get over all the craziness. The Florida guys can sure host one hell of a party. They all love Scarlett, and welcomed her with open arms, even though some of them, at the beginning, were a little salty about me patching over to Nevada. It wasn't long before their opinions were changed, because once they saw us together, how stunning she was, and amazed at how she'd curbed my man whore ways and stolen my heart, they were smitten with her, too.

From the moment Smoke gave his approval for me to date Scarlett, I had wanted to claim her as mine. However, I agreed wholeheartedly with Smoke when it came to the importance of Scarlett's vocation. She'd worked hard over the past few years, secured a lucrative internship with a reputable firm, and I wasn't going to ruin that for her. So, I waited. It wasn't like I had much to worry about when it came to any of the other brothers trying to advance on what is mine. It's common knowledge now that she's Smoke's daughter, and therefore a no go, which definitely went in my favor.

Now that Scarlett has her own business, specializing in corporate law, she's also knowledgeable in Criminal Law, which comes in handy for the club, there's nothing holding us back.

After a nervous, but determined, conversation with Smoke two weeks ago, Scarlett agreed to become my old lady. My need to make it legal in my brothers' eyes is unfounded, but to me, crucial. I want Scarlett to recognize she is it for me, and a lawful marriage attests to that.

So yesterday was the day that, at last, I could shout to the world Scarlett is mine. We married at the Washoe County Courthouse in Reno early in the morning, and then after the legal stuff was done, we were escorted back to the club by a convoy of bikers. It sure was one hell of a sight to hit the streets of Reno. Our commitment to one another declared in front of our family on club land, our makeshift aisle lined with gleaming, highly polished motorcycles, engines roaring while I waited for my beautiful bride to meet me at the makeshift altar.

Scarlett, a vision dressed in the softest of pink fabric, that stopped just above the knee, biker boots and a shiny new black leather cut, that stated 'Property of JB' on the back. I'd sewn the patches on with my own hands. My woman was more beautiful than anyone could believe, and as she met me at the end of the row of my brothers, with the forest as our backdrop, I struggled to catch my breath. All of my Florida and Nevada brothers were there to witness our special day, along with a handful of guys from other chapters of the Young Outlaws.

Cannon stood boldly to my side in the role of officiant, a quick gesture with his hand to call for silence and one by one, the engines became still so the ceremony could begin. The celebration that followed was out of this world and, at Scarlett's request, the fucking and general debauchery was done respectfully behind closed doors. The partying went long through the night.

We weren't going to hang around the clubhouse, we're leaving early this morning, knowing that, although the majority of members were now sleeping off yesterday's celebrations, it was the lull before the storm. The frivolity is most likely to go on for at least another two days before things calm down to some kind of normality.

Leaving for our honeymoon was a sensible decision.

Yesterday had been the second-best day of my fucking life, but now, laying here with Scarlett wrapped around me, the heat of her body soothing my heart and soul, this is it.

This is everything.

The plans we've made, and our life together is all I need. Love, babies, happiness and no longer having the fear of the Death Valley Irish hanging over us or our Young Outlaws family, our future looks exceptional.

And I wouldn't want to change a single damn thing.

The end.

If you've enjoyed this book, why not try UNLAWFUL #1 of the YOMC Florida trilogy.