



Jolt's Vengeance (Reapers Rejects MC: Second Generation: Nevada #5)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: One night is all it took.

Jolt

One night and I craved the woman I met at the bar more than anything.

She rocked my world and I dreamt about her night after night.

Shit at the club was just gettin more complicated, and we were fightin like hell to keep the bastards off our backs.

Then again, in this life, you never had a good nights sleep.

Imagining her was a break from the reality the club was facing... until she walked in through the clubhouse doors like an angel sent from heaven.

The catch?

She wasnt just any sexy as sin woman.

She was Grims daughter... and damn if I didnt want to defile every bit of Aggie.

***Jolts Vengeance is the fifth book in the Reapers Rejects MC: Second Generation: Nevada charter. This book is intended for mature audiences only. Please proceed with caution.

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PROLOGUE

Three Weeks Ago...

Jolt

The neon lights of Vegas blur into a kaleidoscope as I stroll down the Strip, hands shoved in my pockets.

Another night, another bar. The steady thrum of my boots on concrete matches the pulsing bass spilling out of every club I pass.

I'd kill for some company right about now, but all the other prospects in the club are tied down these days.

I pause outside a dingy-looking joint, eyeing the faded sign.

It's not like a lot of the other bars around the city.

It gives me more alternative and rocker vibes than anything else.

Hell, it's good enough.

As I push through the door, the smell of stale beer and desperation hits me like a freight train.

Perfect.

I'm certain there's going to be plenty of women to fuck around with tonight.

The bar is dimly lit, a haze of cigarette smoke hanging in the air.

I push through the crowded bar, the bass thumping in my chest as I make my way to the counter.

The bartender, a tattooed guy with gauged ears, nods at me as I approach.

I tap my fingers on the sticky bar top. "Jameson. Neat."

He slides the amber liquid my way, and I down it in one smooth motion.

The whiskey burns a path down my throat, settling warm in my gut.

I signal for another, knowing damn well I'm going to get what I want here tonight.

As I wait for my second shot, I scan the room.

The place is packed with college kids and twenty-somethings, all looking for a good time—just like me.

My eyes linger on a brunette in a tight red dress, but I quickly look away.

No need to make my intentions too obvious just yet.

I'm hyper-aware of the fact that I'm not wearing my cut tonight.

It's a deliberate choice I always make when I hit the bars solo.

The last thing I want is some chick throwing herself at me just because I ride.

That shit's raunchy as hell, and I've got no problem getting girls any other time.

"Fuckin' patch bunnies," I mutter under my breath, shaking my head.

If I wanted that kind of attention, I would've stuck to the clubhouse.

But tonight, I'm after something different.

Something based on raw chemistry, even if it's just for a few hours.

The bartender slides me another shot, and I knock it back, relishing the burn.

As I set the glass down, a flash of blonde catches my eye.

For a split second, my heart stutters.

But no, it's not her.

Just another college girl looking for a thrill.

I run a hand through my hair, pushing away thoughts of the past.

Tonight isn't about old ghosts or about my complicated history.

It's about living in the moment, finding a warm body to lose myself in for a while.

"What, you forget to order me one?" she asks, her Scottish accent as unexpected as it is intriguing.

I turn to find an ashy blonde with red roots, who has the brightest emerald green eyes giving me a once-over.

I pause, shot glass halfway to my lips, and take a moment to really look at her.

There's something oddly familiar about her face, the tilt of her chin, the arch of her brow.

But I shake it off.

There's no way I'd forget a woman like this.

"My mistake," I say, lowering my glass. "Let me fix that real quick." I catch the bartender's eye. "Three more shots of Jameson, please."

The woman's eyebrow arches higher, a smirk playing at the corners of her mouth. "Three? Getting a little ahead of ourselves, are we?"

I can't help but chuckle at her sass.

It's refreshing, especially in a place like this where most women are falling over themselves to impress. "Just being prepared," I tell her with a wink. "Never know how the night might go."

As the bartender lines up our shots, I find myself studying her again.

That nagging sense of familiarity is still there, but I push it aside.

It doesn't matter who she reminds me of.

What matters is the here and now, and right now, I'm intrigued.

"So," I say, picking up one of the shots. "You always hit on strangers at bars, or am I just lucky?"

She laughs, a rich, throaty sound that sends a shiver down my spine. "Wouldn't you like to know?" she teases, reaching for her own shot.

As we clink glasses, I can't help but think this night just got a whole lot more interesting.

This woman's got fire, and I'm all for it. "Darlin', I'm sure you'll be standing here to have another shot with me before the night's over."

She throws her head back, laughing.

The sound is like music, rich and intoxicating. "Well, aren't you a cocky bastard?"

Her eyes sparkle with mischief as she downs her shot.

"You have no idea," I reply, matching her move and feeling the burn of whiskey slide down my throat.

It's a familiar sensation, but nothing compared to the heat building between us.

She leans in closer, her breath warm against my ear. "So, does this cocky bastard have a name?"

I turn to face her, our noses almost touching.

"Jack," I say, drinking in the scent of her perfume. "And what about you, mystery woman?"

Her emerald eyes lock onto mine, intense and unblinking. "You can call me 'A'," she says, her voice low and husky.

Curiosity piques inside me.

"A?" I repeat, raising an eyebrow. "That's not exactly common. What's the story there?"

She picks up the last shot, swirling the amber liquid in the glass. "Because, Jack," she says, emphasizing my name, "after tonight, I'll be nothing but a ghost in your mind."

Her words hit me like a punch to the gut, sending a jolt of electricity straight to my groin.

This is exactly the kind of woman I've been looking for—no strings, no complications, just pure, unadulterated fun.

I lean against the bar, trying to appear casual despite the electricity crackling between us.

"So, 'A', what brings you to this fine establishment on a night like tonight?"

She laughs, a sound that's both melodic and slightly mocking. "Oh, you know, just looking for a bit of trouble. And you?"

"Same," I say with a smirk. "Seems like we might have similar goals."

We fall into easy conversation, dancing around topics without ever delving too deep.

She's good at this game, revealing just enough to keep me intrigued but never anything substantial.

I find myself leaning in, drawn to her like a moth to a flame.

"You from around here?" I ask, genuinely curious about her accent.

"Oh, here and there," she says with a wave of her hand. "What about you, Jack? You seem like a local boy."

I shrug, not wanting to give too much away either. "I get by. Know the city well enough."

She nods, her eyes scanning the bar. "It's quite a place, isn't it? All these lost souls looking for a connection."

I'm about to respond when I notice her attention shift.

She's no longer looking at me, but past me, toward the exit.

Before I can process what's happening, she's slipping off her barstool.

"Well, Jack, it's been a pleasure," she says, already moving away.

I blink, caught off guard by the sudden shift. "Wait, where are you going?"

She's already halfway to the door when I catch up to her.

"Hey," I say, grabbing her arm gently. "Where the hell are you going? Why'd you tease me like that all night?"

A laugh bubbles up from her throat, rich and mocking. "Well, you didn't bloody do anything about it, did you?" she says, her accent thickening with her amusement. She gestures down her body, a clear invitation. "So I'm goin' to find someone else who wants to enjoy this."

I stand here, stunned, as she turns away again.

My mind races, torn between my pride and the raw desire she's stoked in me all night.

I've never been one to beg, but something about this woman has me off-balance in the best possible way.

"Wait!" I call out, and before I can second-guess myself, I'm right behind her as she walks out on the street.

I don't let her get too far and drag her into an alleyway.

The dim light from the streetlights barely illuminates the narrow passageway, but it's enough to see the surprise in her eyes.

I growl, pressing her against the rough brick wall. "Is this what you want?"

Her breath hitches, pupils dilating. "Took you long enough."

I crash my lips to hers, swallowing her gasp.

The kiss is fierce, all teeth and tongue and pent-up desire.

My hands roam her body, hiking up her skirt as she fumbles with my belt.

"Such a tease," I mutter against her neck, nipping at the sensitive skin.

A lets out a breathy laugh that turns into a moan as I slide my fingers between her legs. "Fuck," she hisses. "Less talking, more action."

Her body stiffens, but only for a moment, before she's melting into me, her hips

pressing against mine.

Her hands tangle in my hair as she tips her head back, yielding to the kiss.

"God, I've wanted this all night," I groan against her lips before shoving my cock inside her.

Her moan is muffled by the hand I've placed over her mouth, but her body speaks volumes, arching into me, nails digging into my back.

She's wet, so damn wet, and the contrast of her soaked pussy against my aching, throbbing dick is almost more than I can take.

My hips move in a primal rhythm, thrusting into her with a need that's been building all night.

The cool air of the alleyway brushes against our overheated skin, heightening every sensation.

"You like that, don't you, sweetheart?" I growl in her ear, punctuating each word with a deep thrust, my cock hitting her cervix.

Her muffled cries of pleasure drive me wild, and I know I want to last as long as I can.

She feels too damn good for me to bust a nut too early.

"You're so fucking tight, but I bet you want it rougher, don't you? You like it when Daddy's cock is buried deep inside, don't you?"

Her nails dig into my shoulders, leaving marks I'll feel for days.

"Harder," she demands, voice rough with desire.

I oblige, pounding into her with everything I've got.

The brick scrapes against my knuckles, but I barely notice the sting.

All I can focus on is the building pressure, the slick slide of skin on skin.

A's breath comes in sharp pants, each exhale a soft cry of pleasure.

I can feel her tightening around me, urging for me to explode inside her, but I won't.

At least, not yet.

I twist her nipples, hard. "You want me to stop? Tell me what you fuckin' want, girl."

Her response is a whimper, a plea caught between the pleasure and delicious pain.

I smirk against her skin, nipping at the delicate line of her neck.

"Mmm, I knew you wanted more of this," I tease, pulling back until just my tip remains inside her, before slamming back into her.

The force of it has her whimpering again, her body jerking against mine in surprise.

The sight of her body cramped up against this brick wall—open, vulnerable, completely at my mercy—is intoxicating.

It's like the sweetest poison that seeps into my veins and takes control of me.

I grip her hips tighter, fingers digging into her soft flesh as I set a punishing rhythm.

The sounds she makes are heavenly—half moans, half sobs.

Each one turns me on more than the last.

I can feel her getting closer to the edge, her body tightening around me in delicious waves.

"Are you going to come for me, sweetheart?" I ask through gritted teeth.

The sensation of holding myself back from release is excruciating but equally thrilling.

Her answer is a choked moan, a surrendering nod.

"That's it...you're so fuckin' good," I pant out as I thrust into her harder and faster.

The friction between us becomes an almost unbearable heat that threatens to consume us.

Suddenly, she's about to scream out in pleasure.

I slap my hand back over her mouth, muffling her cries.

Her body convulses around mine as she reaches climax.

Her high triggers my own and I bury myself deep inside her as release crashes over me in powerful waves.

Shaking with the aftermath of our climax, we stay connected for a while longer; my cock softening inside her as we catch our breaths.

Eventually, I pull out slowly and fix her disheveled clothes before doing up my own.

Before we part ways, I pull her against me for a last lingering kiss.

The taste of her on my lips is a promise of many more nights like this to come.

"Until next time, sweetheart," I whisper into the quiet night, leaving her with a softly echoing promise that hangs in the cooling air of the alleyway.

"In your dreams, Jack. I'm a ghost, remember?"

Just like that, she walks off.

But will she remain a ghost?

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CHAPTER ONE

Aggie

Present Day...

I take a deep breath, inhaling the warm Las Vegas air as I stride across campus.

The neon lights of the city glimmer in the distance as the sun starts to set, a reminder of the vibrant world I've chosen to immerse myself in.

It's a far cry from the vast open landscapes of Montana, but there's an undeniable energy here that sets my blood racing.

"Hey, Aggie!" a voice calls out, and I turn to see Sienna, one of my Delta Zeta sisters, jogging to catch up with me.

Her long dark hair bounces with each step, and she's grinning from ear to ear. "You ready for the mixer tonight?"

I can't help but smile back. "Aye, I suppose I am. Still feels a bit strange, though."

Sienna links her arm through mine as we walk. "Strange how?"

I shrug, trying to find the right words. "Just... different, I guess. Back home, parties are a bit different. Like, Harleys and fights."

She laughs, a tinkling sound that makes me feel instantly at ease. "Well, honey, I promise there won't be any Harleys at this shindig. Unless you want to sneak one in?"

I snort, picturing the chaos that would ensue if I showed up straddling a chopper. "Tempting, but I think I'll pass. Wouldn't want to give the frat boys any ideas."

As we make our way toward Greek Row, I can't help but marvel at how quickly I've adapted to this new life.

It's only been a week, but already the campus feels like a second home.

The agreement I made with Mum and Pa echoes in my mind—choosing a city with friends of the club nearby if shit went awry.

Las Vegas had seemed like the perfect compromise: close enough to a clubhouse for safety, far enough for independence.

"Earth to Aggie." Sienna waves her hand in front of my face. "You zoned out there for a second. Nervous about tonight?"

I shake my head, both to clear my thoughts and answer her question. "Nah, just thinking about how different everything is here. It's... nice, actually."

Sienna squeezes my arm. "Well, we're glad to have you, Scottish firecracker and all. Now come on, let's go get ready. I have the perfect outfit for you to borrow!"

As we enter the sorority house, a wave of excited chatter washes over us.

Girls are rushing about, swapping makeup tips and outfit advice.

It's so much different than the testosterone-fueled energy of the clubhouse, but there's

a similar sense of family here that makes me feel right at home.

I follow Sienna up to our shared room, my mind drifting to the conversation I had with Mum before I left.

She'd been worried, of course—it's in her nature.

But she'd also been proud, seeing me take this step.

"You know," I say as Sienna starts rummaging through her closet, "I never thought I'd end up in a sorority. Always figured I'd be more of a lone wolf type."

She emerges with a slinky, light pink dress. "And now?"

I grin, taking the dress from her. "Now I'm thinking pack life might not be so bad after all. As long as the pack wears less leather and more glitter."

As I slip into the dress, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror.

The girl staring back at me is both familiar and strange—still Aggie, but softer somehow.

Less guarded.

I touch the ends of my bleached blonde hair, remembering the day I decided to change it from its natural red.

A small act of rebellion, a way to distance myself from painful memories.

Then again, it's not so much different. My roots still have the deep red shining through.

But here, in this room, with these girls, I don't feel the need to rebel or distance myself from anything.

For the first time in a long while, I feel like I can just... be.

"You look amazing," Sienna says, coming up behind me. "Those emerald eyes of yours are going to break some hearts tonight."

I laugh, but there's a lump in my throat I can't quite swallow. "Thanks, lass. For everything."

She meets my eyes in the mirror, her expression softening. "That's what sisters are for, right?"

And in this moment, I realize that's exactly what we are.

Not by blood, not by club affiliation, but by choice.

Sisters.

I guess it's not much different than the club life, just different circumstances.

As we head out for the mixer, arm in arm with one of my sorority sisters, I feel like I really do belong.

It's different from what I've known before, but no less powerful.

This, I think, is what college is all about.

New experiences, new friendships, finding the new versions of ourselves.

I'm excited for this night to unfold, sure it's going to be filled with laughter, dancing, and the kind of carefree joy I've rarely allowed myself to feel.

I know I've made the right choice. Las Vegas, Delta Zeta, this new life—it's exactly where I'm meant to be.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, and I fish it out, my heart skipping a beat when I see "Mum" flashing on the screen.

For a moment, I consider letting it go to voicemail since I'm heading out with Sienna, but I know better than to do that.

If I ignore it, I'll worry her to death.

I'm still getting used to this newfound independence, and sometimes talking to Mum feels like a step backward.

But guilt wins out, and I swipe to answer. "Hey, Mum," I say, trying to keep my voice light.

"Aggie, my love!" Her voice, warm and familiar, washes over me. "How are ye, darling?"

I pause at a crosswalk, waiting for the light to change. "I'm good, Mum. Just headin' out with a sorority sister to a mixer."

"Aye, I'm sure you'll be makin' lots of friends," she says, and I can hear the pride in her voice. "And how are ye settling in?"

I start across the street with Sienna, weaving between other students.

Everyone around here goes to the University it seems. "Yeah, it's... it's good. The girls in the sorority are really nice."

There's a brief silence, and I can almost see her worrying her bottom lip, the way she does when she's trying to find the right words. "That's wonderful, love. I'm so glad ye're enjoying yourself."

I swallow hard, suddenly missing her fiercely.

"How's everyone back home?" I ask, desperate to change the subject before I get emotional.

As she launches into updates about Pa and my siblings, I let her voice wash over me, calming the homesickness I hadn't realized was creeping up on me.

She tells me about Davina's latest antics and how Sorcha's been helping Pa in the garage.

"Oh!" My mum's voice brightens. "Somethin' rather big has happened! Ye'll never guess—Bull and Alexa are adopting a little girl!"

My steps falter, and I nearly trip over my own feet. "What? That's amazing!" The words burst out of me, louder than I intended, drawing curious glances from passersby.

Lowering my voice, I continue, "What's her name?"

"They're calling her Jenika," my mum replies, her voice warm with affection. "But 'Nika' for short."

My heart swells with excitement. "Oh my God, that's adorable. What does she look

like? Tell me everything!"

I can practically hear the smile in my mum's voice as she says, "She's not here yet, but I'll guarantee she'll be a wee angel, Aggie."

I find myself grinning as I picture the little girl. "She sounds perfect. Mum, you have to send me a picture when you see her again. I need to see this cuteness for myself."

"Of course, love. I promise I'll send one as soon as I can. They think the birth mother will have her in the next two weeks or so," she assures me.

As I continue my walk with Sienna, my mum's tone shifts slightly. "Speaking of family, Aggie... have ye been keeping in touch with yer sisters? And maybe ye could give yer brother a call once a week or so?"

I feel a twinge of guilt. "I... I've been meaning to. It's just been so busy with classes and?—"

"I know, darling," she interrupts gently. "But Conrad... he's having a hard time with ye being gone. I think hearing from ye would mean the world to him."

My throat tightens unexpectedly.

I swallow hard, trying to push down the sadness from missing my family. "Yeah, of course. I'll call him tomorrow, I promise."

As I say the words, I realize how much I miss them all—Mum, Pa, my sisters, and even my annoying little brother, Conrad.

The familiar chaos of our home, the constant buzz of the club.

Even the smell of leather and motor oil that seemed to seep its way into everything I owned.

I'd never admit it out loud, but God, I miss it all so much it aches.

My mum's voice pulls me from my thoughts. "Good. And Aggie... be careful, yeah? The club... we're still dealing with a lot of heavy shit. Sally Bernard and those other MCs, they're still trying to hurt us. Remember, love, if ye run into any trouble?—"

"I know, Mum," I interject, my voice softening. "The Vegas charter is right here if I need them. I promise I'll reach out if anything happens."

She lets out a small sigh of relief. "Good. I just want ye to be safe, darling."

I feel a rush of warmth for her concern. "I know, and I'm grateful. Really. It's... it's nice to know I have that protection if I need it."

There's a pause on the other end of the line, and I can almost see her worried frown. "Ye're bein' careful, right? Not gettin' into any trouble?"

I roll my eyes, even though she can't see me. "Mum, I'm fine. I'm not some wee bairn anymore."

"I know, I know," she sighs. "It's just... with everything that's happened in our lives..."

Her voice trails off, and I feel a familiar tightness in my chest.

Memories of screams, of shattering glass, of my mother's bruised face flash through my mind.

All because of the sick son of a bitch I used to call my father.

I shake my head, pushing them away.

"I can take care of myself," I say, my voice harder than I intended.

"Aye, that ye can," she agrees, a note of pride creeping into her tone. "Ye're a tough lass, just like yer old mum."

I soften at that, a small chuckle escaping me. "Learned from the best, didn't I?"

"If there's even a hint of trouble," I continue, "I'll go straight to the Vegas charter. I swear it."

I can almost hear the relief in my mum's sigh. "That's my girl. I know ye can handle yerself, but it does my heart good to hear ye say that."

A lump forms in my throat.

Despite the distance, despite my fierce desire for independence, her concern wraps around me like a warm blanket. "I love you, Mum," I say, my Scottish lilt more pronounced as emotion threatens to overtake me.

"I love ye too, mo chridhe ," she replies, using the endearment that always makes me feel like a wee lass again. "Stay safe, and don't forget to call yer brother."

"I won't," I promise. "Bye, Mum."

As I end the call, I stand still for a moment, letting my new campus life wash over me.

I'm caught between two worlds—the fierce, protective embrace of my family and the MC, and the bright, promising future of college life.

The weight of my past, the scars from witnessing my mother's abuse, the strength I've built—it all feels both distant and achingly close.

I take a deep breath, squaring my shoulders.

Sienna smiles at me as we continue to walk to the mixer. "That your mom?"

I nod, trying to keep the emotion out of my voice. "Me mum, yep. I hadn't talked to her in a minute, so she called to check in on me."

Sienna's eyes get a bit darker, almost like she's saddened. "You're lucky to have a mom who cares so much about you, Aggie. Really lucky. But let's get to this party and have a good time, shall we?"

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CHAPTER TWO

Jolt

The horrible stench from tossed out buffet food wafts in the open clubhouse doors as I wipe down the bar for what feels like the thousandth time tonight.

Most days I love living here in Vegas, but days like today I want to scream at whoever's opening that damn door.

I don't know how the hell the wind manages to carry it up from the Strip all the way here, but it does.

My arm moves in automatic circles, muscle memory taking over while my mind wanders.

The clubhouse is quiet at this hour, most of the guys either passed out or off doing who-knows-what.

Just me and my thoughts and this never-ending grunt work.

I pause to crack my neck, rolling my shoulders to ease the tension.

My prospect cut feels heavy on my back, a constant reminder of my place in the pecking order.

Here I am, a few years in, and I'm still scrubbing floors, polishing bikes, and pouring

drinks.

I'm not complaining. This is the life I chose, and I'll be damned if I don't see it through.

The creak of the front door jolts me from my musings.

I look up to see Shiver sauntering in, his face set in hard lines.

Something's eating at him, that much is clear.

"Hey brother," I call out, forcing a grin. "What brings you in at this ungodly hour?"

Shiver doesn't answer right away.

He slides onto a barstool, his muscular frame dwarfing the seat.

His eyes, usually dancing with mischief, are clouded over.

"Whiskey," he grunts. "Straight."

I nod, reaching for the good stuff.

If Shiver's in this kind of mood, he deserves the top shelf.

The amber liquid splashes into the glass, and I slide it over without a word.

Shiver downs half of it in one go, barely wincing at the burn.

I watch him carefully, noting the tension in his shoulders, the tight set of his jaw.

Whatever's on his mind, it's not good.

"You all right, man?" I venture, keeping my tone light.

No need to poke the bear if he's not in a sharing mood.

Shiver's eyes flick up to mine, a hint of his usual humor sparking to life. "Just peachy. Why the fuck you bein' this nosy?"

I hold up my hands in mock surrender. "Hey, bartender's privilege. Gotta make sure my patrons are happy, right?"

That gets a chuckle out of him, albeit a small one. "Your patrons, huh? Big words for a guy on bitch duty."

"What can I say? I aim high." I grab a glass and start polishing it, more for something to do with my hands than any real need. "Seriously though, you look like you're carryin' the weight of the world on those shoulders."

Shiver sighs, running a hand through his hair. "It's nothin', Jolt. Just... club shit."

I nod, understanding all too well.

There's always something brewing in our world, some crisis or conflict that needs handling.

Though, Shiver's a prospect too, so I'm surprised he even knows the details.

"Anything I can help with?" I offer, knowing full well the answer will be no.

As expected, Shiver shakes his head. "Nah, man. You just keep pourin' drinks for me

tonight and we'll be square."

"Bet. But you need me to do anything for ya and I will. Well, maybe not anythin'."

That gets a genuine laugh out of Shiver, his face relaxing for the first time since he walked in. "Christ, Jolt. You never quit, do you?"

I grin, feeling a small surge of pride at having lightened his mood, even just a little.

"Nope. It's part of my charm."

Shiver snorts, downing the rest of his whiskey. "That what you call it? I was thinking more along the lines of 'annoying as fuck.'"

"Potato, potahto." I shrug, refilling his glass without being asked. "So, you gonna tell me what's really bugging you, or do I have to guess?"

Shiver's expression darkens again, but he doesn't shut me down completely.

Progress, I suppose.

"It's just... frustrating, you know?" he says after a long moment. "Feels like we're spinning our wheels, not getting anywhere."

I nod, even though I'm not entirely sure what he's referring to.

"Sometimes the waiting is the hardest part," I offer, trying to sound wise beyond my years. "But I'm sure the club has a plan. Damon wouldn't let us just sit on our asses if there wasn't a reason."

Shiver's eyes narrow slightly at the mention of our President's name.

There's a story there, but it's not my place to pry.

"Yeah, well, patience ain't exactly my strong suit," he mutters, tracing the rim of his glass with one tattooed finger.

I bite back a smartass comment about that being the understatement of the century.

Now's not the time for jokes, no matter how much I want to lighten the mood.

"Look, man," I say instead, leaning on the bar. "I've seen enough to know that this club, these brothers... they're the real deal. Whatever's going on, we'll handle it. It's just gonna take a little time"

Shiver looks at me for a long moment, his expression unreadable.

Then, slowly, he nods. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess you're right."

I resist the urge to pump my fist in victory.

"Of course I'm right," I say instead, unable to resist a little gloating. "I'm wise beyond my years. It's a burden, really."

Shiver rolls his eyes, but there's a hint of a smile playing at his lips. "And modest too. Christ, who let you in here again?"

I grin, grabbing a fresh rag to wipe down the bar.

We lapse into a comfortable silence after that, me cleaning and Shiver nursing his drink.

My mind drifts to my own brother, Victor, or Vader as the Deathstalkers MC calls

him.

Wonder what he'd think of me now, prospect cut on my back and outlaw MC all around me.

Probably wouldn't be disappointed considering I kind of followed in his footsteps, but then again, we both walked different paths for a reason.

The armed services, a life of rules and structure.

Me?

I crave the chaos, the freedom that comes with this world.

I continue my cleaning, moving from the bar to the tables scattered around the room.

Shiver watches me work, nursing his drink and looking slightly less stressed than when he came in.

As I'm stacking chairs, a thought occurs to me. "Hey, Shiver? You hear anything about your dad's members comin' in? I overheard Hawk mentioning something about reinforcements."

I continue stacking chairs, waiting for Shiver to respond.

The tension in his shoulders is visible, even from across the room.

Finally, he lets out a long sigh and takes another swig of whiskey.

"Yeah, there's some shit going down," Shiver admits, his voice low and gravelly. "Same ol' shit, different day, you know? Shadow and Spur should be here within the

next couple of days."

I nod, encouraging him to continue.

Shiver rarely opens up like this, and I'm not about to interrupt.

"It's just..." He pauses, running a hand through his hair. "We ain't gettin' anywhere with the Kodiak MC. Summer's over, and we're still sittin' on our asses while those fuckers are out there, probably laughin' at us."

The frustration in his voice is evident.

I set down the chair I'm holding and make my way back to the bar, leaning against it as I face him.

"Patience, brother," I say, trying to sound supportive. "I'm certain Damon has a plan. And with a couple of your dad's members arriving any day, I'm sure things are gonna be gettin' better soon."

The words feel hollow even as I say them, but I'm not sure what else to offer.

Shiver's eyes flick up to mine, a storm brewing in their depths. "If it was your girl who went through this shit," he says, his voice low and dangerous, "you'd want their fuckin' heads too."

The intensity of his gaze makes me take a step back.

I've never seen Shiver like this before, and it's more than a little unsettling.

For a moment, I try to imagine how I'd feel if someone I loved had been hurt the way Shiver's girl was recently.

The rage that wells up inside me at the mere thought is overwhelming.

"You're right," I admit quietly. "I probably would."

I nod, trying to understand the best way I can.

The weight of Shiver's pain hangs heavy in the air between us. "I'm sure," I say, my voice low and earnest. "But you know we're gonna get him, him and his fuckin' club for what they did to her."

They fucking jumped her when she was coming out of the bathroom at a local diner.

Their president gutted Siren like a fish, and luckily we were able to get her to the hospital in enough time so it didn't kill her.

My fingers drum against the polished wood of the bar, a nervous habit I can't seem to shake.

The tension in Shiver's shoulders is visible, like a coiled spring ready to snap.

I want to reach out, to offer some kind of physical comfort, but I know it's not my place.

Shiver's eyes lock onto mine, blazing with a fury that sends a chill down my spine. "Damn straight I am," he growls, his knuckles whitening as he grips his glass. "Those fuckers won't know what hit 'em. And Serpent, he's mine."

The venom in his voice is terrifying, and for a moment, I'm grateful it's not directed at me.

I've seen Shiver in action, seen the damage he can do when he's pushed too far.

The thought of him unleashing that rage on the Kodiak MC is like a big-wig UFC fight—when you want to be front and center, watching the action.

"Hey," I say, trying to lighten the mood with a hint of my usual charm. "Save some for the rest of us, yeah? I've got a few scores to settle with those assholes myself."

Internally, I wonder if I'm pushing too far, if my attempt at humor will backfire.

But to my relief, I see the corner of Shiver's mouth twitch upward, just slightly.

It's not much, but it's something.

"You'll get your chance," he says, his voice still rough but with a hint of warmth creeping in. "Just make sure you're ready when it comes."

I nod, feeling a surge of determination. "Trust me," I say, meeting his gaze steadily. "I'll be ready."

The tension eases slightly, and I seize the moment to dig a little deeper.

Hawk's gruff voice cuts through my thoughts. "Gimme a beer, now."

It's not a request, and I don't treat it like one.

Without hesitation, I grab a cold bottle and pop the cap, sliding it across the polished wood.

As I do, I can't help but feel a twinge of annoyance.

I know my place as a prospect, but sometimes the lack of basic courtesy grates on me.

Hawk takes a long pull from the bottle, then sets it down with a satisfied grunt.

His eyes flick between Shiver and me, and I can see the moment he decides to weigh in.

"Heard you boys talkin' about the Kodiak situation," he says, his voice low and gravelly. "Once we get a few more bodies, we'll be making some serious moves against those fuckers."

I nod, trying to keep my face neutral even as excitement bubbles up inside me.

This is what I've been waiting for—a chance to prove myself, to show the club what I'm made of.

But I can't let my eagerness show too much.

Shiver leans forward, his muscular forearms resting on the bar.

His eyes narrow as he glances at Hawk. "What about up north? Shit still goin' down in Montana?"

Hawk's face darkens, a storm brewing behind his eyes. He takes another swig of beer before answering, "Yeah, but not for long. Zane's about to fuckin' explode, and Boomer's club is gonna be on the receiving end of it."

The tension in the air thickens at the mention of Zane.

I've heard stories about his temper, and the thought of him losing it sends a chill down my spine.

Still, I can't help but feel a twinge of satisfaction.

Boomer's club has been a thorn in our side for too long.

Curiosity gets the better of me, and I find myself asking, "What about Mexico? Things changing down there yet?"

Hawk's eyebrows furrow, and he shakes his head. "I honestly don't know shit about Mexico."

As I nod in response, my mind wanders to Sally Bernard.

That woman's always got an ace up her sleeve, and I can't help but wonder what she's planning next.

The news about Sera's inheritance of the casino shares is still fresh, and I know it's just another wedge between her and her mother.

Internally, I mull over everything.

Sera, with her slate gray eyes and that raven tattoo peeking out from under her designer clothes, now holds a significant piece of the Vegas pie.

It's a power play that's bound to have repercussions, not just for her, but for the club as well.

As I mechanically wipe down the bar, my mind drifts to a different, more intoxicating memory.

A, the woman from a few weeks ago.

Her image floods my senses—those piercing green eyes, the curve of her hips, the way her blonde hair fell across her face as she threw her head back in laughter.

I can almost smell her perfume, a mix of jasmine and something darker, more dangerous.

My fingers tighten on the rag as I remember how her skin felt under my touch, soft yet electric.

"Earth to Jolt." Shiver's voice cuts through my daydream. "You zonin' out on us, brother?"

I shake my head, forcing a grin. "Just thinking about bike maintenance," I lie smoothly.

Shiver snorts, not buying it for a second. "Sure, if that's what we're calling it these days."

I shrug, not willing to share my thoughts about A.

Something about her feels private, separate from the chaos of club life.

"Speaking of maintenance," I say, eyeing the clock, "I should probably hit the hay. Early start tomorrow."

Hawk nods, draining the last of his beer. "Good, man. We need you sharp."

I toss the rag into the sink and stretch, my muscles aching from a long day. "Night, brothers," I call out, heading for the door.

The cool night air hits me as I step outside, a welcome break from the stuffy clubhouse.

I make my way to the trailer I share with Shiver and Siren, the gravel crunching

under my boots.

Inside, the trailer is quiet.

Siren must be asleep already, and Shiver's still at the bar.

I head straight for my room, closing the door behind me with a soft click.

As I strip off my clothes, my mind wanders back to A.

The memory of our encounter in the alleyway beside the bar is vivid, almost painfully so.

I can still feel the rough brick against my palms, hear her breathless moans in my ear.

I lay down on the bed, my body thrumming with desire.

Closing my eyes, I let myself sink into the fantasy.

A's lips on mine, hungry and demanding.

My hands roaming her body, memorizing every curve and hollow.

The heat of her core as I thrust into her, the way she clung to me like I was her lifeline.

A groan escapes me, and I have to remind myself that the walls in this trailer are thin.

But even as I try to rein in my thoughts, I can't help but wonder if I'll ever see her again.

A... she felt different.

Dangerous in a way that had nothing to do with rival MCs or club politics.

As I drift off to sleep, her face is the last thing I see.

In my dreams, we're back in that alleyway, and this time, I don't let her slip away.

CHAPTER THREE

Aggie

I stare at my reflection in the mirror, my bleached blonde hair a stark contrast against the deep maroon v-neck t-shirt I've just pulled on.

It sort of matches my roots though, and I like the way it looks.

My emerald eyes, a reminder of the Scottish blood running through my veins, look back at me with a mix of excitement and anxiety.

Today's a big day.

It's Labor Day, and the local charter is throwing a party.

It's a chance to reconnect with the world I've been trying to distance myself from since starting college.

"Ye got this, Aggie," I mutter to myself, my Scottish lilt more pronounced in the privacy of my room. "It's just a party, for Christ's sake."

But even as I say the words, I know it's more than that.

It's a step back into a life I've been trying to leave behind, a world of danger, steam, and pure thrill that's as familiar to me as breathing.

I shimmy into a pair of skin-tight jeans, admiring how they hug my curves.

The leather boots come next, their familiar weight grounding me.

As I zip them up, I can't help but think of all the times I've worn similar boots, running around the clubhouse in Montana as a wee lass.

Granted, I didn't look nearly as hot back then when I was a teenager with cystic acne breakouts.

"Focus, ye numpty," I chide myself, shaking off the nostalgia. "Ye're not that wee girl anymore."

The leather jacket is the final piece, and as I shrug it on, I feel like I'm donning armor.

It's silly, really.

These people are practically family, even if I haven't seen most of them in years.

But there's a part of me that feels like I need protection, not from them, but from the memories and emotions that are sure to come flooding back.

I grab my phone, checking the time.

Uber should be here any minute.

As I wait, I find myself pacing, my boots clicking against the hardwood floor of the room I share with Sienna.

"It's just a party," I repeat, trying to calm my nerves. "Just a bunch of old friends and family having a good time."

But even as I say it, I know it's a lie.

Nothing is ever 'just' anything when it comes to the MC.

Every gathering, every party, every seemingly innocent event could be the prelude to something bigger, something dangerous.

My phone buzzes, startling me out of my thoughts.

Uber's here.

"Right then," I mutter, grabbing my keys and heading for the door. "Time to face the music."

The ride to the clubhouse is a blur of neon lights and late-night traffic, until there's hardly any street lights.

Las Vegas never sleeps, and even though it's been months since I moved here for college, I'm still not used to the constant buzz of energy that radiates through the city.

As we pull up to the gates of the clubhouse, I feel a familiar tightening in my chest.

The sound of motorcycles and music drifts through the chain link fence surrounding the perimeter of the property, a siren song calling me back to a life I thought I'd left behind.

"Thanks," I tell the driver, my voice steadier than I feel as I climb out of the car.

The gate looms before me, a barrier between two worlds—the normal, civilian life I've been trying to build, and the wild, dangerous world of the MC.

For a moment, I consider turning back, telling the Uber driver to take me back to the sorority house.

But then I see a familiar face behind the gate, and the decision is made for me.

"Well, I'll be damned," Shiver calls out, his gravelly voice carrying easily over the din. "I still find it hard to believe you, little shitstain, are all grown up."

I can't help but smile at the old nickname. "That's what happens when time passes, Shiver," I call back, approaching the gate.

He looks me up and down, a mix of pride and something like concern in his eyes. "You look good, kid. College life treating ya well?"

I nod, falling easily into the familiar pattern of conversation. "Can't complain. How's things been around here?"

Shiver shrugs, a noncommittal gesture that speaks volumes. "Same old, same old. You know how it is."

And I do know.

That's the problem.

Shiver asks, his hand hovering over the gate controls, "Here for the party?"

"Aye," I say finally. "Thought I'd stop by, see some familiar faces. Mum might've pressured me into it too."

Shiver nods, pressing the button to open the gate. "Well, you'll certainly see plenty of those," he says with a chuckle. "Go on in. I'll catch ya later, Aggie."

As the gate swings open, I take a deep breath, steeling myself for what's to come.

"Good to see ye too, Shiver," I say, stepping through.

The path to the main building is lined with bikes, their chrome gleaming in the dim light.

The rumble of engines and the thump of music grows louder with each step, and I can feel the bass vibrating in my chest.

I pause at the door, my hand on the handle.

This is it.

Once I step inside, there's no going back.

Back to being Grim's eldest daughter, not just Aggie the college student.

"Ye can do this," I mutter to myself, squaring my shoulders. "It's just one night."

With one final deep breath, I push the door open and step inside.

The noise hits me like a physical force—music, laughter, the clinking of bottles, and the unmistakable sound of pool balls colliding.

The air is thick with smoke and the mixed scents of sandalwood, spilled whiskey, and some Latino food.

It's a smell that instantly transports me back to my childhood, to nights spent curled up on the couch in the Montana clubhouse while the adults partied around me.

Well, minus the Latino food.

We didn't have anyone who could cook that well in Montana back then.

For a moment, I'm overwhelmed by the sensory overload.

But then muscle memory kicks in, and I find myself scanning the room, looking for anyone I recognize.

There's Booger at the bar, his massive frame unmistakable even from across the room.

Dixon's holding in a game at the pool table, probably running some poor prospect through the wringer.

And over in the corner, I spot Kat and Ivy, their dark heads bent close together in conversation.

I'm so busy taking in the scene that I almost miss the sudden hush that falls over the room.

It takes me a second to realize that everyone's staring at me.

Faces turn, conversations stop mid-sentence, and even the music seems to fade into the background.

"Shite," I mutter under my breath, fighting the urge to turn tail and run.

But then I see him , and everything else fades away.

Jack.

He's standing by the bar, a Jameson in his hand and a look of shock on his face.

But it's not his presence that surprises me—it's what he's wearing.

A cut.

A fucking cut with a "Prospect" patch clearly visible.

Our eyes lock across the room, and for a moment, it's like we're the only two people in the world.

I can see the questions in his eyes, the same ones that are probably reflected in mine.

What the hell is he doing here?

When did this happen?

But before I can even think about approaching him, I'm engulfed in a whirlwind of dark hair and perfume.

"Aggie!" Kat's voice is warm and welcoming as she pulls me into a hug. "Look at you, all grown up!"

Ivy's right behind her, her smile just as bright. "It's been too long since most of us have seen you," she says, pulling me in for a hug of her own.

I return their embraces, grateful for the distraction from Jack's piercing gaze.

"It's good to see ye both," I say, and I'm surprised to find that I mean it.

Despite my reservations about coming tonight, there's something comforting about

being surrounded by familiar faces.

"So, college girl," Kat says, linking her arm through mine and leading me toward the bar. "Tell us everything. How's Las Vegas treating you?"

I let out a small laugh, falling into step beside her. "It's... different," I admit. "Lots of lights, lots of noise. Not quite like Montana."

Ivy chuckles, falling into step on my other side. "I bet. But you're studying something exciting, right? What was it again?"

"Cybersecurity," I reply, unable to keep the pride out of my voice. "With a minor in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence."

Kat lets out a low whistle. "Impressive. Sounds like you're keeping busy."

I nod, grateful for the easy conversation. "Aye, it keeps me on my toes. How about you two? How's everything here?"

As Kat launches into a story about her daughter Aurora's latest antics, my mind wanders.

I'm so caught off guard by Jack being here tonight.

"Aggie?" Kat's voice pulls me back to the present. "You okay, hon? You look like you've seen a ghost."

I force a smile, pushing down the anxiety bubbling in my chest. "Sorry, just got lost in thought for a second. What were ye saying about Aurora?"

Kat eyes me suspiciously but continues her story.

As she talks, I can't help but scan the room, my gaze landing on familiar faces.

Everyone seems so relaxed, so at ease.

Could things really be that bad if everyone is so relaxed?

"Earth to Aggie," Ivy says, nudging me gently. "You sure you're all right?"

I take a deep breath, trying to shake off the lingering unease. "Aye, I'm fine. Just... it's a lot to take in. I'm gettin' used to college, how much studying I have to do, the social life requirements. You know."

Ivy nods sympathetically. "I bet. But hey, you're family. This is your home too, remember that."

I clear my throat, pushing some of my aside. "Thank you both, I really appreciate that. So, Aurora's turning two soon, right?" I direct my question to Kat.

Kat laughs, the sound warm and rich. "Oh yes. She's a handful who's in her terrible twos. Just like her daddy."

Ivy giggles. "I'd say Damon's been stuck in his terrible twos for twenty years."

Both of the ladies laugh hard, and I join in.

"Enough about us," Ivy chimes in, her dark eyes sparkling with curiosity. "How's college treating you? We want all the juicy details."

I feel a flutter of pride in my chest. "It's really good so far. I'm loving it, actually. The classes are challenging, but in the best way."

Ivy whistles low. "Impressive. Sounds like you're keeping busy."

I'm about to respond when I feel a pair of strong hands grab my shoulders from behind, shaking me playfully.

"Well, well, well," Cobra's gravelly voice booms. "You gonna be our hacker, hmm? Do some dirty deeds for the club?"

My heart races, but I keep my voice steady. "I'd do anything for the damn club, and you know that."

The words come out stronger than I expect, but it's true.

I would do absolutely anything for the club.

Cobra's face splits into a wide grin. "See, that's what I'm talkin' about!"

I laugh, but internally, I'm grappling with the weight of my words.

I mean them, every single one.

This club is my family, and has been since Grim brought us into the club life.

"Unc Cobra is gon' show you around and introduce you to everyone," he announces, his voice carrying through the clubhouse.

I can't help but laugh, the sound bubbling up from my chest.

It feels good to be here, surrounded by people who've known me since I was knee-high.

But as I scan the room, my eyes lock onto Jack's, and the laughter dies in my throat.

His deep green eyes are dark, stormy.

There's an intensity there that makes my skin prickle and he's staring at Cobra's arm around me like he wants to rip it off.

Mmm, he's the jealous type.

This could be fun.

"Lead the way," I say, leaning into Cobra's side just a bit more than necessary.

I toss my hair over my shoulder, making sure to catch Jack's eye as I do.

As Cobra starts to guide me through the crowd, I can practically feel Jack's gaze burning into my back.

It's a heavy feeling, this power.

I might be new to the clubhouse as an adult, but I'm no blushing wee lass.

"So, who's the new prospect?" I ask Cobra innocently, though my eyes flick back to Jack. "Don't think I've seen him around before."

Cobra chuckles, a low rumble in his chest. "That's Jolt. Been prospecting for a few years now. Good kid, but he's got a lot to learn about the life."

I hum thoughtfully, filing away the information.

Jack—no, Jolt—is still watching us, his jaw clenched tight.

I wonder what he's thinking, what he sees when he looks at me.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jolt

I can't believe my fucking eyes.

Cobra's strolling around the clubhouse like he owns the place, his arm draped casually around her shoulders.

A's laughing at something he said, her head thrown back, exposing the curve of her throat.

The same throat I had my lips on not too long ago.

Izzy, Cobra's ol' lady, saunters up to them, and I tense, waiting for the explosion.

But it never comes.

She just smiles and joins their conversation like it's the most natural thing in the world.

What the actual fuck is going on here?

I grind my teeth, my fingers clenching around the empty beer bottle in my hand.

Who the hell is this "A" chick anyway?

And why does it seem like everyone in the damn club knows her except me?

I can't take it anymore.

I need a drink—a strong one.

Pushing myself up from my seat, I make my way over to the bar, my eyes never leaving A and her little entourage.

Siren's behind the counter, wiping down glasses with a rag.

"I need a drink," I mutter, sliding onto a barstool. "Something that'll make me forget the last hour of my life."

Siren raises an eyebrow, her hazel green eyes studying me as she reaches for a bottle of Jameson. "What's gotten into you, Jolt? You look like you've seen a ghost."

I snort.

If only she knew how close to the truth that was.

As Siren pours my drink, I motion towards A with a jerk of my chin. "You see that girl?"

Siren follows my gaze, her eyes landing on A. "Yeah, what about her?"

I down half the whiskey in one gulp, relishing the burn. "Who the fuck is she? And why does everyone seem to know her?"

Siren nods, a knowing smirk playing on her lips. "Grim's oldest daughter, yep. Aggie. Why?"

The glass nearly slips from my fingers, whiskey sloshing dangerously close to the rim.

My heart pounds in my chest, and I can feel the blood draining from my face. "Hold up, that's Grim's daughter?"

Siren nods, confirming, "Yeah, well, his step-daughter, but he's been her dad forever, so."

My mind reels, trying to process this new information.

Grim's daughter.

Grim, the Sgt. at Arms for our Montana charter.

Great!

Fuck me sideways.

The man's a legend, known for his fierce loyalty and crazy temper.

And I just...

I take another long swig of whiskey, hoping it'll dull the panic rising in my chest.

I mutter lowly, "Jesus Christ."

Siren leans in, her dragon tattoo rippling as she moves. "What's the deal, Jolt? You look like you've seen a ghost."

I can't help but laugh, a hollow sound that catches in my throat. "Ghost. Yeah, that's

one way to put it."

My eyes drift back to Aggie—because apparently, that's her name.

She's laughing at something Cobra said, her bleached blonde hair catching the light.

But now, knowing who she is, I can see why she's so damn comfortable here.

That fire in her eyes, the way she carries herself—it all screams 'MC royalty'.

"Fuck," I breathe out, running a hand through my hair. "How long has she been around?"

Siren shrugs, refilling my glass without me asking. "She's been coming around more lately. Something about college in Vegas."

College.

Right.

Because of course, Grim's daughter would be smart as hell on top of everything else.

I down the second whiskey, hoping it'll wash away the memory of her lips on mine, her nails digging into my back...

Siren prods, her blunt nature cutting through my spiraling thoughts.

"You gonna tell me what's got you so worked up?"

I meet her gaze, debating how much to reveal. "Let's just say... I might've made a mistake. A big one."

Siren arches a single brow, “You’d best spit out more shit than that, brother.”

I chuckle lowly, the sound more bitter than amused. "Met her at a bar a couple of weeks back. Fucked her in the alley."

The words taste like ash in my mouth now.

Siren's eyes widen, her usual composure slipping for a moment. "Shut up, you're fuckin' with me right now."

"Wish I was," I mutter, running a hand over my face. "Trust me, if I'd known who she was..."

Siren shakes her head, a mix of disbelief and something that might be pity in her eyes. "Jesus, Jolt. You sure know how to pick 'em."

I'm about to respond when a familiar voice cuts through the air, sending a jolt through my system. "You gonna steal my drink this time, or are we cool?"

She's staring right at Siren.

Standing right there, a playful smirk on her lips that I now realize she must've mastered from her father.

I freeze, my mind racing through a thousand scenarios, none of them good.

Siren, bless her, doesn't miss a beat.

She turns to Aggie with a smile that's all business. "We're good. You're not seventeen anymore, kiddo. Eighteen is enough for me to turn my eye, but I won't turn an eye if you're sharing with underage girls like that again."

I watch the exchange, my heart pounding.

Aggie's emerald eyes flash with mischief as she leans against the bar, her bleached blonde hair catching the dim light.

She downs the rest of her drink and places it on the bar.

She's close enough now that I can catch a hint of her scent—something wild and sweet that takes me right back to that alley.

Fuck.

Oranges and cinnamon, maybe?

"You're a prospect, so I'm sure you'll do whatever I damn well tell you," Aggie says to Siren, her voice dripping with sass.

Her Scottish accent comes out thicker now, and it only adds to her allure.

I can't help it.

Something in me snaps.

Maybe it's the way she's throwing her weight around, or maybe it's the fact that I can't stop thinking about how her skin felt under my hands.

Either way, the words are out of my mouth before I can stop them.

"The fuck she will, or any of us for that matter," I growl, stepping closer. "Our duty is to the club, not to some MC princess brats or keepin' their secrets."

Aggie's eyes widen slightly as she turns to face me.

My heart's racing, adrenaline pumping through my veins.

I know I'm playing with fire here.

She's Grim's daughter, for fuck's sake.

But there's something about her that makes me want to push, to see how far I can go before I get burned.

Aggie's smirk widens, her emerald eyes flashing with a challenge that sets my blood on fire.

I shouldn't like it, but goddamn, the sassiness, the sheer balls on this woman... it's intoxicating.

Cobra, who's been watching our exchange with amusement, finally releases his arm from around Aggie's shoulder.

He leans in, his voice a mock-stern growl. "Little girl, I might not be your daddy, but I can still give ya a whoopin' when need be."

I tense, ready to step in, but Siren beats me to it.

She snorts, shaking her head as she wipes down the bar. "Jesus, Cobra. That sounded so fucking perverted."

Cobra's eyes widen comically. "I didn't mean it to!" he sputters, looking genuinely flustered.

Izzy breaks out into a fit of laughter.

Hell, it's almost enough to make me laugh, if I wasn't so focused on Aggie.

Izzy grabs Cobra's arm, rolling her eyes. "Come on, you big idiot, before you say something else stupid and get yourself into more trouble."

She starts dragging him away, but not before throwing an exasperated look at Aggie. "Sorry about him, hon. You know how he is."

As they disappear into the crowd, Siren turns to us, her hazel eyes glinting with amusement. "You two want another drink?" she asks, already reaching for glasses.

"Hell yes," I mutter, not taking my eyes off Aggie.

She nods too, and Siren pours our drinks.

I can feel the tension crackling between us, electric and dangerous.

Part of me wants to grab her, to finish what we started in that alley.

But another part, the part that values my patch and my life, knows that's a fucking terrible idea.

Siren slides our drinks across the bar and then, bless her, makes herself scarce.

I take a long pull from my glass, relishing the burn as it slides down my throat. When I look back at Aggie, she's watching me, her gaze intense.

"So," I say, my voice low. "A is for Grim's daughter, huh?"

Aggie's emerald eyes flash with a mix of amusement and defiance. "A is for Aggie."

I can't help but laugh, the sound rumbling deep in my chest. "Ghost is more fitting," I retort, taking another sip of my drink. "You've been haunting me ever since that night."

For a moment, Aggie's tough exterior crumbles, and I catch a glimpse of something vulnerable in her eyes.

But it's gone in an instant, replaced by that sassy smirk I'm quickly becoming addicted to.

"I don't know whether to throw up or say that's sweet," she quips, but there's a warmth in her voice.

I lean in closer, drawn to her like a moth to a flame. "How about you decide after you get another drink?" I suggest, my voice low and husky.

Aggie opens her mouth to respond, but before she can, a booming voice cuts through the clubhouse chatter.

Damon hollers, his face set in grim lines. "Everyone except the women, kids, Siren, Shiver, and Doc, with me now!"

The change in atmosphere is immediate.

Every patched member snaps to attention, as do I.

I straighten up, my body tensing as I watch Damon's face.

Whatever's happened, it's serious.

Booger, always quick to ask what everyone's thinking, pipes up. "What's goin' on, Prez?"

Damon's eyes are hard as flint as he surveys the room. "Someone set fire to one of our car washes," he growls.

A collective intake of breath ripples through the room.

My fists clench at my sides, anger surging through me.

Who the fuck would dare?

Actually, I don't even know why I'm thinking this.

Sally, or the Kodiak fuckers.

It had to be one of them.

As if in answer to my unspoken question, Mouser's gravelly voice cuts through the tension. "Them damn Kodiak motherfuckers," he grunts, spitting on the floor for emphasis.

I glance at Aggie, seeing the worry etched on her face.

Part of me wants to stay, to make sure she's okay, but I know my duty.

I'm a Reaper's Reject, and the club needs me.

"Stay safe," I mutter to her, before turning to join the others.

As I move, I can feel her eyes on me, and I silently promise myself that this isn't over.

Ghost or not, I'm not letting Aggie slip away that easily.

I sprint out to the parking lot, the cooling night air a contrast to the heated air inside.

The familiar sight of our bikes lined up like soldiers, ready for battle.

My Harley stands proud among them, its sleek black paint job gleaming under the harsh lot lights.

Damon's voice booms across the lot, and in an instant, we're all in motion. "Let's get the fuck outta here!"

I swing my leg over my bike, feeling the comforting rumble as I kick it to life.

The roar of multiple engines fills the air.

As one unit, we peel out of the lot, tires squealing against asphalt.

The wind whips at my face as we tear down the streets of Vegas, weaving through traffic like it's natural to us.

My mind races faster than my bike, adrenaline coursing through my veins.

"Fuckin' Kodiaks," I mutter under my breath, gripping the handlebars tighter. "They're gonna pay for this shit."

We round a corner, and suddenly, the night sky is illuminated by an angry orange glow.

The stench of smoke hits me first, followed by the devastating sight of our car wash engulfed in flames.

Turmoil swears from beside me as we screech to a halt. "Jesus Christ!"

The fire is a beast, consuming everything in its path.

The heat is intense, even from where we're parked.

I can hear the crackle and pop of burning wood, the crash of the collapsing structure.

Damon's off his bike in an instant, his face a mask of pure fury. "Fan out!" he roars, his voice barely audible over the inferno. "Find the fuckers responsible for this!"

I nod grimly, my eyes scanning the area.

The fire's reflected in Damon's eyes, making him look downright demonic.

I've never seen him this pissed, and that's saying something.

"You heard the man," I shout to the others. "Let's hunt these bastards down!"

As we spread out, I can't help but think that whoever did this just signed their own death warrant.

The club doesn't take kindly to attacks on our shit and tonight, someone's gonna learn that lesson the hard way.

Turmoil and I stick together, our eyes scanning the chaos around us.

The heat from the blaze is getting worse, sweat already beading on my forehead.

My heart's pounding, adrenaline coursing through my veins.

That's when I spot him—a figure darting around the back of the car wash, moving fast, maybe a hundred yards away from it.

"There!" I shout, pointing. "Back of the building!"

Turmoil's eyes narrow. "That must be the fucker who did this," he growls.

I don't wait for confirmation.

My feet are moving before I even realize it, pounding the pavement as I run like hell.

The world narrows to a tunnel of focus—me and my target.

Nothing else matters.

I can hear Turmoil's heavy footsteps behind me, but I'm faster.

The gap between me and the runner is closing rapidly.

Blood pounds in my ears, drowning out everything else.

With a final burst of speed, I launch myself at the bastard, tackling him to the ground.

We hit hard, the impact jarring through my body, but I barely feel it.

All I can think about is making this piece of shit pay.

My fists start flying before we even stop rolling.

I'm straddling him now, raining down blows with everything I've got.

Each impact sends a jolt of pain through my knuckles, but I don't care.

I just keep hitting him.

"You don't fuck with the club!" I roar between punches. "With my fuckin' family!"

I'm vaguely aware that my knuckles are splitting, blood smearing across the guy's face—mine or his, I can't tell.

Honestly, it doesn't matter.

Nothing matters except making him hurt.

Suddenly, I feel strong arms yanking me back.

"Hold up, brother." Turmoil's voice cuts through the red haze of my rage. "We don't want him dead. At least, not yet."

I struggle against Turmoil's grip, my chest heaving.

"Let me go," I snarl. "This fucker needs to pay!"

But even as I say it, I know Turmoil's right.

We need information, and a corpse can't talk.

I force myself to take a deep breath, trying to calm the inferno of rage in my chest.

The crunch of gravel under heavy boots cuts through the night air.

I turn, still breathing hard, to see Damon approaching.

His eyes sweep over the scene—me with blood-slicked knuckles, Turmoil's restraining grip, and the sorry sack of shit whimpering on the ground.

A slow, dangerous smile spreads across Damon's face. "Damn, good job, Jolt."

Pride swells in my chest, mingling with the adrenaline still coursing through my veins.

I've impressed the Prez.

That's no small feat.

"Thanks, boss," I manage, my voice rough. I flex my aching hands, feeling the sting of split skin. "Fucker thought he could run."

Damon crouches down next to our captive, who's curled into a fetal position, face a mess of blood and rapidly swelling bruises.

Good.

I hope it hurts like hell.

"Now then," Damon says, his tone deceptively casual. "Why don't you tell us who sent you to torch our place?"

The guy just whimpers, and I feel my anger flaring again.

I snap, taking a step forward. "Answer him!"

Turmoil's hand on my shoulder stops me.

"Easy, brother," he murmurs. "Let Damon work."

I nod, forcing myself to stay put.

But my mind's racing.

Who is the fucker that would be stupid enough to hit us like this?

Sally, or the Kodiak MC?

Damon's voice, hard as steel now, pulls me back to the present. "Last chance, asshole. Talk, or I'll let Jolt here finish what he started."

I bare my teeth in a feral grin, hoping the dipshit takes the hint.

Part of me—a bigger part than I'd like to admit—hopes he stays silent.

I'm itching to get my hands on him again, to make him suffer for threatening my family.

Because that's what the club is—the only real family I've got, and I'll be damned if I let anyone fuck with that.

CHAPTER FIVE

Aggie

It's been a week since I've been here at the club, but it feels like coming home.

I push open the heavy wooden doors of the clubhouse, and chaos erupts in my face like a glitter bomb.

The air is thick with iridescent bubbles, floating lazily upwards and catching the light.

They're everywhere, a shimmering storm of soap and water.

Aurora's high-pitched squeal pierces through the rest of the noise.

The wee lass is tearing across the room, her chubby legs pumping furiously.

In her hands, she's wielding what looks like a plastic ray gun, but instead of lasers, it's spewing an endless stream of bubbles.

I can't help but grin. "Aye, look at you, ya wee troublemaker!"

As Aurora zigzags past, I spot Widow near the bar.

He's got a wrapped gift in one hand and the other's pressed against his mouth as he coughs violently.

Poor bugger's probably inhaled half the bubble mixture by now.

I call out, trying not to laugh at his misery. "Ye all right there, Widow?"

He waves me off, his eyes watering.

"Just peachy," he wheezes, voice rough as gravel. "Remind me to thank whoever bought her that damn thing personally."

I snicker, watching as he takes a swig of beer, likely trying to wash away the taste of chemicals.

The scene before me tugs at something deep in my chest.

It's mad, aye, but it's also... it reminds me of back home.

I feel a pang of homesickness so sharp it nearly takes my breath away.

Christ, I miss this.

The sense of belonging.

Sure, I've got my sorority sisters and my classes, but it's not quite the same.

Jolt's voice cuts through my musings. "Oi, Ghost!"

He's lounging on one of the worn leather sofas, feet propped up on the coffee table. "You gonna stand there all day or are you gonna join the party?"

I roll my eyes at him, but there's no heat behind it. "Keep yer knickers on, I'm coming."

As I make my way deeper into the clubhouse, dodging errant bubbles and laughing children, I can't help but think about home.

It's only a few more weeks till winter break.

I wasn't sure if I was going to take a winter course, but now I know I'm not.

I need the damn break.

Just a little longer and I'll be back in Montana, surrounded by snow, my annoying little sisters, and my father's watchful eye.

But for now, I've got this.

This beautiful, chaotic mess of a family right here in Vegas.

And as Aurora runs by again, shrieking with laughter as she's chased by a bubble-covered prospect, I know I wouldn't have it any other way.

Suddenly, a blur of dark hair and colorful fabric rushes past me, nearly knocking me off balance.

It's Camila, Booger's ol' lady, her eyes wild with frustration as she chases after a group of sugar-fueled toddlers.

Camila shouts, her Mexican accent thickening with frustration. " ¿Cálmense! Calm down!"

The little ones slow for a moment, looking back at her with mischievous grins, before darting off to another corner of the clubhouse.

"Christ," I mutter, running a hand through my bleached blonde hair.

I catch my reflection in a nearby mirror and smirk.

The skin-tight denim jeans I've poured myself into hug every curve, and the spaghetti strap top I've chosen leaves little to the imagination.

It's different from what I'd normally wear to the clubhouse, but college life is turning me into my own woman.

Now I have to throw together outfits that say I'm a sorority sister, and a badass bitch.

I'm pretty sure this does the trick.

"Aggie!" a familiar voice calls out.

I turn to see Sienna, my sorority sister and roommate, weaving her way through the crowd.

Her eyes are wide, taking in the scene around us. "This is... intense."

I laugh, throwing an arm around her shoulders. "I knew you might think so, it's why I brought you along with me. Bit different from our sorority mixers, aye?"

Sienna's gaze lingers on a group of patched members, their leather cuts adorned with the Reapers Rejects MC logo.

"You can say that again," she murmurs.

I feel a twinge of... something.

Pride?

Defensiveness?

"It's not always like this," I find myself saying. "Just wait till ye see it on a normal day. It's... well, it's home."

Sienna nods, but I can see the questions in her eyes.

I know she's curious about my past, about the life I left behind in Montana.

But those are stories for another time.

"Come on," I say, steering her toward the bar. "Let's get ye a drink. Ye'll need it to keep up with this lot."

As we make our way across the room, I can feel eyes on me.

Some curious, some appreciative, some wary.

I stand a little taller, chin up, shoulders back.

I might be in college now, but I'm still the daughter of Montana's Sgt. at Arms, and no amount of sorority life is going to change that.

"So," Sienna says as we reach the bar, "this is really how you grew up?"

I pause, considering my words carefully. "Aye, more or less. Though things were a bit different back in Montana. This lot..." I gesture around us, "they're family too, but in a different way."

Sienna nods, her eyes still roaming the room.

I can see the questions forming, the curiosity building.

But before she can ask anything else, a familiar figure approaches us—Siren.

"Aggie, it's good to see you again," she says, her voice carrying a hint of the Bronx.

Her gaze shifts to Sienna, curious but not unwelcoming. "Who do you have here?"

I feel a surge of pride as I introduce my friend. "This is Sienna, my roommate and sorority sister."

I turn to Sienna, "And this is Siren. She's practically family."

"Welcome to the madhouse, sweetheart," she says with a wink. "If you need anything—and I mean anything—just holler. We take care of our own here, even if they're just visiting."

I watch as Sienna shakes Siren's hand, a mix of awe and nervousness on her face.

"Thanks," she manages to say. "I appreciate that."

Siren nods, then turns back to me. "I heard your mom's been asking about you. Might want to give her a call soon, yeah?" With that, she saunters off, leaving us alone at the bar.

I feel a pang of guilt at Siren's words.

I've been meaning to call Mum, but between classes and sorority life, time's been slipping away.

I make a mental note to ring her tonight.

"She seems... intense," Sienna says, watching Siren's retreating form.

I can't help but chuckle. "Aye, that's Siren for ye. Blunt as a hammer, but with a heart of gold." I pause, considering. "She's been through a lot lately."

Sienna's eyes continue to dart around the clubhouse, taking in the mayhem.

Her brow furrows as she leans in close, her voice low. "Aggie, I have to know. Why on Earth would you want to go to that frat party later when this looks like it could turn into a real rager?"

I follow her gaze, watching as Aurora tears past us again, her tiny legs pumping furiously as she brandishes a bubble gun like a tiny, determined outlaw.

Bubbles float in her wake, catching the light and creating a surreal, shimmering trail.

I can't help but grin, my heart swelling with affection.

"This?" I gesture broadly, my Scottish becoming more pronounced. "This is Aurora's birthday party, ye numpty." I point to the pint-sized whirlwind wreaking havoc across the room. "She's just turned two."

Sienna's eyes widen in surprise. "Oh! I didn't realize... It's just so..."

"Wild?" I finish for her, laughing. "Aye, that's how we do things 'round here. Ye should see Christmas."

As if on cue, Aurora lets out a gleeful shriek, spraying bubbles directly into Widow's face.

The gruff biker splutters, coughing harder than he was earlier, and I try like hell to hold back my laughter.

I lean against the bar, soaking in the familiar chaos.

It's different from the polished sorority events we're used to, but there's a raw authenticity here that I've missed more than I realized.

My eyes unconsciously scan the room, searching for a particular face.

When I spot Jolt across the clubhouse, my breath catches.

He's leaning against the wall, a drink in hand, laughing at something Spark just said.

The way his t-shirt stretches across his broad shoulders makes my mouth go dry.

As if sensing my gaze, Jolt looks up, his deep green eyes locking with mine.

The intensity in his stare sends a shiver down my spine.

I feel the air between us crackle with unspoken tension, memories of our first time together surging back.

"I'm gonna grab a drink," I mutter to Sienna, not waiting for a response as I push away from the wall.

My feet carry me toward the kitchen, away from the bar and the main party.

But, more importantly, away from Jolt's burning gaze.

But as I reach for a bottle of water, I hear a familiar voice behind me.

Jolt's voice is low and husky. "Running away, Ghost?"

I turn, finding him much closer than I expected.

The kitchen suddenly feels very small.

"Just thirsty," I retort, trying to keep my voice steady. "Ye following me now?"

Jolt steps closer, his body heat radiating between us. "Maybe I'm thirsty too."

The double meaning isn't lost on me.

My heart races as I look up at him, taking in the sharp line of his jaw, the hint of stubble.

Before I can stop myself, my hand reaches out, grazing the front of his jeans.

I feel him harden instantly under my touch.

"I know ye like it when my hand's on ye—" I breathe, fueled by the fire I see flaring in his eyes.

Jolt's eyes darken with lust as he glances around quickly.

In a swift motion, he shoves me back against the wall, his hand wrapping around my throat.

The sudden pressure sends a jolt of excitement through my body.

"Don't test me, Ghost," he growls, his voice low and dangerous. "I'll ravage you up against this wall and take you, not caring who fuckin' sees me do it."

My pulse races under his grip, a mix of fear and desire coursing through me.

This is exactly what I've been craving—the danger, the passion, the intensity.

I can't help but giggle, the sound breathy and slightly manic.

"This is the kind of energy I want from ye," I manage to say, biting my lip. "Ye know that?"

I pull him in for a searing kiss, our lips crashing together with hunger.

His grip on my throat loosens slightly, and I seize the opportunity.

In one quick movement, I bring my knee up, connecting solidly with his groin.

Jolt doubles over, groaning in pain. "Fuckin' hell, Aggie!"

As he's distracted, my fingers deftly slip into his back pocket, retrieving his phone.

The adrenaline pumping through me makes me feel invincible, reckless.

"Pain comes with pleasure, sweetheart," I say with a wink, my Scottish accent thickening with excitement. "And I've got a party to go to."

I slip past him, pausing at the kitchen doorway. "Catch ye on the flip side, laddie!"

As I saunter back into the main room, I spot Sienna chatting with Spark and Zoe.

My heart is still pounding, and I can feel the ghost of Jolt's touch on my skin.

Part of me wants to go back, to finish what we started, but the thrill of the game is too

enticing.

I approach the group, tucking Jolt's phone deeper into my pocket.

The weight of it feels like a secret victory, and I can't help but grin as I join the conversation, wondering how long it'll take him to notice it's missing.

I sidle up to Sienna, gently tugging on her arm. "Time to go, hen," I say, my voice still carrying a hint of breathlessness from my encounter with Jolt.

Sienna's eyebrows shoot up, but she nods, bidding a quick farewell to Spark and Zoe.

As we make our way out of the clubhouse, the cool night air hits my flushed skin, and I take a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart.

Sienna's dark ponytail swings as she turns to look at me. "You all right there, Ag?"

I flash her a mischievous grin. "Never better. Let's get out of here before the real fireworks start."

We hop into an Uber, and I give the driver directions to our sorority house.

As we pull away from the clubhouse, I can't help but glance back, wondering if Jolt's discovered his missing phone yet.

Once we arrive at our destination, I turn to Sienna. "Fancy a wee walk to the frat party? It's only a few blocks away, and I could use some fresh air."

Sienna nods, a small smile playing on her lips. "Sure, why not? It's actually pretty nice out tonight."

As we start our stroll, the silence between us feels comfortable, but there's a heavy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I glance at Sienna, noticing the way she's hugging herself, despite the mild temperature.

"So," I begin, breaking the quiet, "how're you finding life in the sorority? It must be a far cry from what you're used to."

Sienna lets out a soft laugh, but it doesn't quite reach her eyes. "You could say that. It's... different. Sometimes I feel like I'm playing catch-up with everyone else's normal, you know?"

I nod, encouraging her to continue.

As we walk, Sienna's story unfolds, each word painting a picture of a childhood vastly different from my own.

"My mom... she wasn't really around much," Sienna says, her voice barely above a whisper. "And my dad, well, he tried, I guess. But most of the time, I ended up with my grandmother."

My heart clenches at the pain in her voice. "That's bloody awful, Sienna. I'm so sorry you had to go through that."

She shrugs, trying to brush it off, but I can see the hurt in her eyes. "It is what it is. My gran, she did her best."

I think about my own complicated family history, the trauma I've witnessed and experienced. "Family's not always what we expect, is it? How does your gran feel about you being here now?"

Sienna's step falters for a moment, and I see a flash of something—grief, maybe—cross her face.

But before I can ask, she quickly changes the subject.

"So, tell me more about this frat party we're heading to. Is it going to be as wild as that clubhouse?"

I let the deflection slide, making a mental note to circle back to this conversation another time.

I burst out into laughter, "Hell if I know!"

As we near the frat house, the bass of the music already audible from down the street, my nerves start to settle in me a bit.

There's more to Sienna's story, and I'm determined to uncover it—just as soon as I deal with the stolen phone burning a hole in my pocket.

Sienna's eyes glisten in the soft glow of the streetlights as we approach the frat house.

The thump of the bass grows louder with each step, but I barely notice it.

My attention is fixed on the subtle tremor in Sienna's voice as she finally answers my question about her grandmother.

"I'm not trying to evade your questions. It's just hard. My gran... she passed away last winter, just before I graduated high school," Sienna says, her words barely above a whisper.

My heart clenches. "Oh, Sienna, I'm so sorry."

She shrugs, but I can see the pain etched in the tightness around her eyes. "It's okay. I mean, it's not, but... she left me a little inheritance. It's how I can afford college."

I reach out and squeeze her arm gently. "That must have been hard, losing her right before such a big milestone."

Sienna nods, swallowing hard. "Yeah, it was. But the money... it's enough to get me through four years here, with a bit left over to start my life after graduation. It's more than I ever expected, really."

I think about my own family back in Montana—Mom, my father, my sisters.

Despite our complicated history, I've never truly been alone.

The thought of Sienna facing the world without anyone makes my chest ache.

"What about Christmas?" I ask, a plan already forming in my mind. "Do you have somewhere to go?"

Sienna shakes her head, her ponytail swaying with the movement. "Not really. Gran was... well, she was the only person I had left in this world."

The words tumble out of my mouth before I can stop them. "Come to Montana with me."

Sienna's eyes widen. "What? No, Aggie, that's too much. I couldn't possibly?—"

"Nonsense," I cut her off, my Scottish stubbornness flaring up. "You're coming home with me for Christmas, and that's that."

"But—"

"No buts," I insist, channeling my mother's no-nonsense tone. "We've got plenty of room, and trust me, one more person at the table won't make a difference. Besides," I add with a grin, "you haven't lived until you've experienced a proper Montana Christmas, and add in the fact you'll be with Reapers Rejects. Well, that's an experience in itself!"

Sienna looks torn between gratitude and hesitation. "Are you sure? I don't want to impose..."

I loop my arm through hers, pulling her close as we near the frat house. "Sienna, listen to me. Where I come from, family isn't just about blood. It's about who you choose to surround yourself with. And I'm choosing you."

As the words leave my mouth, I realize how true they are.

Despite our short time knowing each other, I feel a kinship with Sienna.

Maybe it's because we both understand what it's like to have complicated family histories, or maybe it's just the bond of shared experiences at college.

Whatever it is, I know in my gut that bringing her home is the right thing to do.

Sienna's eyes well up with tears, and for a moment, I worry I've overstepped.

But then she throws her arms around me in a tight hug.

"Thank you, Aggie," she whispers. "You have no idea how much this means to me."

I hug her back, feeling a warmth spread through my chest. "That's what family does, lass. We take care of each other."

As we break apart, wiping away tears and laughing a little at our emotional display, I can't help but think about how different my life is now compared to just a few months ago.

The bass from the frat house reverberates through my chest as Sienna and I approach the sprawling two-story building.

Red cups litter the lawn, and the air is thick with the scent of cheap beer and weed.

"Ready to raise some hell?" I ask Sienna with a wink.

She grins back, her earlier vulnerability replaced by a mischievous glint in her eye. "Born ready."

As we step inside, the chaos engulfs us.

Bodies writhe to the pounding music, and shouts of laughter punctuate the air.

I scan the room, taking in the scene, when my fingers brush against the hard edge of Jolt's phone in my pocket.

A wicked smile tugs at my lips.

"Give me a sec," I yell to Sienna over the noise.

She nods and drifts toward a group of our sorority sisters by the makeshift bar.

I duck into a quieter corner, fishing out Jolt's phone.

My heart races as I unlock it—thank fuck for his predictable password—and pull up his contacts.

I find Shiver's name and start typing.

My thumb hovers over the send button for a moment.

Is this too far?

But then I remember Jolt's hand on my throat, the heat in his eyes, and how he thinks he can just toy with me whenever he wants. Fuck that.

I hit send:

Catch me if you can.

A thrill runs through me as I imagine Shiver's confusion, followed by Jolt's panic when he realizes his phone is missing.

I can almost hear Shiver's vulgar response, picture that cocky grin of his as he figures out what's happened.

Sienna's voice cuts through my thoughts. "What are you smirking about?"

She's holding two red cups, offering one to me.

I take the drink, tucking the phone away. "Just setting up a little game of cat and mouse," I say cryptically.

Sienna raises an eyebrow. "With that hot biker from earlier?"

"Maybe," I reply, taking a swig of the sickly-sweet punch. It burns going down, but I welcome the warmth. "Let's just say I'm keeping him on his toes."

As we rejoin the party, I can't help but feel excitement coursing through my veins.

Part of me hopes Jolt will come storming in, all righteous anger and barely contained desire.

The other part knows I'm playing with fire, taunting a man who's part of the world I both love and fear.

But isn't that what I do best?

I down my drink and grab Sienna's hand.

"Come on," I shout over the music. "Let's show these frat boys how real women party!"

As we make our way to the dance floor, I push thoughts of Jolt, the MC, and my conflicted feelings aside.

Tonight, I'm just Aggie—college student, sorority sister, and queen of raising hell.

Let the night bring what it may.

CHAPTER SIX

Jolt

I'm leaning against the bar, nursing a whiskey and taking in the familiar chaos around me.

My eyes scan the room, taking in everything.

Shiver's by the pool table, his booming laughter carrying over the noise of clinking glasses and loud conversation.

Siren's perched on a barstool nearby, her lips quirked in that half-smile of hers as she watches the antics unfold.

I can't help but grin, feeling that familiar warmth in my chest.

This is home, as dysfunctional and chaotic as it might be.

These people are my family now, more than my blood relatives ever were.

My happiness is broken as Shiver saunters over, a shit-eating grin plastered across his face.

He's holding up his phone, and there's a glint in his eye that tells me I'm about to be on the receiving end of some prime Shiver bullshit.

"Yo, Jolt," he calls out, waving the phone in my face. "You wanna explain this?"

I squint at the screen, trying to make out the message through the haze of cigarette smoke and the slight blur of alcohol.

It takes me a second to realize what I'm looking at.

"What the fuck?" I mutter, reaching for my back pocket.

My stomach drops when I feel nothing but empty denim. "Son of a bitch."

Shiver's grin widens, if that's even possible. "Looks like someone's been naughty," he drawls, his Texas twang more pronounced than usual. "Care to share with the class?"

I snatch the phone from his hand, my eyes widening as I read the message.

It's from my number, all right, but I sure as hell didn't send it.

I read aloud. "Catch me if you can."

Then, below it. "Come show me what that Harley can really do."

Siren, who's drifted over to join the fun, lets out a snort of laughter. "Damn, Jolt. I didn't know you had it in you. That's some grade-A flirting right there."

I run a hand through my hair, feeling a mix of annoyance and amusement.

"Little bitch," I mutter, but there's no real heat behind it.

I can't help but be impressed by the audacity.

Shiver's practically cackling now, his muscular frame shaking with mirth. "Oh man, this is gold. Who's the lucky lady? Or should I say, who's the ballsy chick who managed to swipe your phone?"

I shake my head, a rueful grin tugging at my lips. "Three guesses, and the first two don't count."

Siren's eyes light up with understanding.

"Aggie?" she asks, her hazel eyes dancing with amusement. "Damn, that girl's got some serious stones."

I nod, unable to keep the grudging respect out of my voice. "Yeah, she's something else, all right."

Shiver claps me on the back, nearly knocking the wind out of me. "Well, well, well. Looks like our boy Jolt's met his match. What are you gonna do about it, man?"

I drain the last of my whiskey, savoring the burn as it slides down my throat. "What do you think I'm gonna do? I'm gonna go get my damn phone back."

Siren raises an eyebrow, her lips quirking in that knowing smirk of hers. "Just the phone, huh? Sure you don't want to, what was it? 'Show her what that Harley can really do?'"

I flip her off, but I can feel the heat rising to my face. "Siren, I don't need any more sass from the peanut gallery."

Shiver's still chuckling, his eyes gleaming. "Oh, come on, Jolt. You gotta admit, it's pretty fuckin' hilarious. Little college girl giving a big bad biker the runaround? That's some sitcom-level shit right there."

I roll my eyes, but I can't quite keep the smile off my face. "Yeah, yeah, laugh it up. We'll see who's laughing when I get my hands on her."

As soon as the words leave my mouth, I realize how they sound.

Siren and Shiver exchange a look, and I can practically see the wheels turning in their heads.

I growl, but it's too late. "Not like that, you pervs. I will say, it's good to see you laughing, Siren."

Siren offers me a soft smile. "Yeah, well, what was I supposed to do? No way in hell I was gonna let Serpent cut out my humor."

"Jesus, girl!" Shiver shakes his head.

I raise my brows and shake mine, knowing I shouldn't be shocked anymore with her sense of humor and crudeness.

I groan, pushing away from the bar. "I'm outta here before you two decide to start planning the wedding or some shit."

As I turn to leave, I catch sight of my reflection in the mirror behind the bar.

My dark hair's a mess, my green eyes bright.

The tribal tattoos on my arms seem to writhe in the dim light, the tiger on my hand almost looking alive.

For a split second, I wonder what Aggie sees when she looks at me.

Does she see the prospect, eager to prove himself?

The charming smartass with a quick wit and quicker smile?

Or does she see something else entirely?

I shake off the thought.

It doesn't matter what she sees. I'm just going to get my phone back, nothing more.

Shiver calls out as I reach the door. "Hey, Jolt."

I turn back, bracing myself for another round of teasing.

But there's something different in his expression now, a hint of seriousness beneath the ever-present humor.

"Yeah?"

He hesitates for a moment, then says, "Be careful, all right? I know you can handle yourself, but... just watch your back out there. Those college girls could eat ya alive!"

I crack up. "Shut up, you dumb fucker!"

My heart's pounding like a jackhammer in my chest as I make a beeline for the door.

Fuck, I need to get out of here before anyone else catches on.

But just as I'm about to taste freedom, a familiar voice stops me dead in my tracks.

"Jolt? Thought you were down by the university."

I turn to see Cobra, his brow furrowed in confusion.

Shit.

Think fast, Sterling.

"Yeah, well," I say, forcing a chuckle, "seems like Aggie took my phone thinking it was hers. I'm on my way to swap now." The lie rolls off my tongue smooth as silk, but my palms are sweating.

Cobra's eyes light up. "Want some company? Could be fun to hit up a college party."

"Nah, man," I reply, shaking my head. "I don't need Izzy beatin' my ass for dragging you around a bunch of college girls. You know how she gets."

That gets a laugh out of him. "Fair point. Wouldn't want to piss off the ol' lady."

As Cobra walks away, still chuckling, I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding.

That was too close.

As I step out into the cool night air, I'm a little bit excited to get off the clubhouse grounds and play this game with Aggie.

I may be annoyed, but there's a part of me that loves the idea of it.

Aggie thinks she's got me figured out?

Well, she's about to learn that Jack 'Jolt' Sterling isn't so easily pinned down.

I swing my leg over my bike, feeling the familiar rumble as it roars to life beneath

me.

It's time to go hunting.

The streets of Vegas blur past me as I weave through traffic, the neon lights painting streaks across my vision.

My mind races faster than my bike, thoughts of Aggie mingling with the thrill of the ride.

Before I know it, I'm pulling up to a house near the university.

The second I arrive, I know I'm in the right spot.

The front lawn is a minefield of red solo cups, and the bass from inside is so loud I can feel it in my teeth.

Typical frat party bullshit.

I kill the engine and sit for a moment, taking in the scene.

A group of giggling sorority girls totter past, giving me curious glances.

I can't help but smirk.

If they only knew what they were getting into, eyeing up a Reaper's Reject like a fresh piece of meat.

"Well, fuck me," I mutter to myself, glancing down at my cut.

The leather vest with our club's patches isn't exactly subtle.

Normally, I'd have it off for a situation like this, but tonight?

There's no other option.

I swing off the bike, my boots crunching on discarded cups.

As I approach the house, I can't shake the feeling that this night could go one of two ways— smooth as whiskey or a complete clusterfuck.

I climb the porch steps.

It's time to find my little phone thief and show her what happens when you mess with me.

I'm barely on the porch when two frat boys block my path, puffing out their chests like they're hot shit.

One of them, a blonde douche with a popped collar, eyes me up and down.

He sneers, his breath reeking of cheap beer. "Where's your invite, man?"

I clench my jaw, my patience already wearing thin.

I'm not in the mood for this bullshit, not when Aggie's in there with my damn phone.

"Up your asshole," I snarl, shoving past them. "Go fish for it."

The other guy starts to protest, but I'm already through the door, leaving them sputtering in my absence.

The heavy bass hits me like a wall as I enter, the air thick with the smell of weed and

spilled booze.

I pull out Shiver's phone, bringing up the tracking app.

My eyes narrow as I see the blinking dot indicating my phone's location.

She's on the far side of the house.

I mutter, weaving through the crowd. "Gotcha, you little minx."

As I push my way through the sea of drunk college kids, I can't help but be amused.

Here I am, a grown-ass man chasing after some college girl who swiped my phone.

But there's something about Aggie that gets under my skin and makes me do crazy shit like this.

It's not just about the phone anymore, and I know it.

I spot her in the back living area, and my breath catches for a second.

She's with Sienna, the girl from earlier, both of them dancing to the pounding music.

They're sipping on what looks like cheap beer, laughing and swaying to the beat.

My eyes narrow as I notice a couple of guys inching closer to them, clearly interested.

A surge of possessiveness rushes through me, catching me off guard.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

It's not like the woman is mine.

I bee-line it for the ladies, shouldering past the wannabe casanovas.

As I get closer, I can see the flush on Aggie's cheeks, the way her body moves to the music.

It's intoxicating, and for a moment, I almost forget why I'm here.

But then I remember the phone, and the wild goose chase she's led me on.

Time to end this little game.

I wrap an arm around both Aggie and Sienna, pulling them close.

"C'mon, girls," I say, my voice a low rumble.

I can feel Aggie tense against me, but I don't give a shit.

I steer them away from the dance floor and into a quieter corner of the room.

Once we're away from prying eyes, I let them go and turn to face Aggie.

Her emerald eyes are blazing and it sets my blood on fire.

"Ghost," I growl, using the nickname I'd given her for her ability to slip away unnoticed. "Gimme my damn phone."

Aggie crosses her arms, her chin jutting out stubbornly. "I don't know what you're talking about, Jolt," she says, her Scottish accent more pronounced now that she's angry.

I take a step closer, invading her personal space. "Don't play dumb with me, girl. I know you took it. You texted Shiver, remember?"

"Prove it," she challenges, not backing down an inch.

Christ, she's infuriating.

And fucking gorgeous when she's riled up like this.

Sienna clears her throat, looking uncomfortable. "Uh, I think I should probably go," she says, glancing between us. "Seems like you two are in the middle of a lover's quarrel."

I hear Aggie scoff beside me. "We'd have to be lovers to have a quarrel," she retorts, her eyes never leaving mine. "And we're not."

Her words sting more than they should.

I grit my teeth, trying to ignore the way my chest tightens at her declaration.

Why the fuck do I care what she thinks we are?

"That so?" I ask, my voice dangerously low. "Then why'd you take my phone, Aggie? Why lead me on this little chase?"

She shrugs, but I can see the slight tremble in her hands. "Maybe I just wanted to see if you'd come after me."

Her admission hits me like a sucker punch to the gut.

I've had enough of her games.

My patience snaps like a rubber band stretched too far.

I grab her forearm, intending to drag her somewhere we can talk without an audience.
"We're done here. Let's go."

But Aggie's not having it.

She wrenches her arm free with surprising strength, her eyes flashing with defiance.

Before I can react, her palm connects with my cheek in a stinging slap that echoes through the crowded room.

For a moment, I'm too stunned to move.

Then the anger surges through me, hot and fierce.

I huff out a breath, my fists clenching at my sides. "Oh, you have no idea what you've done now."

She doesn't back down, meeting my gaze with a fiery intensity that only serves to turn me on. "Shut the fuck up," she spits. "You're not gonna do a damn thing!"

Her challenge ignites something primal inside me.

In one swift motion, I grab her waist and slam her against the nearest wall, not giving a shit who sees.

The music's too loud for anyone to hear, but they can sure as hell see.

I lean in close, my lips brushing her ear. "I'm gonna do exactly what I want to you, sweetheart," I growl, feeling her shiver against me. "And I don't give a flying fuck

who watches."

My heart's pounding so hard I can feel it in my throat.

Part of me wants to make good on my threat right here, to show her and everyone else that she's mine.

But a smaller, more rational part knows that's a bad fucking idea.

Instead, I pull back slightly, meeting her wide-eyed gaze. "You want to play games, Aggie? Fine. But remember, I always win."

Aggie arches a perfectly shaped eyebrow, her emerald eyes glinting with defiance.

A smirk plays at the corners of her lips, and the heat is radiating off her body.

"You know, Jolt, you obviously do care or else you wouldn't be here."

Her words hit me like a sucker punch to the gut.

Fuck.

She's right, and we both know it.

I try to keep my face impassive, but I can feel a muscle twitching in my jaw.

"I came back for my phone," I growl, but even to my own ears, it sounds like a weak excuse.

Aggie opens her mouth to retort, but before she can speak, a lanky frat boy materializes out of thin air beside us.

He's got that clean-cut, preppy look that screams 'mommy's credit card,' and he's eyeing me up and down.

"Hey, Aggie," he says, not taking his eyes off me. "Everything okay here?"

If I had hackles, they'd be rising right now.

Who the fuck does this kid think he is?

Aggie shifts slightly against me, and I realize I'm still pinning her to the wall.

I don't move.

"Trevor," Aggie says, her voice suddenly softer. "It's fine. We're just... talking."

Trevor.

The name registers in my brain.

My grip on her waist tightens involuntarily.

Trevor puffs out his chest like he's some kind of fucking hero. "Doesn't look like talking to me."

I'm about two seconds away from showing this punk what a real man looks like when Aggie's hand comes to rest on my chest.

The touch is light, but it's enough to make me pause.

I'm about to tell this Trevor kid to fuck off when he does something monumentally stupid.

He reaches out and puts his hand on my shoulder, squeezing firmly.

His voice is dripping with confidence and he has no idea who he's fucking with. "I think you should leave her alone, dude."

Time slows down. I see red. Before I even realize what I'm doing, my fist connects with Trevor's jaw.

There's a satisfying crunch, and he stumbles backward, crashing to the floor.

I snarl, standing over him. "Don't fuckin' talk to me like that."

The party around us goes silent.

I can feel dozens of eyes on us, but I don't give a shit.

All I care about is the way Aggie's looking at me, her emerald eyes wide with a mix of shock and... something else.

"Jesus Christ, Jolt!"

I don't respond.

Instead, I grab her wrist and start dragging her toward the exit.

She struggles at first, but I'm not letting go.

"We're leaving," I growl, not bothering to look back at her.

We burst out of the frat house onto the front lawn.

The cool night air hits us, a complete opposite to the stuffy heat inside.

I march toward my bike, Aggie stumbling behind me.

She snaps, trying to wrench her arm free. "Let go of me, you absolute bampot !"

I spin around, facing her. "Get on the bike, Aggie. Now."

For a moment, I think she's going to argue.

Her eyes are blazing, that fiery Scottish temper of hers threatening to explode.

But then she looks back at the house, where curious faces are peering out the windows, and her shoulders slump.

"Fine," she mutters, climbing onto the back of my Harley.

I swing my leg over, feeling her reluctantly wrap her arms around my waist.

The engine roars to life, drowning out the muffled sounds of the party.

Without a word, I peel out of the driveway, leaving a cloud of dust and the chaos of the frat house behind us.

As we speed through the dark streets of Las Vegas, I can feel Aggie's warmth pressed against my back.

Despite everything, despite how pissed off I am, I can't deny the electric current that runs through me at her touch.

We weave through traffic, the neon lights of the Strip blurring around us.

I know where I'm taking her—back to her sorority house.

I holler back at her and ask where it is, and I didn't realize how close to the frat house it was.

Then again, I should've known better.

Hell, I have to fucking backtrack to get her there.

We pull up to the sorority house, the engine's rumble fading as I cut it off.

Aggie slides off the bike, her movements stiff and angry.

I follow her up the steps, my blood still boiling from the scene at the party.

As soon as we're inside her room, she locks the door and grabs her phone.

Her fingers fly across the screen, and I watch as she types out a message.

"Texting your buddy Sienna?" I ask, my voice low and dangerous.

Aggie nods, not looking at me. "Telling her I'm okay and sorry for ditching her."

I let her finish, my patience wearing thin.

The second she hits send, I snatch the phone from her hands and toss it onto the bed.

"Hey!" she protests, but I'm already moving.

I shove her against the window, my hands rough as I yank up her crop top. "You wanna act like a little tease, Aggie?" I growl, yanking down her pants. "Fine. Let's

give the whole fuckin' campus a show."

Her breath hitches as I press my hard cock against her. "Jolt, what are you?—"

I silence her with a bruising kiss, my hands gripping her hips. "I'm gonna fuck you right here, against this window," I growl against her ear. "And I don't give a shit who sees."

Part of me is screaming that this is a bad idea, that anyone could walk by and see us.

But the larger part, the part driven by lust and anger and possessiveness, doesn't care.

I want her, and I want everyone to know she's mine.

As I thrust into her, Aggie lets out a moan that's utter and complete pleasure.

Her nails dig into my forearms, and I know we're both thinking the same thing: this doesn't solve anything between us, but damn if it doesn't feel good.

I fuck her like a savage, her exposed tits pressed against the window.

The light is on behind us, giving anyone who's watching an illuminated view on how I'm plowing her tight cunt.

Aggie wants to be defiant, well, that's fine.

She can be defiant all she wants, a minx for all I care, and drive me up a wall.

But I get to do this.

I get to ravage her body, bury myself deep inside her, feel her wetness around me.

My hand slips down her sleek stomach, soaking up the heat of her skin, to where we're joined.

My fingers find her clit and I apply pressure.

Her whole body arches against me, a gasp tearing from her lips.

I continue to thrust, my pace steady and relentless.

The windowpane shudders with each impact, and I see her breasts shaking with the motion.

Each time I pull out, she whimpers in protest, the sound swallowed by our hungry kisses.

"Fuck," she curses through gritted teeth as she tightens around me, "Jolt..."

I nip at her shoulder, sucking the nape of her neck into my mouth.

She squirms beneath me, a delicious friction against my shaft.

Suddenly, her body spasms and convulses around mine, her nails raking down my arms as she comes hard.

The sight of Aggie writhing in ecstasy against me is too much for any mortal man to bear.

Pressure builds within me until it's unbearable.

My strokes become reckless in pace and aim, driving into her with a primal urge only she can sate.

She matches each thrust with one of her own, grinding against me in an erotic dance that pushes us both higher and higher.

Sweat drips from our bodies onto the floor below while her clothes lay discarded on the other side of the room—proof of how badly I needed to devour her.

Aggie's cries echo around us as I pound into her again and again.

Her face twists with pleasure while I watch her writhe against the glass like some erotic show for anyone who dares to walk past.

Suddenly, everything tightens—a knot at the base of my spine coiling tighter and tighter until it snaps.

A rush of heat floods me as I explode inside of her.

For a split second, all goes quiet except for our heavy breathing echoing off the walls.

I press a kiss into the hollow of her throat, tasting the salty tang of sweat.

Slowly, I withdraw from her, watching her eyes flutter open to meet mine.

"You're something else," I murmur against her ear as she tries to regain her breath, each word punctuated with nips along the shell of her ear.

She's clutching at my arms, her beautiful face flushed and sweaty.

Her muscles twitch involuntarily from our intense coupling.

Her emerald eyes meet mine in a look that's both defiant and satisfied—a silent challenge for more.

Panting, we slide down to rest on the floor.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Aggie

The rhythmic tapping of my fingers on the keyboard fills the air as I squint at the lines of code scrolling across my laptop screen.

The lecture hall buzzes with the low hum of students typing away, punctuated by the occasional cough or rustle of paper.

I inhale deeply, the scent of coffee and musty textbooks filling my nostrils—the obvious scent of higher education.

Ha, my humor isn't like it normally is today.

"And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how we implement a basic firewall using Triad," Professor Martinez announces, his voice cutting through my concentration. "Any questions before we wrap up?"

I glance up from my notes, eyes scanning the room.

A few hands shoot up, but I keep mine firmly on my laptop.

The material isn't particularly challenging—not after the hours I've spent poring over advanced cybersecurity forums late into the night.

As the professor fields questions, I can't help but feel a surge of pride.

A few weeks into my first semester at the University of Nevada, and I'm finally finding my groove.

The initial overwhelm of juggling classes, assignments, and my newfound freedom has settled into a comfortable routine.

My mind drifts to the upcoming weekend, and a small smile tugs at my lips.

Shiver and Siren are having their bachelor and bachelorette party, and I'm itching to blow off some steam.

It's such a change from the stuffy academic atmosphere surrounding me now, but that's precisely why I can't wait until Friday night.

"All right, that's all for today." Professor Martinez's voice snaps me back to the present. "Don't forget, your network security projects are due next week. I expect great things from all of you."

The lecture hall erupts into a symphony of zipping backpacks and scraping chairs.

I shut my laptop with a satisfying click and stuff it into my bag, my movements automatic as my thoughts wander.

"Hey, Aggie!" a chipper voice calls out as I make my way down the stairs.

I turn to see Sarah, a petite brunette from my Data Structures class, waving enthusiastically. "A bunch of us are heading to the library to study. Want to join?"

I hesitate for a moment. Part of me wants to accept—to dive headfirst into the typical college experience.

But I can't.

Not today at least.

"Thanks, but I've got plans," I reply, injecting warmth into my voice to soften the rejection. "Maybe next time?"

Sarah's smile doesn't falter. "Sure thing! Catch you later!"

As I push through the heavy doors and step out into the Nevada sunshine, I can't help but chuckle.

If only Sarah knew that my "plans" involved tinkering with a custom-built server in my bedroom while blasting Metallica at an ungodly volume through my headphones.

But first, I'm going to have some lunch in the cafe.

The campus is alive with activity, students sprawled out on the picturesque lawns, soaking up the last bit of warmth before cooler winter temperatures set in.

The ring of my phone cuts through my inner thoughts.

I fish it out of my pocket, my heart skipping a beat when I see the caller ID.

Dear old Da, but known to everyone else as Grim.

"Hey, Da," I answer, my accent thicker than normal.

It always comes out stronger when I'm talking to family.

I guess that's because I'm more comfortable.

"Aggie." His gruff voice fills my ear. "How's my girl doing?"

I can't help the smile that spreads across my face as I continue my walk to the cafe. "I'm doing all right, Da. Just finished up my last class for the day."

"That's good to hear," he says, and I can picture him nodding, probably sitting in his favorite leather armchair at home. "How're things going overall? You settlin' in okay?"

I pause at a crosswalk, waiting for the light to change. "Yeah, things are going pretty good, actually. I think I'm finally getting the hang of this whole college thing. It's a lot, but I'm managing."

The light changes, and I step off the curb, my boots scuffing against the asphalt. "That's my girl." The pride evident in his voice. "Always knew you had it in you."

I feel a warmth spread through my chest at his words. "Thanks, Da. Oh, and I've been hanging around the local clubhouse more, too. It's... nice. Familiar, you know?"

There's a pause on the other end of the line, and for a moment, I worry I've said something wrong.

But then he lets out a relieved sigh. "That's good to hear, lass. Real good. I'd much rather you be there than mixed up with some of those frat boys."

I bite back a laugh, thinking about how some of the guys at the clubhouse are probably way more trouble than any frat boy.

But Da doesn't need to know that. "Don't worry, Da. I'm being careful."

"I know you are, Aggie. You've always had a good head on your shoulders," he says,

his voice softening. "Just... don't forget where you come from, okay?"

I swallow hard, memories of my childhood in Scotland flashing through my mind. "I won't, Da. Promise."

There's a moment of silence between us before he clears his throat. "All right then, I'll let you go. You take care of yourself, you hear?"

My voice is barely above a whisper. "I will, Da. Love you."

"Love you too, sweetheart. Talk to you soon."

The line goes dead, and I'm left standing in front of the cafe, my phone still pressed to my ear.

I take a deep breath, pushing down the homesickness that threatens to overwhelm me.

This is my life now, and I'm making the most of it.

But it's nice to know that no matter how far I go, I've still got family looking out for me.

As I slip my phone into my pocket, my thoughts drift to Jolt.

His deep green eyes and mischievous grin flash through my mind, sending a shiver down my spine.

If only Da knew the kind of trouble I'm really getting into.

I can almost hear Jolt's husky laughter, feel the ghost of his calloused hands on my skin.

I shake my head, trying to clear it.

"Get it together, Aggie," I mutter to myself as I push open the cafe door.

The scent of garlic and tomato sauce hits me, making my stomach growl.

"What can I get for you?" the cashier asks, snapping me out of my Jolt-induced haze.

"Uh, the chicken parm, please," I reply, fumbling for my wallet.

As I wait for my food, I can't help but wonder what Jolt's doing right now.

Is he at the clubhouse?

Working on his bike?

My mind wanders to less innocent activities, and I feel my cheeks flush.

"Order up!"

I grab my tray, loaded with steaming pasta and garlic bread, and scan the cafe for an empty table.

As I weave through the crowded room, I can't shake the feeling that Da's words of caution are more prophetic than he realized.

But as I think about Jolt's infectious laugh and the way he makes me feel alive, I can't bring myself to care.

I slide into an empty booth, my food forgotten as I lose myself in thoughts of tattooed arms and the rumble of a Harley.

I'm about to take my first bite when a shadow falls across the table.

I look up, fork halfway to my mouth, and nearly drop it when I see Trevor standing there.

What in the hell, dude?

Trevor grumbles, stabbing at his salad. "...and then Professor Hawkins had the audacity to assign a twenty-page paper due next week."

I laugh, shaking my head. "Sounds brutal. So glad I dodged that bullet."

There's a calmness in the conversation, and I can see Trevor's eyes dart to the side before he clears his throat. "So, uh, speaking of dodging bullets... that guy you were with last weekend. Is he your boyfriend?"

My fork freezes halfway to my mouth.

Jolt's face flashes through my mind—that cocky grin, those piercing green eyes that seem to see right through me.

I feel a flush creeping up my neck.

"No," I say, perhaps a bit too quickly. "Jolt and I aren't dating."

Something flickers across Trevor's face—relief?

Satisfaction?

He smiles, but there's an edge to it that makes me uneasy.

"Good," he says, leaning forward slightly. "A woman like you doesn't need to be run ragged by a disgusting pig like him."

The words hit me like a slap.

My stomach churns, anger rising in my throat.

How dare he?

The Jolt I know—charming, funny, protective—is so far from the picture Trevor's painting.

I struggle to keep my voice even. "What do you mean by that?"

Trevor's eyes narrow, his tone dripping with disdain. "Those lowlife bikers, I mean, it's fucking disgusting how they are."

My fingers tighten around my fork, knuckles turning white.

The urge to defend Jolt, to defend my family, is overwhelming.

I spear a piece of pasta with my fork, buying time to compose myself.

The savory aroma of garlic and herbs wafts up, but my appetite has vanished.

I chew slowly, swallowing past the lump in my throat.

"Really, how so?" I ask, my voice steadier than I feel.

Trevor's face darkens, and he launches into a tirade. "They're nothing but criminals, Aggie. Drug dealers, thieves, murderers. They prey on innocent people, terrorize

communities. Those thugs think they're above the law, but they're just scum."

Each word feels like a dagger, twisting in my gut.

Images of my father—strong, loving, protective—flash through my mind.

I think of Jolt's easy laugh, the warmth in his eyes when he looks at me.

The disconnect between Trevor's words and my reality is staggering.

I can't listen to this anymore. "Did you know," I interrupt, my voice low and dangerous, "my family consists of 'lowlife bikers' like Jolt? Every single one of them."

Trevor's jaw drops, his eyes widening in shock.

He reels back as if I've physically hit him. "I... I wasn't trying to be offensive," he stammers.

I lock eyes with him, fury simmering just beneath the surface. "But you were," I spit out. "You were super fucking offensive, and I'm leaving now."

My chair scrapes loudly against the floor as I stand, hands shaking from how furious I am.

I grab my bag, not even bothering to clean up my half-eaten meal.

As I turn to leave, Trevor's hand shoots out, grabbing my wrist.

The sudden contact makes me flinch, memories of a different, more violent touch flashing through my mind.

I jerk away instinctively, my heart racing.

"Wait, Aggie!" Trevor pleads, his voice taking on a desperate edge. "Let me make it up to you. How about we go to a party next weekend? The frat's throwing a rager, and I promise it'll be a blast."

I stare at him incredulously, my mouth hanging open slightly.

Is he serious?

After everything he just said, he thinks I want to party with him?

"I don't know, Trevor. I'm really not—" I begin, trying to find a polite way to tell him to fuck off.

He cuts me off before I can finish, his words tumbling out in a rush. "Come on, I made a mistake. Please don't hold it against me."

I can feel my jaw clenching, the muscles in my neck tightening.

The audacity of this guy is unbelievable.

My mind races, torn between telling him exactly where he can shove his invitation and the ingrained politeness my mom always stressed.

"Trevor, ye just insulted my entire family. My da, my uncles, people I love. And now you want me to party with ye?"

His face crumples at my words, the arrogant veneer slipping to reveal a glimpse of what I think could be genuine regret.

"I...I didn't mean..." he stammers, struggling to find the right words.

His usual confident demeanor is replaced by an awkward hesitancy that is almost pitiful.

"I let my temper get the best of me, Aggie," he mutters, his gaze dropping to his battered knuckles as if they hold the answers to his predicament. "I said things I shouldn't have... things I don't really believe. It was stupid and... and I'm sorry."

For a second, I'm taken aback.

The sincerity in his voice is unexpected, startling even.

But it's not enough.

Not nearly enough.

"Oh, so now you're sorry?" I retort, folding my arms over my chest defensively. My heart is still pounding, adrenaline fueling my anger. "Is that supposed to make it all better?"

He looks up at me then, his eyes pleading as he reaches out tentatively. "I know I messed up," he admits quietly. "And I can't take back what I said. But I can try to make it right. Give me a chance, Aggie."

The look in his eyes makes me think.

Is he sincere?

The blatant disrespect for my family and the life we've chosen is a bit much, though.

"Trevor," I say finally, stepping back out of his reach.

My voice is colder than I intended it to be but holds steady nonetheless. "I appreciate your apology and... and maybe on some level, I believe you regret your words. But ye don't just insult someone's family and then think an 'I'm sorry' will make everything all better."

Trevor's face falls further at my words but I can sense he's not giving up so easily. "Then help me make it right, Aggie," he implores, stepping forward again as if the physical distance between us is what's keeping me from forgiving him.

It's not, but I appreciate the effort.

It's more than most would do.

"I'll do whatever it takes," he adds, his voice barely a whisper as he desperately tries to convince me of his sincerity. "Please... come to the party with me."

I take a deep breath, trying to calm the storm of emotions swirling inside me.

Trevor's face is a mix of hope and desperation, his bruised features making him look even more pitiful.

Against my better judgment, I feel a twinge of sympathy.

"Fine," I say, the word tasting bitter on my tongue. "I'll go to the party."

Trevor's face lights up, and I immediately regret my decision.

I can't shake how curious I am though.

Maybe this is a chance to understand the other side of campus life, to see what I'm missing—or not missing.

"But," I add quickly, holding up a finger, "this doesn't mean we're friends. And if I hear one more word against my family or the club, I'm out. Got it?"

He nods eagerly, relief evident in his eyes. "Absolutely, Aggie. You won't regret this, I promise."

I highly doubt that, I think to myself, but force a tight smile. "Right. Well, I should get going. Classes and all that."

He doesn't know I'm lying, but I'm not heading to a fucking class.

I'm heading back to my sorority house, where I can get a damn break.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jolt

Shiver looks me dead in the eye. "You can't convince me nothin' is goin' on with you and Aggie."

Today, of all days, I can't bullshit him.

We're here at a strip club for his bachelor party, which Siren gave the all clear for by the way.

I sigh, running a hand through my hair. "Not gonna talk about that right now, brother."

Shiver's face splits into a wide grin. "You sly bastard, you like her!"

I roll my eyes. "Drop it, man."

Shiver cackles and calls to a passing dancer, "Sweetheart, how about a dance for my friend here? It's his first time."

What a load of shit.

I've been to plenty of strip clubs.

I shoot him a glare, but he just winks, leaning back in his seat.

The dancer, a tall brunette with legs for days, saunters over, her hips swaying to the beat.

"First time, huh?" she purrs, running a manicured hand down my arm. "Don't worry, honey. I'll be gentle."

As she starts to move, I can't help but laugh.

This isn't how I expected the night to go, but then again, nothing in my life has gone according to plan lately.

Hell, maybe that's not such a bad thing.

The dancer's routine is impressive, all fluid movements and teasing glances.

But as I watch her, my mind keeps drifting back to Aggie.

To her fiery spirit, her sharp wit, the way her eyes light up when she laughs.

I shake my head, trying to focus on the present.

This is Shiver's night, and I'm gonna make sure he enjoys it.

As the song ends, I slip the dancer a generous tip, mumbling my thanks.

Shiver's watching me with a knowing smirk, and I resist the urge to flip him off.

"Enjoyed the show?" he asks, his tone innocent but his eyes gleaming with mischief.

I shrug, trying for nonchalance. "She's good at her job."

Shiver laughs, shaking his head. "Brother, I've seen corpses with more enthusiasm. Your mind's somewhere else entirely."

I don't bother denying it. "Just thinking about the club, man. We've got a lot on our plate right now."

It's not entirely a lie.

The tension with the Kodiak MC has everyone on edge, and as a prospect, I'm feeling the pressure to prove myself more than ever.

Shiver's expression turns serious. "I hear you. But tonight's about celebrating, not worrying. Whatever's on the horizon, we're gonna handle it. That's what the club is all about."

His words warm me more than the whiskey ever could.

"You're right," I agree, raising my beer in a toast. "To the club, and to your impending doom—I mean, marriage."

Shiver clinks his bottle against mine, grinning. "Careful there, brother. My ol' lady might decide you need a lesson in respect."

I laugh, the tension easing from my shoulders. "Bring it on. Siren doesn't scare me."

The words are barely out of my mouth when I catch sight of a familiar figure across the room.

My heart skips a beat, and I blink, sure I must be seeing things.

But when I look again, she's still there.

Aggie.

She hasn't noticed us yet, her attention focused on the friend she's with.

But even from here, I can see the slight furrow in her brow, the tension in her shoulders.

She looks uncomfortable, out of place in the glitzy, neon-lit club.

"Shit," I mutter, my grip tightening on my beer bottle.

Shiver follows my gaze, his eyebrows shooting up. "Well, well. Look what the cat dragged in." He chuckles. "Didn't expect to see your little Scottish firecracker here tonight."

I can't tear my eyes away from Aggie.

She's wearing a tight black dress that hugs every curve, her bleached blonde hair falling in waves around her shoulders.

She looks stunning, and completely out of place among the dancers.

My mouth suddenly goes dry. "Neither did I."

Before I can decide whether to approach her or not, a curvaceous woman with jet black hair saunters up to our table.

She's wearing nothing but a sparkly thong and pasties, a seductive smile playing on her lips.

"How about a dance, handsome?" she purrs, her eyes locked on mine.

I hesitate, glancing back at Aggie.

She still hasn't seen me, engrossed in conversation with her friend.

What the hell, I think.

It's not like we're together or anything.

And, we're at a fucking strip club.

"Sure," I say, forcing a grin. "Why not?"

The dancer leads me to a secluded booth, pushing me down onto the plush seat.

As she starts to move to the pulsing beat, gyrating her hips inches from my face, I catch a flash of movement from the corner of my eye.

Aggie.

Her emerald eyes lock with mine, widening in shock.

For a moment, she freezes, her friend tugging on her arm in confusion.

Then her jaw sets, a steely glint entering her gaze.

I watch, transfixed, as she marches over to the bar, orders a drink, and takes a long sip.

Her eyes never leave mine, even as the dancer in front of me continues her routine.

"You okay, honey?" the dancer asks, noticing my distraction.

I nod, not trusting myself to speak.

Because in Aggie's eyes, I can see it clear as day—the green-eyed monster of jealousy.

She hates seeing another woman this close to me, and a primal part of me revels in it.

The dancer finishes her routine with a sultry wink, and I fumble for my wallet, pulling out a generous tip.

As she sashays away, I catch Aggie's gaze again.

Her lips are pursed, a storm brewing behind those emerald eyes.

She stalks over, dropping into the seat next to me with fluid grace.

The scent of her perfume—a heady mix of jasmine and something uniquely Aggie—fills my senses.

"So," she drawls, "did ye enjoy yer wee dance, then?"

I lean back, trying to appear nonchalant despite the way my pulse is racing. "It was good."

Aggie scoffs, tossing her bleached blonde hair over her shoulder. "Good? Is that all? I bet I could give ye a better lapdance, ye ken."

My mouth goes dry at the thought.

I struggle to maintain my composure, meeting her challenging stare. "Didn't think you'd want to give me one."

She leans in close, her breath hot against my ear. "All ye had to do was ask, lad."

Then she pulls back, a wicked gleam in her eye. "Well, maybe beg me for it, and I might give it to ye."

My heart thunders in my chest.

I can't seem to stop myself from playing with fire. "Beg, huh? You know I don't beg for anything, Ghostie."

Aggie's lips curl into a smirk. "There's a first time for everything, Jolt."

I swallow hard, torn between desire and the need to maintain some semblance of control. "You're playing a dangerous game here, Aggie."

She shrugs, the movement drawing my attention to the curve of her neck. "Maybe I like danger. Ye should know that by now."

The tension between us crackles like electricity, making it hard to focus on anything else.

I force myself to turn toward the rest of the group, spotting a couple of the other guys on the other side of the club.

I catch snippets of their conversation about the upcoming run to Billings.

Aggie shifts beside me, her thigh brushing against mine, sending a jolt through my body.

"So, Jolt," Cobra calls out, his words slightly slurred. "You ready for this run or what?"

I clear my throat, trying to ignore the heat radiating from Aggie. "Yeah, man. Always ready."

Aggie leans forward, her emerald eyes sparkling with mischief. "Ye sure about that? Seems like ye might be a wee bit... distracted."

I shoot her a warning glance, but she just smirks, clearly enjoying the effect she's having on me.

The conversation continues around us, but I'm barely listening.

All I can focus on is Aggie—the way she laughs, her sexy as sin accent, the way her fingers trace patterns on her glass.

Suddenly, she stands up.

"I need some air," she announces, then saunters off toward the back of the club.

Without thinking, I follow her.

My body's on autopilot, drawn to her like a magnet.

I catch up to her in the hallway leading to the bathrooms, grabbing her arm and pulling her into the men's room.

She hisses, but there's a glint in her eye that tells me she's not really angry. "What the hell do ye think yer doing?"

I don't answer.

Instead, I push her against the wall, my lips crashing onto hers.

She responds immediately, her fingers tangling in my hair as she kisses me back with equal fervor.

Breaking the kiss, I growl, "On your knees, Ghost."

For a moment, I think she might refuse.

But then she slowly sinks down, those green eyes never leaving mine.

My cock is already rock hard as I unzip my jeans.

Aggie takes me in her mouth without hesitation, and I have to bite back a groan.

Her tongue swirls around the head before she takes me deeper, and I swear I see stars.

"Fuck, Aggie," I pant, my fingers threading through her hair. "That's it, baby."

She hums around me, the vibration sending shockwaves of pleasure through my body.

I tighten my grip on her hair, guiding her movements as I start to thrust.

The sight of her on her knees, taking me so deep, is almost too much.

I pull her off, hauling her to her feet and lifting her onto the sink.

"Jolt," she gasps as I push her skirt up around her waist. "We shouldn't?—"

I silence her with another searing kiss, positioning myself at her entrance.

"Tell me to stop," I challenge her.

She doesn't.

Instead, she wraps her legs around my waist, pulling me closer.

I slide into her in one swift movement, both of us groaning at the sensation.

I set a punishing pace, driven by days of pent-up desire and frustration.

Aggie matches me thrust for thrust, her nails digging into my shoulders.

"Ye feel so good," she moans, her accent thicker than ever. "Don't stop, please don't stop."

I have no intention of stopping.

I drive into her harder, faster, chasing the orgasms I know will come.

When I feel her start to tighten around me, I slip a hand between us, rubbing her clit in tight circles.

Aggie comes with a cry, her body shuddering against mine.

The feeling of her pulsing around me pushes me over the edge, and I follow her into bliss, spilling deep inside her.

As we both come down from our high, I lean in close, my lips brushing her ear. "You're mine whether you want to be or not, Ghost."

I pull out of her, my heart pounding like a jackhammer against my ribs.

The bathroom suddenly feels too small, too hot.

I tuck myself back into my jeans, hands shaking slightly as I zip up.

Aggie's still perched on the sink, her chest heaving, hair a mess from where I gripped it.

For a split second, I'm tempted to kiss her again, to claim her mouth the way I just claimed her body.

Instead, I turn and walk out, leaving her there without another word.

The club's noise hits me like a physical force as I emerge from the bathroom.

The thumping bass matches the frantic rhythm of my pulse.

I make my way back to my seat, threading through the crowd of half-naked bodies and drunken bikers.

I drop into my chair, running a hand through my hair.

Fuck.

What did I just do?

A waitress appears at my elbow, notepad in hand. "Can I get you another drink?" she asks, having to raise her voice over the music.

I nod, not trusting my voice just yet. Then I clear my throat. "Two doubles. Jameson," I manage to say.

She tilts her head, confusion evident on her face. "Two?"

"Yeah," I confirm, my eyes drifting towards the bathrooms. "One for me, and one for my lady."

The waitress follows my gaze, then looks back at me with a knowing smirk. "Coming right up," she says, disappearing into the crowd.

I lean back in my chair, my mind racing.

What happens now?

Will Aggie come back out?

Will she run off?

And why the hell did I just refer to her as 'my lady'?

The waitress returns, setting two glasses down on the table.

Her eyes flick between me and the bathrooms, a mix of curiosity and amusement on her face.

I reach into my pocket, pulling out a crisp fifty-dollar bill, and hand it to her.

"Keep the change," I say, my voice gruff.

Her eyes widen slightly, clearly not expecting such a generous tip.

"Thanks," she says, tucking the bill into her apron before disappearing back into the crowd.

I drum my fingers on the table, my eyes locked on the bathroom door.

The minutes stretch on, feeling like hours. Just as I'm about to go check on her, the door swings open.

Aggie emerges, her eyes immediately finding mine across the room.

Her cheeks are flushed, her hair slightly mussed.

She looks thoroughly fucked and utterly beautiful.

My cock twitches at the sight, already wanting her again.

She makes her way over, her stride confident despite what just happened between us.

As she slides into the seat next to me, I can smell my scent on her, mixed with her own intoxicating fragrance.

It takes every ounce of self-control not to pull her onto my lap and claim her mouth right here in front of everyone.

I pick up one of the glasses and hand it to Aggie.

Her eyes widen slightly as she recognizes the amber liquid.

"Ye remembered," she says softly.

I take a sip of my own drink, savoring the burn. "I don't forget things about the people who are important to me," I reply, my eyes locked on hers.

Aggie's emerald eyes sparkle with mischief as she leans in closer, her breath tickling my ear.

"Look at you, you charmer," she purrs, sending a shiver down my spine.

I can't help but snicker, the sound rumbling deep in my chest.

"Just stating facts, Ghost," I shoot back, using the nickname that's become second nature.

My fingers brush against hers as we both reach for our drinks, and the electricity between us is palpable.

"Oh, aye? And what other facts do you have stored away about me, Jolt?" Aggie challenges, arching an eyebrow.

Her tongue darts out to catch a stray drop of whiskey on her lower lip, and I'm mesmerized.

"Wouldn't you like to know," I tease, leaning back in my chair with a smirk.

My eyes never leave hers as I take another sip of my drink. "I might be persuaded to share... for the right price."

Aggie lets out a melodious laugh, tossing her bleached blonde hair over her shoulder. "And what price might that be, you cheeky bastard?"

I pretend to consider for a moment, tapping my chin thoughtfully. "How about one of those world-class lap dances you were bragging about earlier?"

Her eyes narrow playfully, but I can see the heat building behind them. "In your dreams, mister," she retorts, but there's no real bite to her words.

"Every night, Ghost," I murmur, my voice dropping low enough that only she can

hear. "Every damn night."

Our playful banter continues for a while, but as the night wears on, I notice Aggie's mood shifting.

Her laughs become more forced, her smiles tighter.

I'm not sure what's triggered it, but I can feel the tension building.

It finally snaps when one of the dancers saunters over, clearly eyeing me. "Want another dance, handsome?" she purrs, running a manicured hand down my arm.

Before I can respond, Aggie's on her feet, eyes flashing. "He's good, love. Why don't you find someone else to entertain?"

The dancer backs off, hands raised in surrender, but the damage is done.

Aggie's jaw is clenched, her earlier playfulness completely evaporated.

"What the hell was that about?" I demand, rising to face her.

"Nothing," she spits. "I need a bloody breather."

She storms toward the exit, and I follow, my own temper rising.

Once outside, the cool night air hits us both, but does little to calm the storm brewing between us.

"Go home, Aggie," I growl, frustration evident in my voice. "Go back to your little college house and cool off."

Her eyes narrow dangerously, but I step closer, unable to resist the magnetic pull between us.

My fingertips graze her cheek, a contrast to the harshness of my words. "Calm down, Ghost. You're mine, and I got you."

For a moment, I think she might melt into my touch.

But then her emerald eyes harden, and she looks me dead in the eye. "If I'm your lass, I'm part of the discussion. I'm not a bloody dog you can just take ownership of, you twat."

With that, she turns on her heel and struts off into the night, leaving me standing there, frustrated and turned on.

Christ, this woman is a force of nature.

Her fiery spirit, that sharp tongue—it drives me wild.

I watch her retreating form, admiring the sway of her hips and the way she holds her head high, even in anger.

A low chuckle escapes me as I shake my head.

Aggie thinks she's walking away, but all she's doing is proving how perfect she is for me.

That attitude of hers?

It's a damn turn on, and she doesn't even realize it.

I light up a cigarette, inhaling deeply as I contemplate my next move.

One thing's for certain—this isn't over.

Not by a long shot.

Aggie can run all she wants, but sooner or later, she'll have to face the truth.

We're inevitable, her and I.

And I'm more than ready for the challenge of proving it to her.

CHAPTER NINE

Aggie

I trace my fingers over the smooth granite countertop, cool to the touch despite the desert heat.

My emerald eyes stare back at me from the mirror, another way my maternal grandmother's genes come straight through.

I've done my best to distance myself from those memories of my childhood, but not because of my grandmother.

Because of my birth father, or sperm donor—bleaching my fiery red hair to a pale blonde, burying my accent under years of American influence, even if it doesn't always work out.

But some scars run too deep to ever truly fade.

"Get it together, Aggie," I mutter to myself. "It's just a party. You've faced worse than this."

Worse like the memory of my father's fists raining down on my mother's bruised and bloodied face.

The sound of her desperate cries echoing through our tiny house back in Scotland.

The helplessness of being a wee lass, unable to do anything but watch in horror as the man who was supposed to protect us became a monster before my eyes.

That was the first time I understood the ones who were meant to protect you could ruin you.

I shake my head sharply, banishing those thoughts to the darkest corners of my mind where they belong.

That was a lifetime ago.

I'm not that scared little girl anymore.

I finish applying a coat of deep red lipstick—my armor for the night ahead.

My phone buzzes with a text from Trevor:

Can't wait to see you tonight, babe! ;)

Babe?

I'm not his fucking babe.

I roll my eyes so hard I'm surprised they don't get stuck that way.

Trevor's about as exciting as lukewarm porridge, but he's harmless enough.

And going to this stupid frat party with him beats sitting alone in my room, drowning in memories I'd rather forget.

"You've got this," I tell my reflection firmly. "Just a few hours of small talk and

cheap beer, then you can come home and binge-watch trashy reality TV until your brain melts."

Grabbing my leather jacket and slipping on a pair of well-worn combat boots, I head for the door.

The sorority house is oddly quiet for a Friday night—most of the girls must already be out painting the town red.

Lucky them.

As I make my way down the stairs, my roommate Sienna pokes her head out of the common room. "Hey, girl, heading out?"

I pause, torn between wanting to spill my guts to my best friend and maintaining the tough-as-nails facade I've so carefully cultivated.

"Yeah, that party at Trevor's frat house. Should be a real rager," I deadpan, unable to keep the sarcasm from creeping into my voice.

Sienna's brow furrows with concern. "You okay, Ags? You seem a little... off."

For a split second, I consider telling her everything.

About the memories haunting me, the weight of the past pressing down on my shoulders.

But I can't bear the thought of her pity, of being seen as weak or broken.

So I force a smile that doesn't quite reach my eyes. "I'm fine, just not looking forward to making small talk with Trevor's meathead buddies all night. Save me some ice

cream for when I get back?"

Sienna doesn't look entirely convinced, but she nods. "You got it. Text me if you need an emergency extraction, okay?"

"Will do. Don't wait up!" I call over my shoulder as I head out into the warm Vegas night.

The walk to Trevor's frat house isn't long, but with each step, I feel my walls breaking down.

What the hell am I doing?

I don't even like Trevor, let alone want to spend an entire evening surrounded by his drunken bros.

But I made a commitment, and if there's one thing Grim—my step-father and the only real dad I've ever known—taught me, it's the importance of keeping your word.

Even when it sucks.

As I approach the frat house, the thump of bass-heavy music grows louder.

Red solo cups litter the front lawn just like the last time, and the porch is crowded with people laughing and shouting over the din.

It's your typical college party scene, but it feels a world away from the life I left behind in Billings.

I spot Trevor on the porch, surrounded by a group of his frat brothers.

He's nursing a beer and laughing at something one of them said.

When he catches sight of me, his face lights up in a way that makes my stomach churn with guilt.

He may be as boring as watching paint dry, but he doesn't deserve to be strung along.

Trevor calls out, waving me over enthusiastically. "Aggie! You made it!"

I paste on what I hope passes for a genuine smile and make my way through the crowd. "Wild party, huh?"

He grins, clearly pleased with himself. "Only the best for my girl."

The possessive term makes my skin crawl, but I bite back the urge to snap at him.

It's not his fault I'm in a shite mood tonight.

"Can I get you a drink?" Trevor asks, already half-turning toward the keg.

I nod, figuring some liquid courage might help me get through this night. "Sure, thanks."

As Trevor heads off to fetch me a beer, one of his frat brothers—Jake, I think his name is—sidles up next to me. "So, you're the famous Aggie we've been hearing so much about."

I arch an eyebrow. "Famous, huh? Should I be worried about what exactly you've been hearing?"

Jake laughs, a little too loudly. "Only good things, I promise. Trevor won't shut up

about how smart and beautiful you are."

Great. Just what I needed—more guilt to pile on top of everything else. "That's... sweet of him," I manage, my voice strained.

Jake leans in closer, his breath reeking of cheap beer. "You know, if you ever get bored of Trevor, I'd be happy to show you a good time."

I fix him with an icy glare that would make my ma proud. "I'd rather stick my hand in a blender, thanks."

Before Jake can respond, Trevor returns with my drink. "Here you go, babe. Having fun?"

I physically want to vomit.

I'm. Not. His. Babe.

I take a long swig of lukewarm beer to avoid answering right away.

The truth is, I'd rather be anywhere else right now, and while I'll be talking to him about this 'babe' nonsense later, I won't emasculate him in front of his buddies.

I force myself to nod and lie straight through my teeth. "Yeah, it's great. Thanks for inviting me."

Trevor beams, clearly oblivious to my discomfort.

He throws an arm around my shoulders, pulling me close. "I'm so glad you're here. Want to dance?"

The thought of being pressed up against Trevor's sweaty body on the makeshift dance floor makes my skin crawl.

But before I can come up with an excuse, a commotion near the front door catches everyone's attention.

"Holy shit, is that who I think it is?" one of Trevor's frat brothers exclaims.

I crane my neck to see what all the fuss is about, and my heart nearly stops.

Because there, striding through the front door like he owns the place, is Jolt.

The man who's been haunting my dreams.

His dark eyes scan the room, and when they land on me, I swear a jab of electricity rushes through my body.

Trevor mutters, his arm tightening possessively around me. "Who invited the biker trash?"

I shrug off his embrace, my eyes never leaving Jolt.

"I need some air," I say abruptly, pushing my way through the crowd toward the back door.

The cool night air is a blessed relief after the stifling heat of the party. I lean against the railing of the back porch, trying to calm my racing heart.

What the hell is Jolt doing here?

And why does the mere sight of him make me feel more alive than I have in weeks?

"Fancy meeting you here, Ghost," a deep voice rumbles behind me.

I spin around to find Jolt leaning against the doorframe, a knowing smirk playing on his lips.

"What are you doing here?" I demand, proud of how steady my voice sounds despite the butterflies doing somersaults in my stomach.

Jolt shrugs, his leather cut creaking with the movement. "Heard there was a party. Thought I'd check it out."

I narrow my eyes, not buying his casual act for a second. "At a college frat house? Try again."

He takes a step closer, and I have to fight the urge to back away.

I take a deep breath, trying to steady myself.

The mixture of sandalwood and cedar overwhelms me, but I force myself to focus.

"I'm serious, Jolt. Why are you really here?" I ask, crossing my arms over my chest.

He studies me for a moment, his dark eyes intense. "Maybe I wanted to see you, Aggie. Ever think of that?"

His words send a thrill through me, but I squash it down. "How'd you even know I was here?"

Jolt takes another step closer, and this time I can't help but back up until I feel the railing press against my lower back. "You're not hard to find, sweetheart."

He places his hands on either side of me, effectively caging me in.

I clear my throat. "I'm here with someone, obviously."

"Yeah, all dolled up for some fuckin' frat boy who clearly doesn't deserve you," he growls softly.

I lift my chin defiantly. "That's none of your business."

I might want Jolt, but I don't want him to know how badly I crave him.

"Isn't it?" He leans in, his breath hot against my ear. "Because from where I'm standin', it looks like you're trying to convince yourself you belong in this world when we both know you don't."

I push against his chest, creating some much-needed space between us. "You don't know anything about me or what I want."

Jolt's lips curve into a dangerous smile. "I know more than you think, Ghost. I know you're running from something—or someone. I know that fire in your eyes isn't meant for playin' house with college boys. And I know that deep down, you're craving something these trust fund brats could never give you."

His words hit too close to home, and I feel my walls begin to crumble.

"Stop," I whisper, hating how weak I sound.

Jolt's expression softens slightly.

He reaches out, brushing a strand of hair behind my ear.

The gentle touch is at odds with his rough appearance, and it nearly undoes me.

"Come on, Aggie," he says, his voice low and persuasive. "Let me show you what real freedom feels like. How about we ditch this party and go on one ride, that's all I'm asking."

I close my eyes, fighting an internal battle.

Every instinct is screaming at me to say yes, to climb on the back of his bike and give in.

But the rational part of my brain—the part that remembers I made a promise—won't let me give in so easily.

"I can't," I say finally, opening my eyes to meet his gaze. "I'm sorry, Jolt, but I just can't. I said I'd be here with him, so I need to see the night through."

For a moment, disappointment flashes across his face. Then his cocky grin is back in place. "Can't blame a guy for trying," he says with a shrug. "But mark my words, sweetheart. I know his type. He's gonna fuck up and you're gonna run as far as you can away from him."

With that, he turns and strides back into the party, leaving me breathless and conflicted on the porch.

I stay outside for a few more minutes, trying to compose myself before facing Trevor and the others again.

When I finally make my way back inside, I spot one of my other sorority sisters, Leah, by the keg.

She takes one look at my face and frowns.

"Hey, you okay?" she asks, concern evident in her voice.

I force a smile. "Yeah, just needed some air for a bit. It's pretty crowded in here."

Leah nods, but I can tell she doesn't really believe what I'm saying. "Want to head back to the house? We could have a girls' night in. I think Sienna's back there, too."

The offer is tempting, but I shake my head. "Nah, I'm already here. Might as well try to have some fun, right?"

As if on cue, Trevor appears at my side, slinging an arm around my shoulders. "There you are, babe! I was starting to think you'd ditched me."

I resist the urge to shrug off his arm, reminding myself why I came here in the first place.

Leah grabs my arm, pulling me aside before Trevor can drag me any further.

Her eyes flick between me and Trevor, concern etched on her face.

"Aggie, you don't have to do this," she whispers urgently. "Just ditch him. You clearly don't want to be here."

I sigh, running a hand through my bleached blonde hair.

"I should give him a chance," I mutter, though the words feel hollow even to my own ears. "He's not a bad guy, just..."

Leah interjects, raising an eyebrow. "Boring? Judgy? An asshole?"

I can't help but chuckle. "Aye, that's one way to put it. I really don't like him all that much, if I'm being honest."

Trevor's voice cuts through the noise of the party. "Aggie! Come on, some of the guys are playing beer pong and I know we can beat 'em!"

Leah's grip tightens. "Seriously, just bail. You don't owe him anything."

For a moment, I'm tempted.

The thought of spending the evening pretending to be interested in Trevor's frat stories makes me want to run for the hills.

But then I think of my mum, of how she always taught me to be kind, even when it's hard.

This could have been a one off thing, and I'm hoping that it was.

I really am.

"I can't," I say, squeezing Leah's hand before letting go. "I promised I'd be here. I'm trying to be a decent person tonight, yeah?"

"Being decent doesn't mean torturing yourself," Leah argues.

She knows how stubborn I can be.

I force a smile, hoping it looks more convincing than it feels. "It's just one night. I'll survive."

Leah's brow furrows as she watches me fidget with the hem of my shirt.

Her eyes narrow, and I can practically see the gears turning in her head.

"Hold up," she says, leaning against the doorframe. "Are you actually trying to date this Trevor guy? Is this, like, a proper date?"

I can't help but snort, the sound a mix of amusement and frustration. "Christ, no. It's just a party, Leah."

"Then why are you?—"

"Look," I interject, my Scottish lilt becoming more pronounced as my irritation grows. "I'm not dating anyone, all right? So I'm allowed to be at this bloody party with him if I want to."

Leah's hands fly up in surrender, her eyes wide. "Whoa, I wasn't accusing you of anything, dude."

The fight drains out of me as quickly as it came.

"I'm sorry, Leah. It's just... it's been a rough day. Jolt showed up here, and I wasn't fuckin' expecting that."

"Hey, it's okay," she says softly, "We all have those days. You're just trying to get through it, right?"

I nod, grateful for her understanding.

I take a deep breath, steeling myself. "I'm gonna get back to it, I'll talk to ye later."

"Later," Leah comments as I finally give in and walk over to Trevor.

Trevor's all smiles as I finally walk up to the beer pong table, and he introduces me to some of his buddies. "Ay, this is my girl, Aggie!"

The pulsing bass from inside the house thrums through my body, but it's nothing compared to the thundering of my heart.

I can't let this go on any longer.

"Trevor," I say, my voice firm despite the tremor I feel inside. "Can you not call me 'your girl'? I don't like it."

The reaction is immediate.

His frat brothers let out a collective "Ooooooo," like we're back in grade school.

Their eyes gleam, hungry for drama that's about to break out

He throws an arm around me and immediately tenses, his fingers digging into my shoulder.

The easy-going mask slips, revealing a flash of anger in his eyes.

"What'd you say?" he growls, low enough that only I can hear.

I try to step back, but his grip tightens. "I said, don't call me that. We're not together, Trevor."

His jaw clenches, a muscle twitching.

Without warning, he grabs my arm, yanking me toward the side of the porch. "We need to talk. Privately."

Rage flares within me, hot and familiar. I plant my feet, wrenching my arm from his grasp.

"Don't you think for one second you're about to touch me like that," I snarl, my accent thick with fury.

Trevor's eyes widen, then narrow dangerously.

He leans in, his breath hot on my face. "Really? You didn't mind getting manhandled by that slimy fucker the other week."

The words hit me like a slap.

I feel the blood drain from my face, replaced by a cold fury that settles in my bones.

My hands clench into fists at my sides, nails biting into my palms.

I snap, my voice trembling with a mix of anger and something else I don't want to examine too closely. "Yeah, well, you're not him!"

The words burst out of me before I can stop them, raw and honest in a way I hadn't intended.

Trevor recoils as if I've struck him, his face a mask of shock and hurt that quickly morphs into disgust.

The party around us seems to fade away, the pounding music nothing more than a dull throb in the background.

For a moment, we're frozen.

I can feel the eyes of his frat brothers on us through the window, their earlier amusement turning to something darker, more predatory.

My skin crawls under their scrutiny, and I fight the urge to wrap my arms around myself.

I won't show weakness, not here, not now.

Trevor shakes his head slowly, his lips curling into a sneer. "I honestly expected better of you, Aggie," he says, his voice dripping with disappointment and judgment.

Something else inside me snaps.

All the pent-up emotions from earlier—the memories of my childhood, the weight of horrible childhood memories as we approach Christmas—they all come rushing to the surface.

I let out a harsh, bitter laugh that sounds foreign even to my own ears.

"I'm surprised you did, honestly," I retort, my words sharp enough to cut. "Leave me the fuck alone, and don't you ever fuckin' even look in my damn direction again."

The venom in my voice surprises even me, but I can't bring myself to regret it.

I stand here, chest heaving, emerald eyes blazing with defiance.

I spin on my heel, my heart pounding in my chest as I stride away from Trevor.

The bass from the party thrums through the air, but it feels distant now, like I'm moving through water.

My boots crunch on the gravel driveway as I make my way to the street.

Trevor's voice calls out behind me, but I don't turn back. "Aggie! Wait!"

Keep walking, Aggie. Don't give him the satisfaction.

The cool night air hits my face, and I take a deep breath, trying to calm the trembling in my hands.

As I reach the sidewalk, I hear footsteps approaching rapidly.

Trevor says, grabbing my arm. "Come on, don't be like that."

I whirl around, yanking my arm from his grip. "What part of 'leave me alone' did you not understand?" I snarl.

Trevor holds up his hands, eyes wide. "I just wanted to apologize. I shouldn't have said that about... you know."

I laugh bitterly. "Oh, you mean about me getting 'manhandled' by that 'slimy fucker'? Yeah, real classy, Trevor."

He at least has the decency to look ashamed. "I was just jealous, okay? I really like you, Aggie."

God, why did I ever agree to this?

"Look," I say, forcing my voice to steady, "I'm not interested. Not in you, not in this whole... whatever this is. Just go back to your party and find some hammered girl who gives into your antics."

Trevor's face darkens. "Is this because of that biker? You into bad boys or something?"

The accusation stings, mostly because there's a kernel of truth to it.

But I'm not about to let him know that.

"This is because of me," I say firmly. "I make my own choices, Trevor. And right now, I'm choosing to walk away."

And I leave him, walking back to the sorority house, ready to be done with this night.

As a matter of fact, I fish out my phone and shoot a text to Sienna and Leah:

Going back to the house. I'm thinking wine, popcorn, and chick flicks!

CHAPTER TEN

Jolt

The desert sun beats down on my neck as I shift in the folding chair, scanning the crowd for a familiar face.

I tug at my collar, already feeling sweat beading under my crisp white shirt.

Why the fuck did we have to wear dress shirts today?

All of us are going to end up fucking roasting out here!

My leather cut weighs heavy on my shoulders, adding to the insane amounts of sweat on my body.

The air shimmers with heat, distorting the rows of white seats stretching out before me.

A light breeze carries the scent of sage and dust, mingling with the perfume of dozens of wedding guests who have arrived, but I don't care about them.

There's only one person I'm waiting for.

My eyes dart to the aisle again, searching.

Where the hell is she?

I check my phone for what feels like the hundredth time.

No new messages from Aggie.

I'd been too chicken shit to actually ask if she was coming, but our texts over the past few days had me hopeful.

A flash of red catches my eye and my heart does a little stutter-step.

There she is, weaving between chairs with that effortless grace of hers.

Christ, she looks good.

The dress hugs every curve, showing just enough skin to make my mouth go dry.

Her wild curls are pinned up, a few wisps framing her face.

I force myself to look away before I start drooling like an idiot.

Play it cool, Sterling.

You're a goddamn man, not some horny teenager.

"You were almost late to this shindig," I drawl as she plops down next to me, fighting to keep my voice casual.

Aggie shoots me a smirk that sets my blood on fire. "Fashionably late, sweetheart. And look at me, arrived just in time."

I can't help the grin that spreads across my face.

God, I love her sass. "Just in time to see me sweat my balls off in this monkey suit? How thoughtful."

She laughs, the sound like music. "Oh aye, that's exactly why I rushed over. Couldn't miss the chance to see big bad biker Jolt all gussied up."

"Hey now, I clean up nice," I protest, puffing out my chest a bit. "Admit it, you're swooning inside."

Aggie rolls her eyes, but I catch the way her gaze lingers on my arms, tracing the edges of my tattoos peeking out from under my sleeves. "Keep dreaming, lad. I've seen better."

I clutch dramatically at my chest, earning another laugh. "Ouch, Ghost. You wound me."

God, I love making her laugh.

The way her eyes crinkle at the corners, how her whole face lights up.

It does something to me, seeing her like this.

Relaxed.

Happy.

Makes me want to keep her laughing forever.

We go silent as the last of the guests arrive.

I can't help stealing glances at Aggie, drinking in every detail.

The way the sunlight catches the copper highlights in her hair.

How she absent-mindedly toys with the silver chain around her neck.

The slight furrow of concentration between her brows as she takes in the scene around us.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" she murmurs, gesturing to the desert landscape stretching out behind the altar. "Never thought I'd see anything quite like this."

I nod, following her gaze.

The red rocks in the distance provide a striking backdrop, the sky an endless expanse of blue above.

Somehow the stark beauty of it all seems fitting for a biker wedding.

"Yeah, it's something else," I agree. "Though I gotta say, never pictured myself at a desert wedding. Always figured if I ever tied the knot it'd be in some dingy chapel off the Strip. You know, full Elvis impersonator and all that."

Aggie snorts. "Classy. Though I suppose that's about what I'd expect from you lot."

I raise an eyebrow. "Oh yeah? And what's your dream wedding then, Ghost? Let me guess—all black everything, skulls for centerpieces?"

She elbows me in the ribs, but there's no real heat behind it. "Fuck off. For your information, I've always wanted to get married back home in Scotland. Up in the highlands, surrounded by nothing but green hills and mist. Just me and my..." She trails off, a wistful look crossing her face. "Well, doesn't matter now, does it? Not like I'll ever find a bastard willing to put up with me crazy arse long enough to marry me."

Something in her tone makes my chest ache.

I want to tell her she's wrong, that any man would be lucky to have her.

That I'd follow her to the ends of the earth if she'd let me.

But the words stick in my throat.

Instead, I force a grin. "Hey now, some men like to be kept on their toes, Ghost. I for one would kill for a little excitement."

Our eyes lock and the air between us feels as thick as it always does when our connection shines through.

Aggie's lips part slightly, like she's about to say something.

But then she blinks and the moment shatters.

"Sure you would," she scoffs, breaking eye contact. "Until the first time I put a knife to your throat for snoring too loud."

I laugh, ignoring the pang of disappointment in my gut. "Sweetheart, that's just foreplay where I come from."

She jabs me in the side again, harder this time. "You're incorrigible, you know that?"

"Part of my charm." I wink.

Aggie rolls her eyes, but I catch the hint of a smile tugging at her lips. "Keep telling yourself that, lad. It's not like you actually want to be tied down with me anyway."

The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them. "Tied down, tying you up—I'd kill for either, darlin'."

Shit.

I brace myself for another jab or worse.

But to my surprise, Aggie just laughs.

A real, genuine laugh that makes warmth bloom in my chest.

"Careful there, Jolt," she says, eyes dancing with mischief. "A girl might start to think you're serious."

I open my mouth to tell her just how serious I am, but the opening chords of the wedding march cut me off.

We both turn to watch as the groomsmen make their way down the aisle.

Shiver looks happier than I've ever seen him as he takes his place at the altar.

Doc stands beside him as best man, stoic as ever in his pressed suit.

Even Turmoil cleaned up nice, though I can see him fidgeting with his tie already.

The bridesmaids follow, a parade of flowing dresses and beaming smiles.

I recognize Stiletto and Jordyn from their visits to the clubhouse.

Mandy brings up the rear, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue.

And then there's Siren.

She's a vision in white, floating down the aisle like something out of a dream.

I hear Aggie's sharp intake of breath beside me and glance over to see her eyes shining with unshed tears.

"You good?" I murmur, resisting the urge to take her hand.

She nods, giving me a watery smile. "Aye. Just... been a while since I've seen something so beautiful."

I want to tell her she's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, but I bite my tongue.

Instead, I nudge her gently with my shoulder. "Careful there, Ghost. Your soft side is showing."

She huffs out a laugh, discreetly wiping at her eyes. "Tell anyone and I'll gut you in your sleep."

"Wouldn't dream of it." I grin.

We fall silent as the ceremony begins.

Sakura officiates, her usual gruff demeanor softened by the obvious joy radiating from the couple before her.

I find myself only half-listening to the vows, too distracted by the warmth of Aggie's arm pressed against mine.

When it's time for the kiss, the crowd erupts in cheers.

I whoop and holler with the rest of them, watching as Shiver dips Siren low.

It's a picture-perfect moment, the kind you see in movies.

As the newlyweds make their way back down the aisle, a fleet of four-wheelers and side-by-sides roar to life.

The reception awaits, set up further out in the desert.

I turn to Aggie, offering her my arm with an exaggerated flourish. "Shall we, milady?"

She rolls her eyes but takes it anyway. "I suppose someone's got to keep you out of trouble."

We make our way to one of the fourwheelers, and I hop on, holding a hand for Aggie.

She gets up, tucking the skirt of her dress below her.

The drive is short but exhilarating, wind whipping through our hair as we tear across the sand.

I can't help sneaking glances at Aggie.

She's let her hair down, wild curls streaming behind her in the wind.

The reception area comes into view, and I can't help but let out a low whistle.

Shiver and Siren have really outdone themselves.

Tables are scattered across the desert floor, draped in crisp white linens that flutter in

the breeze.

Twinkling lights are strung overhead, creating a canopy of stars that will shine even brighter once the sun sets.

At the center of it all stands a massive dance floor, surrounded by high-top tables and a bar that looks like it could serve an army.

"Holy shit," I mutter, helping Aggie down from our ride. "This is something else."

She nods, her eyes wide as she takes it all in. "Never thought I'd see the day when a biker wedding looked like it belonged in a fancy magazine."

I chuckle, guiding her towards one of the tables. "Yeah, well, Shiver's always been one for surprises. He told Siren she could have anything she wanted, and it looks like he followed through."

Aggie leans in close, her breath tickling my ear.

"Who are they?" she asks, nodding toward the group of men wearing cuts different from ours.

I take a swig of the whiskey that's magically appeared in front of me—Jameson, of course.

"That'd be the Shotgun Saints," I explain, keeping my voice low. "They're Shiver's family, from Texas. His old man's their president."

Her eyebrows shoot up. "I didn't realize Shiver had connections like that."

"Neither did most of us, until recently," I admit. "The club's working on building an

alliance with them. This wedding? It's as much about cementing that relationship as it is about Shiver and Siren."

Aggie's quiet for a moment, processing. "Clever," she finally says. "Mixing business with pleasure."

I nod, my eyes scanning the crowd.

The energy is electric.

Everyone's on their best behavior, but there's no mistaking the power play at work here.

"Speaking of mixing," I say, standing up and offering Aggie my hand. "How about a dance?"

She hesitates, eyeing my outstretched palm like it might bite her. "I don't know, Jolt. I'm not much for?—"

I cut her off, gently pulling her to her feet. "Come on, Ghost. Live a little."

As if on cue, the music shifts to something slow and sultry.

I lead Aggie to the dance floor, pulling her close as we start to sway.

She's tense at first, but gradually relaxes into my arms.

"See?" I murmur. "Not so bad, is it?"

She looks up at me, a hint of vulnerability in her eyes that I've never seen before. "Don't get used to it," she warns, but I sense the playfulness underneath it all.

As we move together, I can't help but think about how right this feels.

Aggie in my arms, the desert night closing in around us, and the way I find myself yearning for her more and more.

I know I should be focused on the club, on the alliance being forged here tonight, on the threats surrounding us.

But at this moment, all I can think about is the woman in front of me.

Aggie asks, her voice barely above a whisper, "What's going on in that head of yours?"

I consider deflecting, but decide on honesty instead. "Just thinking about how much I like having you here," I admit. "With me."

She stiffens slightly, but doesn't pull away.

"Jolt," she starts, her tone warning.

"I know, I know," I say quickly. "But, we can enjoy this, in the right here, the right now."

She can argue all she wants that she doesn't belong to me, but we both damn well know she does.

Aggie studies me for a long moment, her expression unreadable.

Finally, she nods.

As the song comes to an end, I resist the urge to pull her closer, to kiss her right here

in front of everyone.

Instead, I lead her back to our table, my hand resting lightly on the small of her back.

The night stretches on, a blur of toasts and laughter, dancing and drinks.

The desert night has cooled, but I feel nothing but warmth.

"Well, Ghost," I drawl, leaning in close enough to catch the faint scent of her perfume, "I was thinking we could keep this party going. Drink a little more, enjoy this beautiful night..."

I pause, letting my gaze roam over her face. "And spend some quality time with this gorgeous woman I can't seem to get out of my head."

Aggie's eyebrow arches, a smirk playing at the corners of her mouth. "And then what? You planning on taking me back to your place to sleep with me?"

The bluntness of her question catches me off guard, but I recover quickly.

I've always appreciated her straightforward nature, even if it sometimes feels like verbal whiplash.

"Sweetheart," I say, my voice low and sincere, "I don't need to sleep with you. I'd be more than content just sleeping beside you, with you in my arms."

I watch as surprise flickers across her face, followed by a softness I rarely see from her.

It's gone in an instant, replaced by her usual tough as nails exterior, but I caught it.

And I'm glad I did.

I want Aggie to know she's more than just a piece of ass to me.

"Careful there, Jolt," she says, her Scottish lilt more pronounced. "A girl might start to think you're going soft on her."

I chuckle, shaking my head. "Never, Ghost. I just know a good thing when I see it."

Aggie rolls her eyes, but I can see the pleased flush on her cheeks. "All right, smooth talker. Let's get out of here before you start sprouting poetry or some shite."

As we stand to leave, I catch her hand in mine, intertwining our fingers.

She doesn't pull away, and I count that as a win.

We make our way through the dwindling crowd, saying our goodbyes to Siren and Shiver.

The night air is crisp as we step away from the reception area, the sounds of the party fading behind us.

I lead Aggie toward the four wheeler we rode in on, and we hop on the beast.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Aggie

I blink owlshly, adjusting to the light streaming in from the top of the blinds as I come to the realization I'm not in my dorm bed.

My heart hammers in my chest when I realize where I am—Jolt's bed in his trailer.

The events of the night before play through my mind, and I can feel my cheeks heating up as I remember how we got here.

It wasn't supercharged sex, lust, or anything else that got us in this bed together.

It was romantic, like something you'd see in the movies.

Shifting carefully, I study his sleeping form.

He's shirtless and on his side, one arm tucked under his cheek, revealing the rich ink adorning his arms.

His chest rises and falls with even breaths, his dark hair in disarray around his face.

He's even more handsome in sleep than he is when he's awake—if that's even possible.

A grin curls its way onto my lips as a naughty idea crosses my mind.

I mean, what's the harm in waking him up in the best way possible, right?

I slide out from under the covers, trying my best not to wake him, and pad my way to the adjoining bathroom.

I take a quick trip to the loo and then wash my hands before coming back to his bedroom.

Jolt's still fast asleep, oblivious to the mischief I have planned.

Positioning myself at the end of the bed, I take a deep breath, my heart pounding.

Slowly, so I don't wake him, I slide my leg over his body and straddle him.

He stirs but doesn't wake, so this is as good a cue as any to keep up my shenanigans.

With a mischievous grin, I glance down and spot his boner creating a tent under the sheets.

I pull back the covers carefully, not wanting to wake him, and shimmy down his boxers slightly until there's no barrier between us.

I guide his hard dick to my entrance and slowly sink down, knowing all too well he won't be asleep for much longer.

Biting my lip, I rock up and down.

His eyes snap open, and he groans, his face scrunching up in pleasure.

"Fuck, Ghost," he moans, his hands going to my hips. "This is a hell of a way to wake up."

"Good," I snicker, grinding my hips against him, loving the way he fills me up. "I aim to please."

I begin bouncing up and down, picking up speed as Jolt starts to liven up.

His hands move to my breasts, squeezing my perky mounds as I ride him.

His thumbs flicked at my nipples, and I can't help but throw my head back in ecstasy.

He knew exactly which of my buttons to push, and damn, he was pushing them.

"Jolt," I moan, my body burning with glorious pleasure. "Oh, fuck, right there."

He doesn't verbally respond, but physically.

Jolt picks up the pace, meeting me thrust for thrust, our bodies slapping together like we're giving a round of applause.

My orgasm builds deep inside me, and I know it won't be long before I'm unravelling around him.

"Fuck, Jolt!" I cry, leaning down and digging my nails into his chest. "I'm close, I'm so fucking close!"

"That's it, baby," he growls, his grip on my hips tightening even more. "Come for me, Aggie. Show me what I do to you."

And with those words, I completely shatter apart, my pussy clenching around him as I come harder than I ever have with him.

My whole body trembles with the force of my climax.

Jolt's grunts and curses are music to my ears as I feel him follow me over the edge, his hips jerking beneath me as he joins me in ecstasy.

I roll off him and collapse against his side, my head resting on his chest.

He strokes my hair soothingly as we both catch our breath.

"That, Ghost," he pants, "was one hell of a wake-up call."

I smirk and slide off the bed, sauntering toward Jolt's ensuite bathroom.

The cool air against my naked skin sends a delightful shiver down my spine.

Jolt calls out, his voice still husky from sleep. "Where you goin', darlin'?"

I glance over my shoulder, catching his deep green eyes roaming appreciatively over my body.

I'm about to answer when he cuts me off.

"Wait!" he exclaims, sitting up abruptly. "I don't wanna know if you're takin' a shit."

I roll my eyes, unable to suppress a laugh.

"You're such a child, Jolt. I'm getting in the shower." I pause at the bathroom doorway, arching an eyebrow. "Care to join me?"

His face lights up with that infectious grin of his. "Darlin', you don't have to ask me twice!"

I step into the bathroom, my heart racing from what we just did.

As I hear Jolt scrambling out of bed behind me, I can't help but be surprised at how quickly this man has wormed his way under my skin.

I turn on the water and surprisingly it shoots out hot.

Back in Montana, we always have to give it a few seconds to warm up.

I waste no time sliding in, allowing the hot water to cascade over me.

Jolt steps into the shower behind me, his strong arms encircling my waist. "This is fuckin' depths of Hell hot, Ghost."

I lean back against his chest, relishing the feel of his skin against mine. "It's what I like, so, if yer showerin' with me you can tolerate it."

Jolt chuckles, before his tone shifts. "Let me take care of you," he murmurs, reaching for the shampoo bottle.

I nod, closing my eyes as his fingers begin to massage my scalp.

The gentle pressure of his touch sends tingles down my spine, and I can't help but let out a contented sigh.

Jolt asks, his voice low and intimate. "Feels good?"

"Mmm," I respond, unable to form coherent words.

As he works the shampoo through my hair, I find myself melting into his touch.

It's not just the physical sensation—there's something deeply nurturing about the way he's caring for me.

A lump forms in my throat as I realize how starved I've been for this kind of tender attention.

Jolt instructs softly, guiding me under the spray to rinse my hair. "Tilt your head back."

Once my hair is clean, he reaches for a loofah and begins to gently scrub my body.

His touch is almost worshipful, as he traces the curves of my shoulders, the line of my spine, the swell of my hips.

"You're so beautiful, Aggie," he murmurs against my ear.

I swallow hard, fighting against the surge of emotion his words evoke. "Jolt, I..."

"Shh," he soothes, pressing a kiss to my shoulder. "Just let me take care of you."

As his hands continue their gentle exploration of my body, I'm hit with a startling realization.

I'm falling for him.

Hard.

The thought terrifies me, but I can't deny the warmth blooming in my chest.

When we finally step out of the shower, I feel both refreshed and slightly overwhelmed.

Jolt wraps a fluffy towel around me before grabbing one for himself.

I stand in front of the mirror, running a brush through my tangled hair, when Jolt appears behind me.

His eyes meet mine in the reflection, and the intensity of his gaze takes my breath away.

"You're looking absolutely gorgeous."

I roll my eyes, trying to deflect. "Ye can stop with the compliments now, you know. You've already got me in yer bed."

Jolt's expression turns serious. "I'm never gonna stop telling you how beautiful you are, Aggie. You deserve to hear it every damn day."

His words hit me like a punch to the gut.

Suddenly, I'm that little girl again, desperately craving praise and affection from a father who only knew how to hurt.

I blink rapidly, fighting back tears.

"Thank you," I manage to whisper, my voice thick with emotion. "I... I should get dressed. I have classes today."

Jolt nods, seeming to sense my need for space. "All right, darlin'. Go out there and kill it in class, yeah?"

I force a smile, grateful for his understanding.

As I turn to leave the bathroom, I can't shake the feeling that something intense has shifted between us.

And despite my fears, I'm not sure I want to go back to the way things were in the beginning.

Luckily, I brought a bag with me last night in case I did end up staying the night, so I changed into my new clothes and am ready for the day.

I step out of his trailer, the morning sun already beating down on the Las Vegas pavement.

The weight of my backpack feels heavier than usual, filled with textbooks and my clothes from last night, I head up to the gate.

It's not long before an Uber is picking me up and then I'm on campus, being dropped off in front of the lecture hall.

As I make my way across the grounds, the familiar buzz of college life surrounds me.

I slide into my seat for my first class, Cryptography and Network Security, my mind still half-lost in the memories of this morning.

"All right, class," Professor Chen's voice cuts through my thoughts. "Let's dive into public key infrastructure."

I force myself to focus, my pen flying across the page as I take notes.

Despite my earlier distraction, the material comes easily to me.

It's like puzzle pieces clicking into place, each concept building on the last.

Three classes and two quizzes later, I'm practically floating as I head to meet Sienna at our favorite cafe on campus.

My bag is lighter now, filled with graded papers sporting bold red 98s across the top.

The rush of pride I feel looking at those numbers reaffirms that I've made the right choice with my degree.

I spot Sienna's familiar jet black hair at our usual table, a spread of Mexican food already waiting.

She grins, pushing a plate of tacos toward me as I sit down. "There's my cybersecurity genius!"

I can't help but smile back. "Don't jinx it. But yeah, I'm kicking ass."

Sienna leans forward, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. "Enough about school. Spill the tea about the wedding! And don't think I didn't notice you've been MIA since you left for it."

I take a bite of my taco, buying time as I consider how much to share. "The wedding was... intense. Beautiful, but intense. Jolt and I, we..." I pause, feeling a blush creep up my neck.

Sienna's eyebrows shoot up. "Oh my god, you hooked up with him again, didn't you?"

I nod, unable to keep the grin off my face. "Not at the wedding, mind you. We just slept together. But this morning..."

I trail off, the memory of Jolt's body against mine sending a shiver down my spine.

"Holy shit, Aggie!" Sienna squeals, drawing looks from nearby tables.

She lowers her voice, leaning in closer. "How was it? Is he as good as he looks?"

I laugh, shaking my head. "Better. It was... fuck, Sienna, it was amazing. But it's not just the sex. He's so... gentle with me. Caring. It's throwing me for a loop."

Sienna's expression softens. "That's a good thing, isn't it? You deserve someone who treats you well."

I nod, but I can feel the doubt creeping in. "Yeah, but... what if I'm gettin' in too deep? This was supposed to be casual, just a bit of fun. Now I'm worried I'm developin' real feelings for him."

Sienna asks gently. "Would that be so terrible?"

I stare down at my half-eaten taco, my appetite suddenly gone. "I dunno," I admit softly. "I'm not sure I'm ready for that kind of vulnerability."

Sienna sighs, leaning back in her chair. "I swear, after college, I need to find myself a good biker man. All this talk of Jolt is making me jealous."

I can't help but chuckle, grateful for the shift in conversation. "Aye, we'll make it our mission to find ye a good one. It'll be like searchin' for a needle in a haystack, but we'll get ye sorted."

"Promise?" Sienna's eyes gleam with mischief.

"Cross my heart," I reply, drawing an X over my chest. "We'll comb through every leather-clad, beard-sportin' bloke in Nevada if we have to."

We both burst into laughter, the tension from moments ago dissipating.

As our giggles subside, I find myself truly appreciating Sienna's friendship.

She's been a rock for me since I moved to Las Vegas, never judging, always supporting.

In a way, she's like another sister to me.

Our chat continues, moving from biker fantasies to classes and campus gossip.

The sky outside the cafe windows gradually darkens, the warm glow of streetlights replacing the fading sunlight.

Suddenly, Sienna's phone buzzes.

She glances at it, her eyes widening. "Shit, I completely lost track of time," she mutters, hastily gathering her things.

"Everything okay?" I ask, concern creeping into my voice.

"Yeah, yeah," she says distractedly. "I just forgot I promised to help one of the girls at the house with a project. It's due tomorrow and she's freaking out."

I nod, understanding all too well the panic of upcoming deadlines. "Go on then, I'll clean up here."

Sienna pauses, looking guilty. "You sure?"

"Aye, it's no bother. Now get yer arse movin' before she has a meltdown."

Sienna flashes me a grateful smile. "You're the best, Aggie. I'll text you later!"

As she rushes out, I can't help but feel a twinge of loneliness in her absence.

Sienna really is a good friend, and I love hanging out with her.

I gather our trays, I can't quite shake the nagging desire to text Jolt, to hear his voice, to feel his arms around me again.

"Get a grip, Aggie," I mutter to myself, dumping the trash and stacking the trays. "Ye've got more important things to worry about than some biker, no matter how good he is in bed."

But even as I think it, I know I'm lying to myself.

Jolt has wormed his way under my skin, past my carefully constructed defenses.

And that terrifies me more than I care to admit.

I push through the cafe's double doors, the cool night air hitting my face like a slap.

The streets are eerily quiet, except for the distant hum of traffic and the occasional bark of a dog.

I hesitate for a moment, my eyes adjusting to the darkness.

"Right," I mutter to myself, squaring my shoulders. "Just a quick shortcut and ye'll be home in no time."

I turn down a narrow alley between two buildings, one I vaguely remember hearing about from one of the sorority girls.

It's supposed to shave ten minutes off the walk, but as I venture deeper into the

shadows, doubt creeps in.

"Bloody hell, Aggie," I chide myself. "Ye couldn't just take the long way, could ye?"

The alley seems to stretch on endlessly, the darkness thickening with each step.

My heart rate picks up, and I find myself straining to hear any sound beyond my own footsteps.

That's when I hear it—another set of footsteps, just slightly out of sync with mine.

I whirl around, my breath catching in my throat.

A figure stands about ten feet behind me, face obscured by a hood.

My mind races, Da's voice echoing in my head: "Always be aware of your surroundings, kiddo."

"Shite," I whisper, turning back and quickening my pace.

The footsteps behind me speed up too.

My inner voice screams at me to run, but I force myself to stay calm.

Don't panic, I think. Ye've been in worse situations. Just keep moving.

But my racing heart betrays me, and as I try to pick up speed, my foot catches on an uneven patch of pavement.

I stumble, arms windmilling, and hit the ground hard.

"Fuck!" I hiss, pain shooting through my palms and knees. "Ye stupid, clumsy bint!"

As I struggle to my feet, I can hear the footsteps getting closer.

Fear grips me, but beneath it, a familiar anger begins to simmer.

I straighten up, fists clenched at my sides, ready to face whatever comes next.

As I straighten up, a hand grabs a fistful of my hair, yanking me backward.

Pain explodes across my scalp, and before I can react, I'm slammed against something hard and cold.

The metallic clang combined with rotting garbage filling my nostrils tells me it's a dumpster.

"Fuck!" I cry out, stars dancing in my vision.

My attacker doesn't give me a moment to recover.

He grabs me again, this time hurling me against a chain-link fence.

The impact knocks the wind out of me, and I feel the rough metal digging into my back.

My heart pounds so hard I can hear it in my ears.

Fear and confusion war within me, but beneath it all, a familiar anger starts to bubble up.

I open my mouth to scream, but before I can, a voice I recognize cuts through the

night air.

"Not so tough now, are you, Aggie?"

My blood runs cold.

I gasp, disbelief coloring my voice. "Trevor?"

He steps closer, and I can finally see his face in the dim light.

It's twisted with a mixture of rage and satisfaction.

He's happy he's doing this.

He's getting off on causing me pain.

"What the fuck are ye doin'?" I scream, my Scottish accent thickening with anger and fear. "Have ye lost yer bloody mind?"

Trevor's laugh is cold and humorless. "Lost my mind? Nah, darlin'. I'm just takin' back what's mine."

I press myself against the fence, trying to put some distance between us. "Yers? I was never yers, ye delusional prick!"

"Oh, but you were," he snarls, closing the gap. "And you will be again."

My mind races, searching for a way out.

I think of Jolt, of the club, of all the strength I've found since leaving Billings.

I take a deep breath, steeling myself. "Trevor," I say, trying to keep my voice steady, "ye need to back the fuck off. Right. Now."

He just smirks, reaching for me again. "Or what, Aggie? What're you gonna do?"

As his hand comes toward me, and time seems to slow.

I can feel my heart pounding, hear my own ragged breathing.

But beneath the fear, that familiar fire ignites.

I'm not the same girl who left Billings. I'm stronger now. I'm a survivor.

"This," I growl, and I lash out with everything I have.

My fist connects with Trevor's jaw, snapping his head back.

For a moment, I feel a surge of triumph.

But it's short-lived.

"You fuckin' bitch!" he roars, his eyes blazing with fury.

Before I can react, he's on me, pinning me against the fence again.

The cold metal digs into my back as he presses closer, his breath hot on my face.

"You never did know your place. That's your fucking problem!" he hisses, and I see a glint of metal in the dim light.

My blood runs cold as I realize he's pulled out a knife.

"Trevor, don't—" I start, but my words are cut off by a scream as he drags the blade from just below my jaw down to my sternum.

The pain is white-hot, searing.

He growls, but I barely hear him over the roaring in my ears. "This should teach you some manners."

Adrenaline surges through me, and suddenly, everything becomes crystal clear.

I won't die here.

I won't let him win.

With a strength I didn't know I possessed, I bring my knee up hard between his legs.

As he doubles over, I shove him away and scan the ground desperately.

My hand closes around a jagged rock, and I don't hesitate.

I swing with all my might, catching him on the temple.

There's a sickening thud, and Trevor crumples to the ground.

For a moment, I stand here, panting, the rock still clutched in my trembling hand.

Then reality crashes back in.

"Fuck," I mutter, stumbling away from Trevor's motionless form.

I need to get out of here.

I need... I need the club.

I need Jolt.

Fumbling with my phone, I order an Uber, then stagger to the nearest street.

When the car pulls up, the driver's eyes widen in horror.

"Miss, you need a hospital!" he exclaims, reaching for his phone.

"No!" I snap, my voice ragged. "Do yer damn job and take me where yer supposed to!"

As we pull away, I close my eyes, willing the tears not to fall.

I'm going home—to where I belong, the club.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Jolt

The stench of fear and sweat hangs heavy in the air, mingling with the metallic tang of blood.

I stand in the “butcher shop,” my eyes fixed on the pathetic figure before us.

Widow looms beside me, his presence a dark, intimidating force in the cramped space.

Widow's gravelly voice breaks the tense silence. "You gonna talk now, asshole?"

Our captive—the fucker who torched our car wash—whimpers pitifully.

His body trembles, fresh rivulets of blood trickling down his bare chest from where the hooks pierce his flesh.

The sight should sicken me, but a twisted part of me relishes his suffering.

He deserves this pain for what he did to the club.

"I... I don't know anything else," the man stammers, his eyes wild with terror.

Widow steps closer, his massive frame casting a menacing shadow. "Wrong answer, buddy."

I watch, fascinated, as Widow reaches for a nearby table laden with an assortment of nasty-looking instruments

My stomach churns with a mix of adrenaline and unease.

Part of me wants to look away, to distance myself from the brutality about to unfold.

But I force myself to observe.

This is part of club life—the ugly, violent underbelly that keeps us safe and in control.

"Last chance," Widow growls, selecting a wicked-looking pair of pliers. "Who do you work for?"

The man's eyes bulge as he stares at the tool in Widow's hand.

"Please," he begs, voice cracking. "I told you everything I know!"

Widow glances at me, a silent question in his eyes.

I give a slight nod, preparing myself for what's to come.

As much as I hate this part of the job, I know it's necessary.

We can't let anyone fuck with the Reapers Rejects MC and get away with it.

"All right then," Widow says, his tone deceptively casual. "Let's see if we can jog your memory."

As Widow moves in, I can't help but admire his composure.

The guy's a pro at this shit, no doubt honed from years of protecting the club and his daughter, Zoe.

The man's agonized scream snaps me back to the present.

Widow's got the pliers clamped around one of his fingernails, slowly pulling.

"Stop!" the captive wails. "Please, I'll talk! I'll tell you everything!"

Widow pauses, eyebrow raised. "That's more like it. Start talkin'."

As the man babbles out information between sobs, I find my mind drifting.

Is this really who I am now?

The easygoing, joke-cracking Jolt, now an accomplice to torture?

But then I remember the car wash engulfed in flames, the livelihoods threatened, the message it sent.

This is necessary.

"Jolt." Widow's voice cuts through my thoughts. "You hear that?"

I blink, refocusing on the situation. "Sorry, what?"

Widow sighs, clearly annoyed at my lapse in attention. "He says the Kodiaks are planning something big. Some kind of coordinated attack on multiple fronts."

My blood runs cold, but I'm not surprised in the least bit.

"Shit," I mutter. "Any details on when or where?"

The captive shakes his head frantically. "I don't know specifics, I swear! I'm just a hired hand, they don't tell me everything!"

Widow grunts, clearly unsatisfied. "Keep talking. What else do you know about their operations?"

As the interrogation continues, I find myself studying Widow.

The man's a fucking rock, unwavering in his dedication to the club and his methods.

Part of me admires that steadiness, that certainty of purpose.

But another part of me wonders if I'll ever reach that level of commitment.

I'm sure I will one day, and while I'm here, I'm watching everything Widow does.

Being able to be up close and personal with these kinds of experiences will make me a better man in the long run—for the club, and my woman.

"Hey." Widow's gruff voice pulls me from my musings once again. "You with us, prospect?"

I straighten up, forcing myself to focus. "Yeah, sorry. Just... processing."

Widow's eyes narrow slightly, but he doesn't push it.

Instead, he jerks his head toward our captive. "What do you think? He giving us the straight shit?"

I take a moment to really look at the man hanging before us.

His face is a mess of tears, snot, and blood.

His body shakes uncontrollably, and his eyes dart around the room like a cornered animal.

Every instinct tells me he's spilled everything he knows.

"Yeah," I say finally. "I think he's tapped out. Doubt he knows much more than what he's told us."

Widow nods, seemingly satisfied with my assessment. "All right then. Let's see if you're right."

The tension is thick enough to cut with a knife when a strangled whimper breaks the silence. "You told me the other day you couldn't stand spiders, so I need to know you're not lyin' to me, Paulie. It's not personal. You got me?"

"Please," he gasps, his voice raw and desperate. "I'll tell you everything I know. Just... please don't do what I think you're gonna!"

Widow grabs a box, and puts a glove on his right hand.

He grabs spider after spider and Paulie screams, thrashing against the hooks, which only cause him to scream even more.

I watch as a particularly large arachnid skitters across his sweat-slicked forehead, causing another terrified moan from him.

It's a gruesome sight, but I can't look away.

Widow steps forward, his face an impassive mask. "Okay, let's start with something easy. What's your name."

His eyes dart frantically between us. "P-Paulie. My name's Paulie, b-but you know that!"

"Yes, I do," Widow says, his tone deceptively casual. "Why don't you tell us about your relationship with the Kodiak MC?"

Paulie shakes his head, wincing as the movement causes the hooks to dig deeper. "I'm not... I'm not part of their club. They just pay me to do odd jobs sometimes. That's all, I swear!"

I can't help but feel a twinge of sympathy for the guy, despite everything.

I keep my voice level. "Why'd you take the job?"

Paulie's eyes meet mine, and I see a glimmer of desperation there. "It's how I keep the lights on, man. How I feed my kids. I got two little girls at home, and another baby on the way. I... I had to do something."

Widow nods slowly, his expression softening. "I understand a man needing to provide for his family, Paulie. But there are much better ways than setting fires for rival MCs."

I watch Paulie closely, trying to gauge his sincerity.

His fear seems genuine enough, but in our world, you can never be too careful.

Still, the mention of his kids tugs at something inside me.

I think of Aggie, of the future I want to build with her, and I can't help but wonder if I'd do any differently in Paulie's shoes.

"Tell us more about these jobs," I prod, pushing aside my conflicting emotions. "What exactly did the Kodiaks have you doing?"

Paulie opens his mouth to respond, but before he can get a word out, he lets out a blood-curdling scream.

One of the larger spiders has made its way to his neck, and in his panic, Paulie thrashes violently against his hooks.

The sight is enough to turn my stomach.

The barbed hooks tear into his flesh as he struggles more, fresh rivers of blood trickling down his torso.

The spiders, disturbed by the sudden movement, begin to swarm, several of them sinking their fangs into Paulie's exposed skin.

"Get them off!" Paulie wails, his eyes wide with terror. "Please, I'm begging you! I'll tell you anything you want to know, just get these fucking things off me!"

"Fair enough, Paulie," Widow says, his voice calm and steady. "Let's make a deal. You give us some solid information, and we'll start removing these eight-legged friends of yours one by one. Sound good?"

Paulie nods frantically, tears streaming down his face. "Yes, anything! Just... please..."

As Widow steps closer to continue interrogation, I'm revulsed and impressed.

This is the ugly side of club business, the part that keeps me up at night sometimes.

But as I watch Paulie's walls come crumbling down because of these damn eight-legged terrors, I can't deny its effectiveness, and these are the times where I know I'm learning from the best.

Widow's eyes narrow as he scrutinizes Paulie, who's writhing in agony. I can't help but admire the calculated precision in Widow's methods. It's fucked up, sure, but there's an art to it.

I lean in, curiosity getting the better of me.

"Hey, Widow," I whisper, careful not to let Paulie hear, "these spiders... they dangerous?"

A smirk plays at the corner of Widow's mouth. "Oh yeah. Desert brown recluse. Nasty little fuckers."

He turns to Paulie, raising his voice. "If you're not careful, they'll keep biting. And trust me, you don't want that. Necrotic lesions ain't pretty. Luckily for you, we have an anti-venom I can give you after this whole shin-dig is over with. If you deserve it."

I suppress a shudder, imagining the damage those tiny fuckers can do.

Part of me feels sick, but another part... fuck, another part is impressed by how Widow's working this guy.

Paulie's face contorts in terror. "Please! I'll flip on the Kodiaks! I'll tell you more. I'm sorry I lied, I'm just afraid of what's gonna happen to me when I get outta here! Just get these things off me!"

Widow cocks an eyebrow. "That so?"

"I swear!" Paulie's voice cracks. "Look, I'm just tryin' to be a good father, yeah? A provider for my girl, for my kids. It was just a job, man. I didn't mean no harm!"

I watch Paulie, seeing the desperation in his eyes.

For a moment, I wonder if I'd do the same in his position.

Would I compromise my morals to keep my family fed?

"A job, huh?" I can't help but interject, my tone dripping with sarcasm. "Funny how 'just a job' involves burning down our shit and putting people at risk."

Widow shoots me a look—part warning, part approval.

I get it—we're playing good cop, bad cop here.

Or maybe it's bad cop, worse cop.

Either way, I'm learning.

Widow nods slowly, his face unreadable.

Without a word, he pulls out his phone and starts tapping away.

I watch, curiosity gnawing at me, wondering who he's messaging.

The silence stretches, broken only by Paulie's ragged breathing and the faint skittering of spiders across his skin.

"Hey!" Paulie's voice cracks. "Did you hear me? I said I'll flip!"

Widow looks up from his phone, his expression calm. "Oh, I heard you all right. My bosses are on their way. You can tell them what you just told me."

Paulie's eyes widen in panic. "What? No, no, no! Just get these things off me, man! Please!"

I watch as more beads of sweat trickle down Paulie's temple, a spider dancing around it.

The poor bastard scrunches up his face, desperately trying to keep the arachnids from his eyes and mouth.

"Fuck," I mutter under my breath, running a hand through my hair. "This is some next-level shit."

Widow glances at me, a hint of amusement in his eyes. "You ain't seen nothin' yet, kid. This is just the warm-up."

I nod, trying to look nonchalant, but inside, my mind is racing.

Is this what it takes to protect the club?

To keep our family safe?

The weight of it settles on my shoulders, and I realize I'm witnessing a side of club life I've only heard whispers about.

Paulie's whimpers draw my attention back to him.

His face is a mask of pure terror, eyes squeezed shut as spiders crawl across his eyelids.

It's like watching a car crash—horrifying, but impossible to look away from.

"Christ," I breathe, "he looks about ready to piss himself."

Widow chuckles darkly. "Wouldn't be the first time someone's lost control in here. You'd be surprised what fear can do to a man."

I swallow hard, trying to keep my cool. "Yeah, I bet. How long before they get here?"

"Not long," Widow replies, his eyes never leaving Paulie. "Why? You gettin' squeamish on me, Jolt?"

I force a laugh, hoping it doesn't sound as nervous as I feel. "Nah, man. Just curious. This is... educational."

Widow smirks. "That's one way to put it."

The heavy metal door creaks open moments later, revealing Damon and Dixon, our Prez and VP.

The air in the room shifts, becoming charged with their presence.

Damon's eyes lock onto Paulie, his face a mask of cold calculation.

I straighten up instinctively, feeling the weight of their authority.

Damon strides forward, his cut creaking with each step.

He stops in front of Paulie, who's still writhing and whimpering.

"So." Damon's voice cuts through the room like a knife. "I heard you're ready to flip? I don't particularly like rats, so..."

The threat hangs in the air, unspoken but clear as day.

My heart's pounding, wondering how this is gonna play out.

Paulie's eyes are wide with fear, darting between Damon and the spiders still crawling over his skin.

Before Paulie can respond, Widow steps forward.

I'm surprised to see a flicker of something like sympathy in his eyes.

"He's got two young little girls, and a wife, baby on the way," Widow says, his gravelly voice softer than usual. "Dude is tryin' to keep food on the table and lights on, Prez."

I blink, caught off guard by Widow's defense.

This is the same man who just has Paulie strung up and covered in spiders.

But then again, Widow's a father himself.

Maybe he sees something of himself in Paulie's desperation.

Damon's eyebrows rise slightly, considering Widow's words.

I hold my breath, waiting to see how he'll react.

Damon's eyes narrow as he studies Paulie, his gaze calculating.

I can practically see the gears turning in his head.

After a long moment, he gives a slight nod, his stance shifting from outright aggression to something more... considering.

"Okay," Damon says, his voice low and gravelly. "What do you want, Paulie?"

Paulie's eyes widen, a glimmer of hope breaking through his terror.

He licks his cracked lips, swallowing hard before he speaks. "Take these damn spiders off me," he pleads, his voice cracking. "I'll tell you anything you want to know. Just... please."

A shudder runs through me as I watch one of the brown recluses skitter across Paulie's cheek.

The poor bastard looks like he's about to lose his mind.

Damon exchanges a quick glance with Dixon, then turns back to Paulie. "I know about the deal Widow made you," he says, crossing his muscular arms over his chest. "Removing a spider for every piece of useful information you give us. We'll honor that, since it's obvious they bother you so much."

Paulie nods frantically, relief flooding his features. "Yeah, yeah, I got it. Thank you, thank you."

I lean in, curious to see what other intel Paulie has up his sleeves.

Damon raises an eyebrow, waiting.

Paulie takes a deep breath, wincing as the movement causes the hooks to pull at his skin. "Okay, here's something big," he says. "The Kodiak MC? They only got one real threat in Vegas. It's you guys—the Reapers Rejects."

Damon's expression doesn't change, but I can see the interest in his eyes.

He nods to Widow, who steps forward and carefully plucks a spider off Paulie's shoulder, crushing it under his boot.

We're the only ones the Kodiaks see as a real threat.

If we're their main focus, what kind of shit are they planning to throw our way?

Paulie's eyes follow the crushed spider, a mix of relief and lingering fear on his face.

He licks his dry lips, wincing as another spider crawls across his cheek.

"There's more," he says, his voice shaky. "Serpent, he's... he's obsessed with one of your women. The biker girl, the one he..." Paulie swallows hard. "The one he gutted."

My blood runs cold.

Siren.

He's talking about Siren.

Paulie continues, his words rushing out now. "Serpent said he's gonna come back for her. Said he knew she was getting married, but that wouldn't stop him. He wants to use her like his... his 'little fucked up blood doll.'"

The room goes deadly silent.

I clench my fists, fighting the urge to put them through the nearest wall.

Widow yanks another spider off Paulie, crushing it with vicious force. "Fucker say anything else?"

"He was gonna get Sera, put her head on a platter, and deliver it to her mother."

Dixon's voice cuts through the tension. "No one will ever touch the women or children in our club and get away with it, period."

I nod in agreement, my jaw clenched so tight it hurts.

We protect our own, always.

Accidents and slip ups happen, but not because we allow it.

Paulie's head bobs frantically. "I figured as much, knowin' what I do about you all now," he says. "But Serpent, he's a disgusting fucker. He doesn't care who he hurts, as long as he gets what he wants."

A cold smile spreads across Paulie's face, and for a moment, I see a glimpse of the man who could set fire to our business without remorse. "That's why I was burning down the car wash," he admits. "To distract you guys."

My mind races.

A distraction?

From what?

What the hell is Serpent planning?

I glance at Widow, seeing my own anger and concern mirrored in his eyes.

This isn't just about the club anymore.

This is personal.

And we're going to make damn sure Serpent never gets anywhere near Sera, Siren—or any of our people—ever again.

Damon's eyes narrow, his voice a low growl as he cocks an eyebrow. "A distraction? Or sending a message?"

I watch Paulie's face intently, searching for any sign of deception.

Sweat beads on his forehead, mingling with the blood from where the barbed hooks pierce his skin.

He flinches as another spider skitters across his chest.

"No, no," Paulie insists, his voice cracking. "Serpent wanted to distract you guys, I swear. But I can't... I can't remember why. He said it was important, but..."

Widow steps forward, his massive frame looming over Paulie.

I've known Widow for years now, seen him break men twice his size, but the cold calculation in his eyes right now sends a chill down my spine.

Widow's voice is deceptively calm. "Maybe remembering might get me to take off another fuckin' spider."

I watch Paulie's eyes go wide with panic.

Paulie's chest heaves as he struggles against the hooks, desperate to escape the creepy little fuckers crawling over his skin.

I can see the moment something clicks in his eyes.

"Wait, wait!" he gasps. "I remember now. Serpent, he... he had someone watching your club."

My blood runs cold.

Watching us?

How long?

What did they see?

Paulie continues, words tumbling out in a frantic rush. "They wanted to see who left, who stayed behind. How many people were actually here, and..." He swallows hard. "And if they could get onto your grounds."

Fuck.

My fists clench at my sides.

This wasn't just about the car wash.

This was reconnaissance.

They're planning something big, and we've been blind to it this whole time.

Damon's voice cuts through the tension like a knife.

"Take two off him," he orders Widow, his tone brooking no argument.

Widow nods, his weathered hands moving with surprising gentleness as he plucks two spiders from Paulie's sweat-slicked skin.

The crunch as he crushes them under his boot echoes in the room, making my stomach turn.

Paulie's eyes lock onto Damon's, desperation clear in every line of his face. "I promise it wasn't personal," he pleads, his voice hoarse. "I was only a paid man doing what I needed to. Surely you can see that."

I watch Damon carefully, trying to gauge his reaction.

His face is a mask, giving nothing away.

After what feels like an eternity, he nods slowly.

"I can see that," Damon says, his voice deceptively calm.

My chest tightens as I recognize that tone.

It's the one he uses right before all hell breaks loose.

"But I also see how fast you flip." His eyes narrow dangerously. "So why should I keep you alive?"

The question hangs in the air, heavy as lead.

I find myself holding my breath, waiting for Paulie's response.

This could go south real quick if he doesn't play his cards right.

Paulie licks his lips nervously, his eyes darting between Damon and the remaining spiders on his skin.

When he speaks, his voice is low but steady. "Because I'm the kind of man who will do anything for the people I'm loyal to."

I raise an eyebrow, skeptical.

Loyalty?

From a guy who just flipped on his employers without much prodding?

But Paulie's not done. "And given the fact I haven't been killed or tortured crazily, I'd be loyal to the Reapers Rejects. If I'm given the chance."

I can't help but admire the guy's balls.

He's dangling from meat hooks, covered in venomous spiders, and he's still trying to negotiate.

Part of me wants to respect that kind of survival instinct.

The other part wonders if we'd be stupid to trust him.

I glance at Widow, trying to read his reaction.

His face is impassive, but I catch a flicker of something in his eyes.

Interest?

Or maybe just calculation.

Either way, I know he's weighing Paulie's words carefully.

As for me, I'm not sure what to think.

On one hand, having an inside man could be invaluable.

On the other, how can we trust someone who's already proven he'll sell out for the right price?

The silence stretches on, broken only by the soft skittering of spider legs on skin.

We're all waiting for Damon's verdict, and I find myself holding my breath again.

Damon's eyes narrow as he considers Paulie's offer.

I can almost see the gears turning in his head, weighing the risks against the potential rewards.

Finally, he nods, his decision made.

"All right," Damon says, his voice gravelly. "But you have to go back and find more shit out for us. I want details, and I want your number."

It's a gamble, but one that could pay off big time if Paulie comes through.

Paulie's relief is obvious. "Yeah, yeah, of course. I'll do whatever you need. Just... please, get these fucking spiders off me."

Dixon chimes in, a rare note of approval in his voice. "Good job."

Damon turns to Widow and me. "Get Paulie down, address his wounds. Make sure he doesn't die from a fuckin' infection. And for fuck's sake, give him whatever anti-venom you have."

As I start working on the hooks, I hope Paulie won't make us regret this.

"Easy there, prospect," Widow murmurs, his hands steady as he helps me. "Don't want to cause any more damage than necessary."

I nod, focusing on the task.

Paulie whimpers as we work, each movement causing the hooks to shift.

"Almost there, man," I tell him, trying to keep my voice light. "Just hang in there a little longer."

As we lower Paulie to the ground, I catch Widow's eye.

There's a glimmer of respect there, and it hits me—this is a test, too.

Not just for Paulie, but for me.

How I handle this, how I react, it's all being noted.

I swallow hard, pushing down the mix of emotions churning in my gut.

This is the life I chose, the family I want to be part of.

And if that means patching up the guy we just tortured, well, that's what I'll do.

"Let's get you cleaned up," I tell Paulie, my voice steadier than I feel. "Can't have our

new informant looking like he just went ten rounds with a meat grinder, can we?"

The air in the bunker feels heavy as we finish patching up Paulie, thick with the lingering scent of fear and blood.

I catch Widow's eye, and he gives me a subtle nod.

We've done our job.

"All right, get outta here," Widow growls at Paulie, who doesn't need to be told twice.

He scrambles to his feet, wincing at every movement, and bolts for the door.

I watch him go, my mind racing.

This shit with the Kodiaks, it's escalating fast.

Widow's phone goes off and his eyes flicker to mine. "Head back to the club, prospect."

Licking my lips, I furrow my brows. "I'm good, Widow. We have a lot of cleanin' up to do here."

Widow clears his throat. "I wasn't askin'. You get your ass back there. Your girl's in the main area, and she's not good. Someone beat 'er, so get the fuck outta here and go check on 'er."

He doesn't have to tell me twice.

I run like a bat out of hell, get on my bike, and ride to the clubhouse.

I don't even know how much time has passed when I'm rushing through the clubhouse doors and find a group of women around Aggie.

Sera, Siren, Sakura, Kat, and Camila are all there.

Sakura's tending to her wounds, while the rest of the ladies are trying to be supportive for her.

I waste no time getting over to her, "What in the hell happened, Ghost?"

It's then I see the cut going from the bottom of her chin all the way down to her sternum.

Aggie's emerald eyes, normally full of fire and defiance are murky—clouded over with pain and fear as she meets my gaze.

Her bleached blonde hair is matted with blood, strands sticking to the fresh wound that mars her beautiful face.

A sight that sends waves of seething rage coursing through me.

"Aye, Jolt," she rasps out, sobbing silently. "It was Trevor."

The name rolls off her tongue like poison.

That fucking frat boy.

I clench my fists at my side as an image of him flashes in my mind—the cocky smirk permanently etched on his face.

A primal growl rumbles in my chest, threatening to break free.

"Jolt..." Aggie's voice cracks as she reaches out to touch my arm.

The touch is feather-light, but it grounds me instantly, pulling me back from the dark abyss threatening to swallow me whole. "Don't... Please..."

Her plea hangs between us.

I meet her gaze head on. "You beggin' me not to go after him?"

"Aye," she admits softly, her hand falling away from my arm as if it suddenly weighs a ton. "Please, not yet. I need to get away from here. I need a bloody break."

I want to argue with her—tell her that I can handle Trevor, that I will make sure he would never hurt her again.

But my words get stuck in my throat when I look into her eyes, filled with fear and pain.

Fear and pain this bastard put there!

"Aggie... this fucker has to pay." My voice breaks the silence. "He doesn't get to do this and walk away. Not while I'm still breathing."

"And he will, but for fuck's sake, Jolt, let me have some damn time!" Aggie starts visibly shaking, and Kat turns to look at me.

Her eyes are a silent warning—one that tells me I need to do whatever the fuck Aggie wants right now.

I kneel down in front of Aggie. "Ghost, tell me what you need right now. I'll do whatever you ask. Anything."

Her lip quivers and my heart breaks, because I've never seen her like this. "I need you, Jack. I need you to go away with me, go back home for the holiday, please."

I swallow hard. "I need to ask Damon, baby girl. I can try to get permission, but with shit goin' on right now, I don't wanna get your hopes up."

Kat speaks up, clear as day. "You'll be able to go, Jolt. Don't you worry about that."

Damon might run the club, but Kat does anything for the women in it.

Sometimes, I forget that even my Prez has to answer to someone at the end of the day.

I smile softly. "Looks like we're headin' back to see your folks then. We'll leave in a couple of days, all right?"

Aggie nods, tears streaming down her face. "Okay, b-but I need to get some of my things, and go get Sienna, please. She's going to Montana with me for Christmas."

"Okay, but I'll head to the sorority house to pick up Sienna. Maybe Sienna can pack 'em and I'll just pick her up and bring her here with all your shit tomorrow. Sound good?"

Aggie nods, and the tears continue to stream down her face.

I wrap my arms around her and hold her against me, wanting nothing more than to have my girl feeling better.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Aggie

The Montana sky stretches out before us, a vast expanse of blue that seems to swallow the whole world.

I can't help but stare, unable to believe I'm really back home.

It feels familiar, safe, even though there's a load of other threats here.

My fingers trace the fading bruises on my cheek.

Hell, some days I forget about what happened, but then I scratch my cheek a little too hard and the memories come flooding back.

I glance over at Jolt, his muscular hands gripping the steering wheel, knuckles white with tension.

His jaw is clenched, eyes fixed on the road ahead.

I want to reach out and touch him, to smooth away the worry lines etched on his forehead, but I hold back.

There's still so much unsaid between us, so much we need to figure out.

So many adult conversations I don't have the energy for right now.

My voice is barely above a whisper. "You okay?"

Jolt's eyes flick to me for a brief moment before returning to the road. "Yeah, just... thinkin'."

I nod, understanding all too well.

My own mind is a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. "About what?"

He sighs, his shoulders sagging slightly. "Everything. You. Us. What we're gonna face when we get there."

I reach out then, unable to resist the urge to comfort him.

My hand finds his thigh, giving it a gentle squeeze. "We'll face it together, yeah?"

A small smile tugs at the corner of his lips. "Yeah, together."

The word hangs between us, heavy with meaning.

I turn my gaze back to the window, watching the landscapes pass us by.

It's surreal, being so close to home after everything that's happened.

Part of me still can't believe we're here.

I murmur, more to myself than to Jolt, "I can't believe we're almost there."

"Having second thoughts?" There's a hint of worry in his voice that makes my heart clench.

I shake my head. "No, not at all. It's just... it feels like a lifetime ago that I left for college. So much has changed."

Jolt's hand covers mine on his thigh, his touch warm and reassuring. "In time, we all change, Ghost."

I look at him, really look at him, taking in the sharp angle of his jaw, the intensity in his dark eyes. "Ye, I guess yer right."

A soft snore from the backseat breaks the moment, reminding me that we're not alone.

I twist in my seat to check on Sienna, her face peaceful in sleep.

I report, turning back to face the front. "She's still out cold."

Jolt nods. "Good. She needs the rest."

We fall into silence again, but it's comfortable this time.

I find myself lost in thought, memories of the past few days flashing through my mind like a technicolor nightmare.

The fear, the pain, the uncertainty... but also the unexpected moments of tenderness, of connection.

My hand absently traces the line of the cut from my neck to my sternum, hidden beneath my shirt but ever-present in my mind.

"Does it still hurt?" Jolt asks, his voice low.

I drop my hand, realizing what I've been doing. "Not really. It's more... a reminder, I guess."

His grip on the steering wheel tightens. "I should've killed that bastard."

"Jolt..." I start, but he cuts me off.

"No, Aggie. What he did to you... what he was going to do if you didn't escape his crazy ass..." He trails off, his jaw clenching so hard I worry he might crack a tooth.

I take a deep breath, trying to find the right words. "I know. Believe me, I know. But we're here now, we're safe. That's what matters."

He doesn't look convinced, but he nods anyway. "You're right. I just... I can't stand the thought of anyone hurting you."

The intensity in his voice, the raw emotion behind his words, sends a shiver down my spine.

It's still new, this thing between us, but it feels as natural as breathing.

"I can take care of myself, you know," I remind him, a hint of my usual sass creeping into my tone.

Jolt chuckles, some of the tension easing from his shoulders. "Oh, I know. You're a force to be reckoned with, Aggie. But that doesn't mean you have to face everything alone. Not anymore."

His words wrap around me like a warm blanket, soothing fears I didn't even know I had.

"I'm not used to that," I admit softly. "Having someone to lean on."

"Well, get used to it," he says, his tone leaving no room for argument. "Because I'm not going anywhere."

I smile, feeling a warmth spread through my chest. "Good. Because I'm not letting you go anywhere."

We share a look, one that speaks volumes without a single word uttered.

I guess it's the first time we've established we're in each other's lives, and this isn't some hormone fused fling anymore.

It's still hard for me to believe sometimes, how quickly and deeply I've fallen for this man.

How he's become such an integral part of my life in such a short time.

The familiar outskirts of Billings begin to come into view, and a mix of excitement and anxiety bubbles up inside me.

"We're almost there," I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

Jolt nods, his expression a mix of determination and apprehension. "You ready for this?"

I take a deep breath, steeling myself for what's to come. "As ready as I'll ever be."

The truth is, I'm not sure if I'm ready at all.

Ready to face my family, to explain everything that's happened.

Ready to introduce Jolt as my ol' man, to deal with the inevitable questions and concerns.

Ready to step back into a world I thought I'd left behind.

Hell, I don't even know if I want to tell anyone what happened, especially my Da.

But as I look at Jolt, at the strength and support radiating from him, I know that whatever comes, we'll face it together.

"Ye know," I say, breaking the silence that had fallen between us, "I never thought I'd be comin' back like this."

Jolt raises an eyebrow. "Like what? With a handsome prospect as your ol' man?"

I can't help but laugh, the sound bubbling up from deep inside me.

It feels good to laugh, to feel something other than fear or worry. "Well, that too. But I meant... I dunno. Different, I guess."

"Different how?" he asks, genuinely curious.

I pause, trying to put my feelings into words. "When I left for Vegas, I was running away from somethin'. From my past, from the club life, from... everythin'. I thought I needed to find myself, to become someone new."

Jolt nods, encouraging me to continue.

"But now," I go on, "I feel like I'm not runnin' anymore. Like I'm finally facing everything head-on. And it's terrifyin', but it also feels... right. Yer part of that, I think."

"You're stronger than you give yourself credit for, Aggie," Jolt says, his voice filled with admiration. "You've been through hell, but you're still standing. Still fighting."

I feel a lump form in my throat at his words. "We both have."

He squeezes my hand, a gesture that's become so familiar, so comforting. "Yeah, we have. And we'll keep fighting, together."

As we drive deeper into Billings, familiar landmarks start to appear.

The old diner where I used to grab milkshakes after school, the park where I scraped my knees learning to ride a bike, the corner where I had my first kiss.

Each sight brings a flood of memories, both good and bad.

"It's strange," I muse, "how a place can feel so familiar and so foreign at the same time."

Jolt glances at me, concern etched on his face. "You okay?"

I nod, offering him a small smile. "Yeah, just... processing, I guess. It's a lot to take in."

"I can imagine," he says softly. "Must be weird, coming back after everything that's happened."

"Weird doesn't even begin to cover it," I admit with a wry chuckle. "Part of me feels like that girl who left for Vegas, all wide-eyed and naive. And part of me feels like... like I've lived a lifetime since then."

Jolt's hand finds mine again, his touch grounding me. "You have, in a way. You've

been through things that change a person. But you're still you, Aggie. Still, that fierce, beautiful woman I fell for."

His words make my heart skip a beat, and I feel a blush creeping up my cheeks. "Careful there, Jolt. You're starting to sound downright sappy."

He grins, a rare sight that never fails to take my breath away. "Don't tell anyone. I've got a reputation to maintain."

We both crack up into laughter, but I see something I've been dreaming of for the last couple of hours.

The familiar red cowboy hat of Arby's looms ahead, and my stomach growls on cue.

I glance over at Jolt, taking him in as he navigates the SUV into the drive-thru lane.

His jaw is set, eyes focused on the road, but there's a softness to his expression that wasn't there when we first met.

It makes my heart flutter.

Jolt catches me looking and quirks an eyebrow.

"What?" he asks, a hint of nervousness in his voice.

I can't help but laugh.

This big, bad biker, nervous because I'm looking at him?

It's adorable.

"Nothing," I say, smiling. "I'm just... happy."

The word feels strange on my tongue, but it's true.

Despite everything we've been through, despite the lingering fear and uncertainty, I am happy.

Here, with Jolt, on our way back to my hometown.

Jolt stares at me for a long moment, his deep green eyes searching mine.

I know that look—it's a mix of desire, wonder, and something deeper that neither of us is quite ready to name yet. The intensity of it makes my breath catch in my throat.

A crackling voice breaks the moment. "Welcome to Arby's, how can I help you?"

Jolt clears his throat and leans out the window. "Yeah, we'll take three Classic Roast Beef sandwiches, three large curly fries, and..." He pauses, glancing back at me. "What do you want to drink, babe?"

"Dr. Pepper," I reply, touched that he remembered my favorite.

"Two large Dr. Peppers and a large Sprite," Jolt finishes, adding Sienna's usual order without missing a beat.

As we wait for our food, I can't help but marvel at how easily Jolt has slipped into this role—my partner, my protector.

It should feel strange, this whirlwind romance born from lust and desire.

But somehow, it just feels right.

Jolt pulls up to the next window, fishing out his wallet and pays the cashier.

We inch forward to the final window, the smell of roast beef and curly fries wafting through the air.

Jolt turns to me, his expression softening.

"I'm glad you're happy, Aggie," he says, his voice low and gravelly. "But there's a part of me that wants to be back in Vegas, making that fucker pay for what he did to you."

His words send a shiver down my spine, but I understand why he wants to hurt Trevor.

Hell, I want Trevor to hurt, but I need time away from that shite.

I reach out, placing my hand on his thigh and giving it a gentle squeeze.

"I'm glad you're not," I murmur, my accent more pronounced with emotion. "That you're here with me instead, enjoying our couple of weeks in Montana."

Jolt's eyes darken at my touch, his muscles tensing beneath my fingers.

"Aggie," he breathes, and I can hear the struggle in his voice. "You don't know what it does to me, seeing those bruises on your face, that cut on your body. I want to tear him apart with my bare hands."

I swallow hard, my emerald eyes meeting his. "I know, Jolt. But that's not what I need right now. I need you here, with me. Safe."

He nods, covering my hand with his own. "I'm not going anywhere, Ghost. You're my

ol' lady now, remember?"

The term makes me smile, despite the seriousness of the moment. "Aye, and you're my ol' man. God help us both."

Jolt's deep, dark green eyes crinkle at the corners as he laughs, the sound warming me from the inside out.

"God help us indeed," he says, his thumb tracing circles on the back of my hand. "But I wouldn't have it any other way."

I lean back in my seat, the tension easing from my shoulders. "So, tell me more about this brother of yours. Victor, right? The one in the Deathstalkers MC?"

We've spent the last couple of days talking about him more than me.

I came to the realization I barely knew anything about his life, and yet he knew almost everything about mine.

Jolt's expression softens. "Yeah, Vic. He's a few years older than me, always been the responsible one. Joined the Marines straight out of high school."

"And you didn't fancy following in his footsteps?" I ask, genuinely curious.

He shakes his head, a wry smile playing on his lips. "Nah, military life wasn't for me. But the brotherhood? The sense of belonging? That's what drew me to the Reapers Rejects."

I nod, understanding all too well the pull of club life. "It's in your blood now, isn't it?"

"Just like it's in yours," he says, giving my hand a squeeze.

The miles roll by and it's not long before I realize we're almost there.

He nods, his eyes scanning the road ahead. "You more nervous or excited about bein' back home?"

I consider his question for a moment. "A wee bit more nervous," I admit. "It's been a while since I've been home."

As we approach the clubhouse grounds, I spot a familiar figure standing guard.

Ripper, with his medium-brown hair and stubbled jawline, gives us a nod as we pull up.

"Welcome back, princess," he calls out, his cocky grin firmly in place. "Jolt, you better be treatin' our girl right."

Jolt rolls down the window, matching Ripper's grin. "You know it, brother. Wouldn't dream of doing otherwise."

Ripper waves us through, and Jolt steers the SUV toward Kade's old house.

As we come to a stop, I turn in my seat to wake Sienna.

"Hey, sleepyhead," I say, gently shaking her shoulder. "We're here."

Sienna stirs, blinking owlishly. "What's goin' on?" she mumbles, her voice thick with sleep.

"We're at the clubhouse," I explain, watching as realization dawns on her face.

Meanwhile, Jolt's already out of the car, hauling our luggage toward the house.

I can't help but admire the way he jumps to do any sort of manly thing.

As I watch him, a thought occurs to me.

My parents will probably expect me to stay with them while I'm here.

It's the logical thing, after all.

But I don't think I'm going to stay in my childhood home.

I'd much rather be cozied up with Jolt, safe in his arms, feeling protected from the entire world.

I want the stolen moments, the quiet nights, the chance to explore this new relationship without the weight of my family's expectations.

But how do I tell my parents that?

How do I explain that I'd rather have alone time with the man who's quickly becoming my everything?

A prospect, no less.

God, I know my da is going to be thrilled at that.

I take a deep breath, calming myself for the conversations to come.

Whatever happens, I know one thing for certain: these next two weeks are going to be anything but boring.

I slip out of the SUV, stretching my legs as Jolt emerges from the house.

His dark green eyes lock onto mine, a mischievous glint dancing in them.

"Ready to cut loose, darlin'?" he asks, his voice a low rumble that sends shivers down my spine.

I nod, feeling a surge of excitement. "Absolutely. Let's head down to the clubhouse. I could use a damn drink."

He chuckles. "As could I."

As we start walking, my phone vibrates in my pocket. I fish it out, seeing a text from Mum:

Where are you, love?

I can practically hear her thick accent through the screen.

It's much worse than mine.

I remember my childhood friends not being able to understand a lick of what she was saying growing up.

My fingers fly over the keys as I reply:

Walking to the clubhouse now. See you in a minute.

Jolt's arm snakes around my waist as we walk, his warmth a comforting presence against the cool Montana air.

Sienna trails behind us, still looking a bit groggy.

I call over my shoulder, unable to keep the teasing note out of my voice. "You okay back there, Sleeping Beauty?"

She mumbles something that sounds suspiciously like "Fuck off," making me laugh.

As we approach the clubhouse, my heart starts to race.

It's been a few months since I've been home, since I've seen my family.

Will they notice the changes in me?

Will they approve of Jolt?

I sure fucking hope so.

Suddenly, the clubhouse door flies open with a bang.

Mum comes charging out like a force of nature, her face a mix of joy and worry.

"Aggie!" she cries, her arms opening wide.

Before I can even react, she's on me, wrapping me in a fierce hug that nearly knocks the wind out of me.

The familiar scent of her perfume—a mix of lavender and vanilla—envelops me, and suddenly, I'm home.

"Oh, my wee lassie," she murmurs into my hair, her accent thicker with emotion. "I've missed you so much."

I feel tears pricking at the corners of my eyes as I hug her back just as tightly.

"Missed you too, Mum," I whisper, my voice cracking slightly.

As we embrace, I can feel Jolt watching us, giving us space but staying close.

I'm hit with a wave of gratitude—for him, for my mum, for this moment.

After everything that's happened, I'm finally surrounded by people I know who love me unconditionally.

When Mum finally pulls back, her eyes are glistening.

She cups my face in her hands, studying me intently. "Let me look at you, sweetheart. Are you all right? You look tired."

I laugh, a bit shakily. "I'm fine, Mum. Just been a long trip."

Her gaze shifts to Jolt, then back to me, a question in her eyes.

And I realize she notices the bruising on my face.

Surely, she doesn't think Jolt did this to me.

I take a deep breath, knowing the introductions—and tiresome explanations—are about to begin.

The clubhouse door flies open again, and I turn to see my father barreling out, his face a storm of emotions.

His eyes lock onto me, widening as he takes in the bruises on my face and the angry red line peeking out from my collar.

For a split second, I see a flash of pain in his eyes, quickly replaced by fury.

Before I can even open my mouth to explain, Da's gaze snaps to Jolt.

In a blur of motion, he lunges forward, grabbing Jolt by the shirt and slamming him to the ground.

Grim roars with all of his might, face inches from Jolt's. "You fuckin' do this to her?!"

My heart leaps into my throat. "Da, no!"

I cry out, but Jolt doesn't even flinch.

Instead, he meets my Da's rage-filled eyes with an odd calm that sends a shiver down my spine.

"Fuck no," Jolt growls, his voice low and deadly. "I'm gonna kill the bastard who put his hands on 'er."

The intensity in Jolt's voice makes my breath catch.

I've never heard him sound so... dangerous.

It should probably scare me, but instead, I feel a rush of heat course through my body.

Da's grip on Jolt's shirt loosens slightly, confusion replacing some of the anger on his face.

He pulls back, eyeing Jolt warily.

"Why would you wanna kill him? Huh?" His eyes narrow suspiciously. "What's my daughter to you, prospect?"

I hold my breath, waiting for Jolt's response.

Part of me wants to jump in, to explain everything myself, but I know this is a moment Jolt needs to handle on his own.

Jolt meets Da's gaze unflinchingly. "She's my ol' lady, sir," he says, his voice firm but respectful. "That's what your daughter is to me."

My heart swells at his words, at the way he claims me without hesitation.

But as I watch my father's face darken again, I can't help but wonder if we've just jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

Da's eyes lock onto mine, his expression a mixture of disbelief and fury.

I can almost see the gears turning in his head, trying to process this unexpected information.

"It's true, Daddy," I say, my voice steady despite the nerves fluttering in my stomach. "Jolt's my ol' man."

The words hang in the air between us, causing the tension to only become thicker.

I watch as his face cycles through a range of emotions—shock, anger, confusion, and finally, a kind of resigned frustration.

Da shakes his head, running a hand through his graying hair. "What the fuck happened down there? I wanted you close to the club for safety reasons, not to get in

a fuckin' relationship."

I open my mouth to explain, but Jolt beats me to it.

He steps forward, placing himself slightly in front of me in a protective stance that doesn't go unnoticed by my father.

"Well, sir," Jolt begins, his tone respectful but firm, "it just sort of happened."

I can't help but snort at the understatement.

'Just sort of happened' doesn't quite cover the shite we've been through.

Da's eyes narrow, his lips curling into a sarcastic smirk.

"Yeah," he drawls, "like you just happened to fall for my beautiful daughter, hmm?"

I tense, ready to jump to Jolt's defense, but once again, he surprises me.

Jolt nods, his deep green eyes never leaving Da's face.

"Yes, sir," he says simply. "That's exactly what happened."

The sincerity in his voice makes my heart skip a beat.

I reach out, intertwining my fingers with his, silently offering my support.

Jolt squeezes my hand gently, and I feel like things are going to turn out okay.

As I stand there, caught between the two most important men in my life, I can't help but think how surreal this all is.

A week ago, I was just a college student trying to balance classes and club life.

Now, I'm introducing my ol' man to the man who raised me, sporting bruises from a fight I barely escaped.

Life in the MC world, I suppose.

There's never a dull moment.

A shiver runs through the air, and I hear Sienna's teeth chattering behind us.

"Um, guys," she pipes up, her voice trembling, "can we head inside so I don't freeze my ass off?"

I turn to look at her, feeling a pang of guilt.

In the drama of our reunion, I'd almost forgotten about my friend standing out here in the chilly Montana air.

"Aye, of course. Sorry, love."

Da nods, his stern expression softening slightly. "Right, let's get you all inside. We can continue this... discussion.. where we won't freeze our asses off."

As we move toward the clubhouse, Jolt's arm snakes around my waist, pulling me close.

The heat of his body seeps through my clothes, and I lean into him instinctively.

His touch grounds me, reminding me that no matter what chaos is going on around us, we're in this together.

"You okay?" he murmurs, his lips brushing against my ear.

I nod, offering him a small smile.

"Never better," I whisper back, and I mean it.

As we walk, I can feel Jolt relax beside me.

His stride becomes more confident, his grip on my waist more assured.

It's as if being here, in this place that's so much a part of me, is making him feel more secure in his place by my side.

This man, this beautiful, brave man, chose me.

And I chose him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Jolt

The crackling fireplace casts a warm glow across the living room of Kade's old house, which is where all of the guests coming to Montana stay.

Its flames dance in rhythm with the twinkling lights on the Christmas tree.

I lean back on the couch, my arm draped casually around Aggie's shoulders as she nestles against me.

Her presence is a soothing balm, easing the tension that's been building in my muscles all day.

"Ye know, Jack, this is nice. Just us, away from all the chaos."

I nod, running my fingers through her blonde hair.

It's so different from her natural red, but I love how it represents her rebellion, her strength.

"Yeah, it is. Though I gotta admit, I'm surprised you're not bouncing off the walls with excitement. It's Christmas Eve, after all."

Aggie shifts slightly, and I catch a glimpse of those striking emerald eyes.

There's something there, a flicker of... what?

Sadness?

Anxiety?

It's gone before I can place it.

"Ah, well," she says, forcing a smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes, "I'm just enjoyin' the peace while it lasts. Ye know how wild it gets with my family."

I chuckle, but inside, my mind is racing.

Something's off with her, has been for a while now.

Is it the holidays?

Being back in Montana?

Or is it from what she went through back in Vegas?

I want to ask, to pry open whatever's troubling her, but I hold back.

Aggie's tough as nails, a firecracker who can handle herself.

If she wants to talk, she will.

Instead, I pull her closer, planting a kiss on the top of her head.

"Well, I'm glad I get you all to myself for now. Though I gotta say, I'm a little nervous about tomorrow. Your family's... intense."

Aggie laughs, a genuine sound that eases some of my worry. "Aye, that they are. But they'll love ye, Jack. Just be yerself. Hell, Conrad will adore you. He's vastly outnumbered."

Conrad, her little brother.

I think Aggie said he's about six now.

"You mean the charming, devastatingly handsome biker?" I wiggle my eyebrows at her, earning me a playful swat on the chest.

"I mean the sweet, caring man I fell in love with," she says softly, her fingers tracing the tribal tattoos on my arm.

Her words warm me more than the fire ever could.

I cup her face gently, marveling at how this fierce, independent woman has captured my heart so completely. "I love you too, Aggie. More than I ever thought possible. I love you enough to tell something's bothering you."

Aggie's gaze meets mine, and I see a flicker of something. "Aye, just... rememberin', I suppose."

I wait, giving her space to continue if she wants.

After a moment, she does.

"Christmas Eve is always a weird day for me. Tomorrow is one of the days I remember my biological father beating my mother. I think I remember because of the bloody holiday, and it's tainted Christmas for me ever since."

My gut clenches at her words. I knew Aggie had a rough past, but hearing her say it so plainly.

"Jesus, Aggie," I breathe, pulling her closer. "I'm so sorry."

She shakes her head, blonde hair brushing against my chest. "Don't be. It's in the past."

But I can feel the tension in her body, hear the slight tremor in her voice.

This isn't just in the past for her.

It's still raw, still haunting her.

I run my fingers through her hair, wishing I could erase those memories for her. "You don't have to pretend it doesn't affect you, Ghost. Not with me."

Aggie's emerald eyes meet mine, a storm of emotions swirling in their depths.

"I know," she whispers. "It's just... I've spent so long trying to be strong, to not let it define me."

"Being strong doesn't mean you can't hurt," I tell her softly. "And talking about it doesn't make you weak."

She's quiet for a moment, her fingers absently tracing patterns on my chest.

When she speaks again, her voice is low, tinged with a pain that makes my heart ache.

"I can still hear her screams sometimes. Still see the blood on her face. He was like a

monster, Jack. And I was too small, too weak to do anything."

I tighten my arms around her, wishing I could shield her from those memories. "You were a child, Aggie. It wasn't your job to protect her."

"I know that now," she says, her Scottish lilt more pronounced with emotion. "But back then... it felt like I'd failed her somehow."

I press a kiss to her forehead, struggling to find the right words.

How do you comfort someone who's been through something so horrific?

"You survived," I finally say. "You and your mom both. That's not failing. That's strength."

Aggie nods against my chest, her voice slightly muffled. "Aye, we did. Mum was a warrior through it all. She packed us up one night, just the clothes on our backs, and we fled here to Montana."

I listen intently as she continues, her words painting a vivid picture of their escape and new beginning.

"We stayed with my grandparents at first. Mum was so broken, but she was determined to give us a better life. That's when she met Grim."

A small smile tugs at her lips, softening the hard edges of her memories. "He was like no one she'd ever known. Rough around the edges, sure, but with a heart of gold. He treated her like she hung the moon and stars."

I can't help but grin, thinking of the gruff biker who's become such an important part of Aggie's life. "Sounds like quite the love story."

"It was," Aggie agrees, her eyes brightening. "Still is, really. They fell hard and fast, and the rest, as they say, is history."

I brush a strand of her hair behind her ear. "You're lucky to have had a step-father like Grim," I say softly.

Aggie sits up suddenly. "He might formally be called my step-father," she says, her Scottish lilt more pronounced, "but Grim is my da, through and through. He's always been there for me, Davina, Sorcha, and then Mum and him had Conrad."

The intensity of her words catches me off guard, but I understand.

Family isn't always about blood.

Sometimes it's about who shows up, who stays, who loves you unconditionally.

And it's clear that Grim has done all of that and more for Aggie and her siblings.

A sharp knock at the door breaks the moment.

I squeeze Aggie's hand before standing up, my muscles screaming slightly after sitting for so long.

As I make my way to the door, I can't help but wonder who'd be dropping by on Christmas Eve.

I swing the door open, and for a second, I'm hit with a strong sense of déjà vu.

The girl standing there could be Aggie's twin, except for the different eye and hair color.

It takes me a moment to place her—Davina, Aggie's sister.

I've met so many people since arriving in Montana that faces are starting to blur.

"Davina, come on in," I say, stepping aside to let her enter.

She cocks an eyebrow at me, her lips curving into a smirk. "Geeze, took ye long enough," she sasses, brushing past me.

I can't help but chuckle internally.

That attitude is definitely genetic.

As Davina saunters into the living room, I'm struck again by how much she and Aggie resemble each other.

Same facial structure, same almond shaped eyes.

The main difference is Davina's dark hair, a stark contrast to Aggie's bottle blonde.

Davina plops down on the couch next to Aggie, making herself right at home. "So, what we drinkin'?" she asks, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

Aggie shoots her sister a look that could curdle milk. "We're not drinkin' anything," she says firmly. "I'm not about to get in a load of shite for you."

Davina's laugh is sharp and quick. "Aw, come on. You've gone soft, sis."

I can't let that slide. "Nothing about your sister is soft," I interject, my voice low and serious. "She's just smarter than she was when she left."

Davina's eyes narrow, a dangerous glint flashing across them.

She leans forward, her voice dripping with venom. "If she was that much smarter, she wouldn't have gotten roughed up."

The words hit like a physical blow.

I feel the air leave the room, tension crackling like electricity.

My muscles tense, ready to intervene, but Aggie moves faster than I can react.

Crack!

The sound of flesh meeting flesh echoes through the room.

Aggie's hand connects with Davina's cheek, leaving an angry red mark.

I've never seen Aggie move so quickly, her entire body radiating fury.

"Shut yer fuckin' face, you imbecile," Aggie snarls, her accent thickening with rage. "Yer protected here and don't know what it's like out in the real world. I was lucky to get away, lucky enough to not wait on anyone to come and save me, or to even hope they would."

Her eyes, usually warm emerald pools, have turned to hard, glittering stones.

She leans in close to Davina, her voice dropping to a deadly whisper. "If I ever hear you say some dumb shite like that again, I will hold your head below water until I almost kill ye."

My heart pounds in my chest.

This is a side of Aggie I've never seen before—raw, unfiltered rage born from deep trauma.

It's terrifying and heartbreaking all at once.

I want to reach out, to comfort her, but I know this is a moment she needs to own.

Davina's eyes widen for a split second, a flicker of fear crossing her face.

Then, to my utter shock, she bursts into laughter.

Her whole body shakes with it, the sound filling the room.

"God, you forgot how we joked around, didn't ye?" Davina gasps between fits of giggles, rubbing her reddened cheek.

Aggie freezes, her anger evaporating like mist in the sun.

She shakes her head, covering her face with both hands.

For a heart-stopping moment, I think she might be crying.

But then I hear it—a muffled snort, followed by full-blown laughter.

Jesus fucking Christ.

These two are absolutely insane.

I watch, dumbfounded, as Aggie's shoulders shake.

She drops her hands, revealing eyes bright with tears of laughter instead of rage. "Ye

bloody idiot," she wheezes, playfully shoving her sister's shoulder. "I coulda killed ye!"

"Nah." Davina grins. "Ye love me too much. Besides, someone's gotta keep ye on yer toes."

I run a hand through my hair, trying to process the emotional whiplash of the last few minutes.

These Scottish women are a whole different breed of crazy.

But watching Aggie now, her face relaxed and open in a way I rarely see, I can't help but feel a rush of affection.

"You two are going to give me a damn heart attack," I mutter, shaking my head.

Davina's gaze shifts to me, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Maybe so, but I'm sure yer gonna get used to it. Gotta know, though, is yer family not coming for Christmas?"

I shake my head, feeling a pang of loneliness I hadn't expected. "Nah, my brother's in Portland. Haven't seen him in a while."

The words taste bitter on my tongue.

Victor and I used to be close, but life has a way of pulling people apart.

I push down the ache, plastering on my usual carefree grin.

Davina presses, arching an eyebrow. "Ye sure about that?"

"Course I'm sure," I reply, confusion creeping in. What's she playing at? "Pretty hard to miss a six-foot-four biker showing up on your doorstep."

Just as I'm about to ask what the hell she's on about, a familiar voice cuts through the room like a lightning bolt.

"Kid helped me pull a damn good surprise, huh?"

My heart stops. That voice. It can't be. I whirl around, hardly daring to believe it.

There he is, larger than life, my big brother Victor—Vader to the Deathstalkers MC—standing in the doorway with that trademark smirk of his.

My mind short-circuits, unable to process the sight.

"This can't fuckin' be real," I breathe, closing the distance between us in three long strides.

I pull him into a bear hug.

Victor's deep chuckle rumbles through his chest. "It's real, little brother. Flesh and blood, right here."

I step back, drinking in the sight of him.

Same dark blond hair, same green eyes that run in our family.

But there are new lines around his eyes, a few more scars.

Time hasn't stood still for either of us.

"How long you here for?" I ask, my voice rough with emotion I'm struggling to contain.

"Few days," Victor replies, clapping me on the shoulder. "Gotta head back home after that. But I'm all yours 'til then."

I shake my head, still reeling. "How the fuck did this happen? I mean, not that I'm complaining, but?—"

Victor's eyes slide past me, settling on something—or someone—behind me.

His lips quirk up in a knowing smile. "Your ol' lady made a call. Got me out here as a Christmas gift to you."

I turn, following his gaze to Aggie.

She's watching us with a soft smile, her eyes shining.

And suddenly, everything clicks into place.

My heart swells, threatening to burst right out of my chest.

In two quick strides, I'm across the room.

I scoop Aggie up into my arms, her feet leaving the ground as I crush her to me.

Her surprised laugh is muffled against my chest, and I can feel her smile against my neck.

I capture her lips in a deep, passionate kiss, pouring every ounce of love and gratitude I'm feeling into it.

She responds eagerly, her fingers threading through my hair, holding me close.

When we finally break apart, both breathless, I rest my forehead against hers. "God, you have no idea how much I love you," I murmur, my voice thick with emotion.

Aggie's emerald eyes are glistening with unshed tears, and I can see the depth of her feelings reflected back at me. "I love you too. Merry Christmas, Jack."

I set her down gently, but keep her close, one arm wrapped around her waist.

My mind is reeling, trying to process everything.

How long has she been planning this?

"You sneaky little minx," I tease, unable to keep the grin off my face. "How'd you pull this off without me catching on?"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Aggie

The twinkling lights on the Christmas tree cast a warm glow across the living room, reflecting off the shiny paper and ribbons strewn about.

I lean back against the couch, soaking in the comforting chaos of wrapping paper carnage and excited chatter.

Jolt's arm is around my shoulders as he sits on the floor beside me, his back against the couch.

Conrad's high-pitched voice cuts through the noise as he holds up a long box, his gap-toothed grin infectious. "Aggie, look! Santa brought me a telescope!"

I can't help but smile back at my little brother's enthusiasm. "That's brilliant, Con! You'll be spotting aliens in no time."

Davina rolls her eyes good-naturedly from her perch on the armchair. "Please don't encourage him. You know he'll be waking us all up at 3 AM to go stargazing."

Pushing my sister's button is on my to-do list. "Ach, let the lad have his fun. Besides, you're just jealous Santa didn't bring you anything as cool."

My seventeen-year-old sister huffs dramatically, but I catch the hint of a smile playing at her lips. "As if. My new laptop is way cooler than some glorified

binoculars."

Sorcha pipes up from her spot on the floor, surrounded by a pile of art supplies. "I think Con's telescope is neat! Can I use it too?"

"Course you can, squirt." Conrad puffs out his chest like a little emperor bestowing favors.

Jolt's chest rumbles with silent laughter against my side.

His thumb traces lazy circles on my arm, and I find myself leaning into his warmth.

It's strange how natural this feels—him here with my family, as if he's always belonged.

"What do you think, Jolt?" I ask, tilting my head to look up at him. "Reckon we've got some budding astronomers on our hands?"

His deep green eyes crinkle at the corners as he grins. "Definitely. Though I'd keep an eye on that one." He nods toward Conrad, who's now dramatically reenacting some space battle with his telescope. "Pretty sure he's plotting interplanetary domination."

I snort, picturing my six-year-old brother as some sort of pint-sized evil overlord. "Wouldn't put it past him. The wee terror's too clever for his own good sometimes."

Jolt's arm tightens around me briefly, and I catch a flicker of something in his expression—fondness, maybe—before he schools his features back into his usual easy-going smile.

"Speaking of clever," he says, raising his voice slightly to be heard over the ongoing gift-opening frenzy, "Davina, how's that college application process going? Aggie

mentioned you were looking at some programs."

Davina perks up, clearly pleased to be included in the 'adult' conversation. "It's going well, actually! I've got my eye on a few programs, but I haven't decided what I want to do yet."

It's a little hard to believe Davina's going to be graduating high school next year.

Sorcha rushes over, plopping herself unceremoniously onto my lap.

At ten, she's really getting too big for this, but I wouldn't dream of pushing her away.

"Aggie," she says seriously, her brow furrowed in concentration. "I need your expert opinion."

I raise an eyebrow, fighting back a grin. "Oh? And what might you need my expertise on, mo chridhe?"

She holds up two sketchbooks—one with a vibrant floral design, the other adorned with fantastical creatures. "Which one should I use for my new project? It's very important."

I pretend to consider deeply, tapping my chin in mock thoughtfulness. "Hmm, a truly weighty decision. What do you think, Jolt? Any artistic insights to share?"

He leans in. "Well, as someone with absolutely zero artistic talent, I'd say... flip a coin?"

Sorcha giggles. "You're silly. I can't leave it up to chance! This is serious business."

"Ah, of course. My apologies," Jolt says solemnly, though I can see the corners of his

mouth twitching. "In that case, I vote for the magical beasties. Can't go wrong with a dragon or two, right?"

Sorcha considers this, then nods decisively. "Good point. Dragons it is!"

She hops off my lap and scampers back to her pile of art supplies, already lost in her own world of creation.

I watch her go, a bittersweet ache blooming in my chest.

It hits me suddenly how much I've missed—how much I'll continue to miss—being away at university.

Sure, Vegas has its excitements, but nothing quite compares to the comfort of home, of family.

Jolt must sense the shift in my mood because he gives my shoulder a gentle squeeze.

"You okay?" he asks softly, his voice pitched low enough that only I can hear.

I nod, not quite trusting my voice.

He doesn't push, just pulls me a little closer, a silent offering of support.

It's moments like these that make me wonder how I ever thought this thing between us was just a bit of fun.

There's a depth to Jolt that constantly surprises me, hidden beneath his easy going exterior.

"I'm glad you're here," I finally manage, my voice barely above a whisper.

His answering smile is soft, genuine in a way that makes my heart stutter. "Wouldn't want to be anywhere else, Aggie-girl."

The moment is broken by a shriek of laughter from Conrad, who's now wielding his telescope like a sword, chasing a giggling Sorchia around the room.

"Oi! Watch where you're swinging that thing!" I call out, more amused than actually concerned. "You'll take someone's eye out!"

Conrad calls back, not sounding sorry in the slightest. "Sorry, Aggie!"

Davina rolls her eyes again—I swear, one of these days they're going to get stuck that way—and goes back to tapping away at her new laptop.

The familiarity of it all washes over me: the chaos, the constant low-level bickering undercut with pure love.

It's home, in all its messy, wonderful glory.

I catch my Mum's eye from across the room where she's perched on Da's lap in his favorite armchair.

She gives me a knowing look, her gaze flickering between me and Jolt.

I feel my cheeks heat up, but I don't look away.

There's approval in her eyes, and maybe a hint of relief.

I know she worries about me, off in Vegas on my own.

Well, not entirely on my own anymore, I suppose.

"So, Jolt." Da's gruff voice carries easily over the commotion surrounding us. "How do you feel like prospecting is working out for ya?"

I tense slightly, unsure how this conversation will go.

Da's part of the Montana charter, sure, but Jolt's forging his own path in Vegas.

Jolt, to his credit, doesn't miss a beat. "It's been an experience, sir. Challenging, but rewarding. I've learned a lot."

Da grunts noncommittally. "I bet. Vegas is a different beast altogether from what we deal with up here."

"That it is," Jolt agrees easily. "But at its core, it's about family, right? Looking out for your brothers, protecting what's yours. That's universal."

I watch Da carefully, seeing the way his eyes narrow slightly as he considers Jolt's words.

There's a tense moment where I'm not sure which way this is going to go, and then—Da nods, a small smile breaking through his usual stoic expression.

"Well said. You've got a good head on your shoulders."

Mum shouts at Conrad and Sorcha, "Get back in here you two! Plenty of other gifts to be opened, don't ya think?"

Conrad doesn't have to be told twice.

He rushes back in and slides on the hardwood floor like a rocker playing at Madison Square Garden.

Sorcha comes back too, plopping down quietly.

Conrad begins ripping away at more paper and before long he's squealing, eyes wide with excitement.

"Oh my gosh, it's the new Minecraft Lego set! Santa is the freaking best!"

I glance over at Jolt and realize he's watching me, those deep green eyes of his intense and searching.

"What?" I ask, suddenly self-conscious. "Do I have hot chocolate on my face or something?"

Jolt shakes his head, a slow smile spreading across his face. "No, nothing like that. You just... you look beautiful, Aggie. Radiant."

I roll my eyes, trying to ignore the flutter in my chest.

"Oh, stop it. You don't need to butter me up, you know. You've already got me."

"I'm not toying with you," Jolt says, his voice low and serious.

He reaches up, tucking a stray strand of my hair behind my ear. "I mean it. Seeing you this happy... it's something else. You're glowing."

I feel my cheeks heat up, and I'm grateful for the dim lighting that hopefully hides my blush.

"You're such a sap," I mutter, but there's no real bite to my words.

"Only for you, lass," he responds, his attempt at a Scottish accent making me snort

with laughter.

Davina calls out, her eyebrow arched, "Oi, what's so funny over there?"

"Nothing," I say quickly, at the same time Jolt answers, "Just admiring your sister's beauty."

Davina makes a gagging noise, but I can see the approval in her eyes.

It means more to me than I care to admit, knowing that my family seems to like Jolt.

As Conrad launches into an excited explanation of his new Lego set to anyone who'll listen, I lean back into Jolt's embrace, allowing myself to relax fully for what feels like the first time in weeks.

Tomorrow, we'll have to head back to Vegas, back to the club and all the complications life brings us.

I won't lie though, the crackling fire and the soft chatter of my family create a cocoon of warmth that I never want to leave.

As I watch Sorchia help Conrad piece together his new Lego set, I realize how much I've truly missed my family.

"Mum?" Sorchia's voice breaks through my thoughts.

She's looking at our mother with a furrowed brow. "Did you and Da get anything for Aggie for Christmas?"

I feel my cheeks heat up. "Sorchia, don't be?—"

But my mum's warm laugh cuts me off. "Of course we did, love. We've got presents for Aggie, and for Sienna too." Her eyes twinkle mischievously. "We even picked up a couple things for Jolt and Vader."

Jolt straightens beside me, surprise evident in his voice. "Ma'am, you didn't have to?—"

"Natalie, dear," my mum corrects him gently. "And of course we did. You're guests in our home, and more importantly," she gives me a knowing look, "you're important to our Aggie girl."

I duck my head, feeling a mix of embarrassment and overwhelming love for my family.

Jolt's arm tightens around me, and when I glance up at him, I see a softness in his eyes that makes my heart skip a beat.

"Thank you," he says, his voice rough with emotion. "That means a lot."

As my mum bustles off to retrieve the gifts, I lean in close to Jolt. "See? I told you they'd love you."

He chuckles, the sound rumbling through his chest. "I think it's more that they love you, Ghost I'm just along for the ride."

I punch his arm lightly. "Don't sell yourself short, Jack Sterling. You're pretty lovable when you want to be."

His eyebrows shoot up at the use of his real name. "Oh? And here I thought you only had eyes for Jolt, the mysterious biker."

I snort, unable to keep a straight face. "Please. You're about as mysterious as an open book."

"Ah, but I'm your open book," he quips, pressing a kiss to my temple.

As I watch my family, feeling Jolt's solid presence beside me, I know with absolute certainty that I've made the right choice.

Whatever challenges await us back in Vegas, we'll face them together.

For now, I just need to enjoy the time I have left here.

My mum returns, arms laden with brightly wrapped packages. "Here we are! A few little somethings for our guests."

Jolt and Vader immediately start protesting, their voices overlapping.

"You really didn't have to—" Jolt begins.

"This is too much, we can't accept—" Vader chimes in.

My mum waves them off with a laugh. "Nonsense, boys! You're practically family now. And it's Natalie, remember?"

I can't help but grin at the flustered looks on their faces.

"Mum's right," I say, squeezing Jolt's hand. "You're stuck with us now. Might as well get used to it."

Jolt's eyes meet mine, a mix of gratitude and something deeper swirling in their depths. "I think I can live with that," he murmurs.

As the gift-opening continues, I find myself lost in thought.

It's surreal, watching Jolt and Vader fit so seamlessly into my family's Christmas.

If someone had told me a few months ago that I'd be sitting here, cuddled up to a Reaper's Reject prospect, I'd have laughed in their face.

Yet here we are, and it feels... right.

The rustle of paper and excited exclamations fade into the background as the last of the presents are opened.

My mum stands, clapping her hands together. "All right, girls! Time to get cooking. We've got a proper Scottish feast to prepare."

I groan playfully. "I should've known there was a catch to all this holiday cheer."

Jolt chuckles, releasing me from his embrace. "Go on. Show me what those talented hands of yours can do in the kitchen."

I swat at him, heat rising to my cheeks. "Behave yourself, Sterling. There are children present."

As I follow my sisters and mum into the kitchen, the scent of spices and roasting meat already filling the air, I can't help but feel like I could do this every year.

"Aggie, can you start on the neeps and tatties?" my mum calls out, already elbow-deep in stuffing preparation.

I roll up my sleeves, ready to dive in. "On it!"

As we work, the kitchen reminds me of a commercial one.

Sienna's at the stove, stirring a pot of soup with intense concentration.

Davina's chopping vegetables with the precision of a surgeon, while little Sorchu carefully measures out ingredients for the cranachan.

"So," Sienna says, bumping her hip against mine as we work side by side. "Things seem pretty serious with you and Jolt now."

I feel a blush creeping up my neck. "Yeah, I guess they are."

"You guess?" She raises an eyebrow. "The man looks at you like you hung the moon. And don't think I haven't noticed how you light up around him."

I bite my lip, focusing intently on mashing the potatoes. "It's... complicated. But good. Really good."

Sienna's voice softens. "I'm happy for you, Aggie. You deserve someone who makes you smile like that."

I glance over my shoulder, catching a glimpse of Jolt through the kitchen doorway.

He's listening intently to something my da is saying, his brow furrowed in concentration.

As if sensing my gaze, he looks up, flashing me that crooked grin that never fails to make my heart race.

"Yeah," I murmur, turning back to my task with a smile. "I think I found a good one."

The scent of cinnamon and cloves fills the air as Sorcha and I work on the desserts.

My little sister's tongue pokes out slightly in concentration as she carefully finishes measuring out ingredients for the cranachan.

"Aggie," she whispers, eyes wide with excitement, "d'you think Jolt likes Scottish puddings?"

I can't help but chuckle. "I'm sure he'll love anything you make, wee one."

Hours pass in a flurry of chopping, stirring, and laughter.

Finally, Mum calls out, "All right, troops! Dinner's ready!"

We file into the dining room, a parade of steaming dishes in our hands.

Jolt jumps up to help, his fingers brushing mine as he takes a platter.

That simple touch sends a shiver down my spine.

"Looks amazing," he murmurs, his deep green eyes locked on mine.

As we settle around the table, the conversation flows as freely as the wine.

I can't help but notice how my da keeps engaging Jolt, asking about his work with the club, his plans for the future.

There's an approving glint in Da's eye that warms my heart.

Curious, I turn to my stepfather. "Da, have you known Vader for long? Before all this, I mean."

Grim nods, taking a sip of his whiskey. "Aye, the Deathstalkers have been allies of the club for years now. We've crossed paths a time or two."

Mum lets out a laugh, shaking her head. "It's a small world, isn't it? Who would have thought one of the Vegas prospects would be a Deathstalker's little brother?"

I feel Jolt tense slightly beside me, and I lay a hand on his thigh under the table.

He relaxes at my touch, flashing me a grateful smile.

"Small world indeed," I agree.

Da nods slowly, his weathered face creasing with a mix of pride and concern. "Mmm, it's not too shocking. The MC world's smaller than you might think, especially when it comes to allied clubs."

Suddenly, Conrad's eager voice pipes up from the end of the table.

"I wanna be a Reaper!" he exclaims, nearly bouncing in his seat with excitement.

The room falls silent for a moment, and I feel my breath catch in my throat.

I glance at Mum, seeing the flash of worry in her eyes before she masks it with a smile.

Da leans forward, his gaze softening as he looks at his young son. "I'm sure you will, little man," he says, his gruff voice gentler than I've heard it in a long time.

I know Da loves the club, but I also know the toll it's taken on him over the years.

The thought of Conrad following that same path sends a shiver down my spine.

It's hard to imagine my little brother dealing with all the same dangers Da and my boyfriend do.

"You've got plenty of time to decide what you want to be, sweetheart," I say, trying to keep my voice light. "Maybe you'll want to be a doctor or a teacher instead."

Conrad shakes his head vigorously. "Nuh-uh! I'm gonna be just like Da!"

I feel Jolt shift beside me, and when he speaks, his voice is low and thoughtful. "Being a Reaper is a big responsibility, little man. Your da's one of the best, but it takes a lot of work and dedication."

I squeeze Jolt's hand under the table, grateful for his attempt to temper Conrad's enthusiasm without shutting it down completely.

It's a delicate balance, one I'm still learning to navigate myself.

But Con's only six, and he's got plenty of time to make up his mind.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Jolt

The leather couch creaks as I shift my weight, the sound muffled by the distant thrum of Christmas music seeping through the closed door.

My brother, Vader, sits beside me, his massive frame dwarfing mine even though I consider myself to be a muscular bastard.

The dim light of the side room casts shadows across his face, highlighting the scars etched into his skin—a roadmap of the life we've chosen.

"Remember when we used to sneak beers from Dad's stash and hide out in the treehouse?" I ask, a grin tugging at the corner of my mouth. "Thought we were such badasses."

Vader chuckles, the sound rumbling deep in his chest. "Yeah, until you puked all over yourself and Mom grounded us for a month."

"Hey, I was thirteen! Cut me some slack." I punch his shoulder playfully, my knuckles connecting with solid muscle.

It's surreal, sitting here with my big brother after so much time apart.

The years have changed us both, hardened us in ways I never could have imagined back when we were just two punk kids dreaming of adventure.

Now here we are, both living a life weighed down by responsibility.

"So," Vader drawls, fixing me with that penetrating stare of his. "You gonna tell me what's really goin' on with you and that little firecracker out there?"

I snort, shaking my head. "Aggie? Man, I don't even know where to start."

He raises an eyebrow, waiting. "How about the beginning?"

I lean back, running a hand through my hair as I gather my thoughts. "It's... complicated. She's not like anyone I've ever met before, bro. Smart as hell, stubborn as a mule, and she takes exactly zero of my bullshit."

Vader chuckles,, a smirk playing on his lips. "Sounds like just what you need."

"Yeah, maybe," I admit, surprising myself with how easily the words come. "She challenges me, you know? Makes me want to be... I dunno, better or some shit."

Vader nods, his expression softening slightly. "That's good, little brother. Real good."

I find myself lost in thought, memories of Aggie flashing through my mind.

She's the best damn thing that's ever happened to me.

"You love her."

It's not a question.

I meet Vader's gaze, feeling suddenly exposed. "I... yeah. Yeah, I do."

The admission hangs in the air.

I don't think I've ever loved a woman before.

Have I felt something for them, sure, but it doesn't even compare to the way I feel for Aggie.

Vader studies me for a long moment before speaking again.

"You know what having an ol' lady really means, right?"

I nod, my jaw clenching. "It means I protect her. No matter what."

"With your life," Vader adds, his tone deadly serious. "You ready for that kind of responsibility?"

The question hits me like a punch to the gut.

Am I ready?

Can I really offer Aggie the kind of security she deserves, given the life I've chosen?

Doubts swirl in my mind, but beneath them all, I feel certain.

"I am," I say firmly. "She's worth it. All of it."

Vader's expression relaxes into a smile. "Good. 'Cause let me tell you, little brother, finding a woman who can handle our lifestyle? That's rare as hell. It doesn't hurt her father's in the club either. Means she's as strong as they come. You hold onto her tight."

I nod, feeling a swell of pride at my brother's approval. "Trust me, I plan to."

"So," Vader leans in conspiratorially, "you two gettin' busy yet or what?"

I burst out laughing, shoving him playfully. "Seriously? That's where you're going with this?"

He shrugs, unrepentant. "Hey, I'm just lookin' out for my baby bro. Gotta make sure you're... performin' adequately."

"Jesus Christ," I groan, covering my face with my hands. "I'm not having this conversation with you."

"Aw, come on," Vader teases. "You can tell your big brother. She rock your world or what?"

I peek through my fingers, seeing the mischievous glint in his eye.

Two can play at that game.

"Well," I drawl, leaning back with exaggerated nonchalance, "let's just say I've never had any complaints in that department."

Vader cracks up, slapping his knee. "That's my boy! Keepin' the Sterling family reputation alive and well."

I roll my eyes, but can't help grin at him.

It feels good to joke around like this, to reconnect with the way we were when we were kids.

"What about you?" I ask, turning the tables. "Any lucky ladies catching your eye back home?"

A shadow passes over Vader's face, so quickly I almost miss it.

"There might be someone," he admits grudgingly.

Now it's my turn to lean in, intrigued. "Oh yeah? Do tell, big brother."

Vader shifts uncomfortably, avoiding my gaze. "It's... complicated."

I prod gently. "Isn't it always?"

He sighs, running a hand over his close-cropped hair. "Her name's Sin. Got a couple kids, rough past. I'm tryin' to take it slow, you know? Be there for her without pushin' too hard."

I whistle low. "Vader the gentle giant, huh? Never thought I'd see the day."

He shoots me a warning glare, but there's no real heat behind it.

"She's been through some shit, all right? Needs someone to have her back, not another asshole trying to get in her pants."

I hold up my hands in surrender. "Hey, I get it. No judgment here, bro. You're a good man for being there for her."

Vader nods, his expression softening. "She's worth it. The kids too. They're good kids, just need a break, you know?"

"Yeah," I say softly, thinking of Aggie and her own struggles. "I know exactly what you mean."

It's strange, realizing how much we've both changed.

The reckless boys we once were seem like distant memories now, replaced by men willing to fight—and die—for the people we love.

"You ever think about settling down?" I ask suddenly, surprising myself with the question.

Vader considers for a moment before answering. "Used to think it wasn't in the cards for me. But now? With Sin and the kids? Yeah, I'm startin' to see the appeal."

I nod, understanding completely. "It's scary as hell, isn't it? Realizing you've got something—someone—to lose."

"Scariest fuckin' thing in the world," Vader agrees. "But also the best."

"Yeah," I murmur, thinking of Aggie's smile. "The best."

The music outside gets louder and the excited laughter from the club kids does with it.

Vader stands, stretching his massive frame.

"We should probably head back out there," he says. "Can't hide in here all night."

I nod, rising to join him.

As we move toward the door, Vader catches my arm, his expression serious once more.

"Listen, Jack," he says, using my given name. "I'm proud of you, little brother. You've grown up a lot."

A lump forms in my throat, emotion threatening to overwhelm me. "Thanks, Vic," I manage. "That... that means a lot."

He pulls me into a bone-crushing hug, and for a moment, I'm that scrawny kid again, looking up to my big brother like he hung the moon.

When we part, I see a similar sheen of moisture in Vader's eyes.

"Now," he says gruffly, clearing his throat. "Let's go join this party before they send a search party."

I laugh, following him out into the warm glow of the main room.

The clubhouse is a riot of color and noise, decorations everywhere and the scent of cinnamon and pine heavy in the air.

My eyes scan the crowd, instinctively seeking out my girl.

I spot her by the refreshment table, laughing with some of the other ol' ladies.

The sight of her hits me like a punch to the gut—fire and sass wrapped up in a package that takes my breath away.

As if sensing my gaze, she turns, her eyes meeting mine across the room.

The smile that spreads across her face is like the sun coming out from behind the clouds.

In that moment, I know with absolute certainty that I would burn the world to ash to keep her safe and happy.

I make my way toward her, weaving through the crowd.

As I reach her side, my arm slides around Aggie's waist, pulling her close as I breathe in the familiar scent of her shampoo.

The warmth of her body against mine settles something in my chest, a restlessness I didn't even realize was there until it eased.

"Hey, Ghost," I murmur, pressing a kiss to her temple. "Miss me?"

She leans into me, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Hardly noticed you were gone, Jolt. I've been having far too much fun without you."

I chuckle, loving her sass. "That so? Guess I'll have to step up my game then."

As we banter, I can't help but notice the bruises don't riddle her cheekbone anymore.

It's hard to believe these past couple of weeks have flown by.

"How's Vader?" Aggie asks, her voice pulling me from my thoughts.

I shrug, keeping my tone light. "Same old Vader. You know how he is."

She nods, but there's a knowing look in her eyes.

Sometimes I swear she can see right through me.

"Everything okay?" she probes gently.

"Yeah," I finally say. "Nothing for you to worry about."

Aggie raises an eyebrow, clearly not buying it. "Jolt, I'm not some delicate flower. I can handle whatever's going on."

"I'm just a little stressed about goin' back home, Ag."

She offers me a soft smile. "You and me both."

Aggie's mom calls her over, waving until we know she's not going to give up. "Aggie, c'mere!"

I chuckle, "You'd best go and do what she wants."

Aggie smiles brightly, "Look at ye, already picking up what Mum's personality is usually like."

As Aggie walks off, I head over to my brother, who's sipping on an eggnog along the wall. "There's something I need to talk to you about, get your input on. Don't know why I didn't before."

Vader nods, "Go on,"

"It's this fucking frat boy," I begin, my jaw clenching involuntarily. "He's got some kind of obsession with Aggie. At first, it was just annoying, you know? But then..."

I trail off, the memory of Aggie's bruised face flashing in my mind.

Vader leans forward, his posture tense.

"Keep going," he urges.

"He got pissed when he saw me around her. Then Aggie shut him down hard, and he

just... lost it." My fists clench at my sides. "Fucker lashed out at her after he was rejected. That's where the bruises came from."

Vader's eyes darken, a dangerous glint I recognize all too well. "What are you gonna do about it, little brother?"

I meet his gaze, feeling a cold fury settle in my gut. "What the fuck you think I'm gonna do about it?" I snarl, my voice low and intense. "I'm gonna make sure he doesn't ever put his damn hands on her again."

There's a moment of silence, and then Vader nods slowly. "Good, it's the only fuckin' thing you should be doin'."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Aggie

The sharp scent of fresh paint fills my nostrils as I dip the roller into the tray, saturating it with periwinkle blue.

Sienna and I have been at this for hours, transforming her bedroom in one of the "bonus" trailers from a drab beige to something more vibrant.

My arms ache from the repetitive motion, but there's a satisfaction in seeing the walls come alive with color.

I glance over at Sienna as she meticulously edges around the window frame. "You're sure you're happy you ditched the sorority?"

The question's been nagging at me since we got back to Vegas.

Sienna doesn't hesitate. "Yeah, absolutely. It was going to happen soon anyway."

I raise an eyebrow, pausing mid-stroke. "Oh? Why's that?"

She sets down her brush, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand and leaving a smear of blue. "You realize they didn't even notice we were gone, right? Like, none of them."

I can't keep the disbelief from my voice. "What?"

We stayed in Montana for a little over two weeks.

The idea that no one had noticed our absence is... well, it stings a bit.

Sienna nods, her expression filled with frustration. "I texted Elizabeth, and you know what she said? She told me I needed to make sure our room was clean before I left."

She rolls her eyes. "Like, the room was damn spotless, so..."

I let out a low whistle, shaking my head. "That's cold."

My mind races, thinking back to all the times we'd bent over backwards for the sorority, the endless social obligations, the pressure to maintain a certain image.

It was obviously all for nothing.

"Exactly," Sienna agrees, picking up her brush again. "It just made me realize how superficial it all was, you know? I mean, we were supposed to be sisters, but they couldn't even be bothered to check if we were okay."

I don't know why, but I'm not overly surprised. "I get it. It's like... we were trying so hard to fit in, we didn't stop to think if it was worth it."

I shake my head and laugh, the sound tinged with a hint of bitterness. "Maybe we shouldn't have been in a sorority in the first place, but I'm glad I got to experience it with you."

The words come out softer than I intended.

Sienna's brush pauses mid-stroke, and she turns to me with a warm smile. "You know what? The best thing that came out of that whole mess was our friendship."

Her words hit me right in the chest, and I feel a rush of affection for this girl who's become like a sister to me. "Aye, you're not wrong there," I agree, my emerald eyes meeting hers.

We fall into silence, the rhythmic swish of our brushes against the wall filling the air.

The periwinkle blue paint transforms the room, making it feel lighter, airier.

"You know," I muse, dipping my brush into the paint tray, "I never thought I'd be spending New Year's Eve working like this."

Sienna snorts. "What, you mean you didn't envision ringing in the new year covered in paint on a clubhouse trailer park?"

I laugh, the sound echoing off the freshly painted walls. "Och, of course I did. It was my lifelong dream, don't you know?"

As we continue to work, I can't help but reflect on how much has changed in such a short time.

From Montana to Vegas, from sorority girl to... whatever I am now.

Jolt's girl?

A biker chick?

I'm not sure I have a label for it yet.

"Hey, Sienna?" I say, breaking the silence.

"Yeah?"

"I'm glad we're here. Together."

The words feel inadequate, but I hope she understands what I'm trying to say.

Sienna's honestly turned into my best damn friend.

She nods, a soft smile playing on her lips. "Me too, Aggie. Me too."

We turn back to our work, the room slowly transforming around us.

As I paint, I can't help but wonder what other changes this new year will bring.

With Jolt in my life, I have a feeling it's going to be one hell of a ride.

Suddenly, the door flies open with a bang, causing me to jump and nearly topple off the stepladder.

My heart hammers in my chest as I whirl around, paintbrush raised like a weapon.

"Where's the fire?" I demand.

Doc stands in the doorway, eyes intense and urgent.

His athletic frame fills the entrance, and I can see the tension in his shoulders.

"Jolt needs you," he says, his voice clipped. "Now."

I blink, taken aback by his abruptness. "I'm sure he can give me thirty minutes," I reply, gesturing at the mess around us. "I have to help Sienna clean this bloody mess up."

Doc shakes his head, his jaw set. "No time. He needs you right now."

I feel a flare of irritation.

Who does he think he is, barging in here and making demands?

I may be Jolt's ol' lady, but I'm not at his beck and call.

"Listen here, Doc," I start, my voice taking on an edge. "I don't know what's got your knickers in a twist, but?—"

The distant rumble of a motorcycle cuts through my words, growing louder by the second.

I pause, my gut twisting with a mix of anticipation and unease.

What could be so urgent?

"Aggie, please," Doc says, his tone softening slightly. "It's important."

I open my mouth to argue further when heavy footsteps thunder up the stairs.

Jolt appears behind Doc, his dark hair tousled and his green eyes blazing with an intensity that makes my breath catch.

"For fuck's sake, Ghost, come on!" he barks, his gaze locking onto mine.

The urgency in his voice, the use of nickname—it hits me like a punch to the gut.

Something's wrong.

Really fucking wrong.

I hesitate for a split second, torn between my loyalty to Sienna and the pull I feel toward Jolt.

But the look in his eyes decides it for me.

"I'm sorry," I say to Sienna, already moving toward the door. "I'll be back as soon as I can to help clean up."

Sienna waves me off. "It's no big deal, Ag. I'll talk to ya later."

As I follow Jolt down the stairs, my mind races.

What could possibly be so urgent?

I rush after Jolt, my heart pounding in my chest.

The cool night air hits my face as we step outside, and I can smell the lingering scent of paint on my hands.

"Jolt, what's going on?" I ask, grabbing his arm. "You're scaring me."

He turns, his eyes softening for just a moment. "I can't explain here, Ghost. We need to go."

I bite my lip, frustration bubbling up inside me. "Can ye at least give me a hint? Is someone hurt?"

Jolt shakes his head, leading me to his bike. "I promise I'll tell you everything when we get there. Just trust me, okay?"

I want to argue, to demand answers, but something in his voice stops me.

I've never seen him this tense, this... worried.

It sends a chill down my spine.

"All right," I give in, swinging my leg over the bike behind him.

As I wrap my arms around his waist, I can feel the tension in his muscles.

The engine roars to life, and we're off, tearing through the streets of Vegas.

The wind whips through my hair, and I cling tighter to Jolt, my mind racing with possibilities.

What could be so urgent that he couldn't even spare a minute to explain?

We ride for what feels like hours, but my phone tells me it's only been about ten minutes when we pull up to a dilapidated metal building.

It looks abandoned, the kind of place you'd expect to see in a horror movie.

"Jolt," I start, but he's already off the bike, striding toward the entrance.

I follow him inside, my eyes struggling to adjust to the dim light.

The air is thick with dust and something else... something metallic that makes my stomach churn.

As we round a corner, I see a familiar figure.

Widow stands with his arms crossed, his usual stoic expression replaced by something darker.

His eyes are fixed on something in the middle of the room, and as I follow his gaze, I feel my blood run cold.

"Oh my God," I whisper, my hand flying to my mouth. "What have ye done?"

My eyes widen in shock as I take in the scene before me.

Strung up on meat hooks, his body wrapped in barbed wire, is Trevor.

Blood drips steadily from numerous wounds, creating a crimson pool on the concrete floor beneath him.

His face is barely recognizable, swollen and bruised beyond belief.

"Jolt," I whisper, my voice trembling. "What is this?"

He meets my gaze, his deep green eyes intense and unapologetic.

"This," he says, gesturing towards Trevor's battered form, "is what happens to anyone who threatens or dares to harm you, Ghost. I told you I'd do anything to keep you safe. I meant it."

I swallow hard, trying to process his words.

Part of me is terrified by the brutality before me, but another part... another part feels oddly protected, cared for.

"What..." I pause, licking my dry lips. "What did you do to him?"

Jolt's expression darkens. "What needed to be done."

I can't tear my eyes away from Trevor's limp form. "Is he... did you kill him?"

Widow speaks up from behind us, his voice gruff. "He ain't dead. Just passed out from the pain."

Jolt steps closer to me, his presence both comforting and intimidating. "Would it bother you if I had killed him, Ghost?"

I stare at him, searching his face.

The playful, charming man I've come to know is still there, but there's an edge to him now, a darkness I hadn't fully understood before.

I open my mouth to respond, but I realize... I don't know the answer.

I don't know what the fuck I'm supposed to say to him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Jolt

The silence in the room is deafening, broken only by the slow, steady drip of blood hitting the concrete floor.

Aggie stands motionless, her eyes fixed on Trevor's unconscious form.

The barbed wire wrapped around his body glints dully in the harsh overhead light, each point glistening with fresh crimson.

I watch her carefully, trying to gauge her reaction.

Her face is a mask, unreadable, but I can see the slight tremor in her hands, the rapid rise and fall of her chest as she struggles to keep her breathing steady.

"Ghost," I say softly, using the nickname that's become second nature. "You don't have to look at him."

She doesn't respond, doesn't even blink.

It's like she's trapped in some kind of trance, unable to tear her gaze away from the man who hurt her so badly.

I move closer, placing myself between her and Trevor.

My voice is low, intense, as I speak. "I'd do this a thousand times over for you, you know that? It doesn't matter who it is. Anyone who thinks they can touch what's mine, anyone who tries to hurt you—they're dead. No questions asked."

Aggie's eyes finally meet mine, a mix of emotions swirling in their emerald depths. "Jolt, I?—"

"It's my job to protect you," I continue, my hands coming up to cup her face. "But it's more than that. You're everything to me, Ghost. Everything. And this fucker? He never should have laid a finger on you."

A single tear escapes, rolling down her cheek.

I brush it away with my thumb, my touch gentle despite the violence that surrounds us.

"I don't know how to feel," Aggie whispers, her voice barely audible. "Part of me wants to run. But another part..."

I nod, understanding. "It's okay to feel conflicted. This isn't an easy thing."

She takes a shaky breath. "Is it wrong that part of me wants to see him suffer?"

"No," I say firmly. "After what he did to you? It's human. Natural."

Aggie's gaze drifts back to Trevor, and I can see the struggle playing out across her face.

The compassionate woman she's always been, fighting against the raw, primal need for vengeance.

I brush a strand of hair behind her ear, drawing her attention back to me. "Whatever you decide, I'm here. You say the word, and I'll end it. Or we walk away right now. It's your call, Ghost."

She's quiet for a long moment, her eyes searching mine.

Then, with a soft exhale, she makes her decision.

Widow's gruff voice cuts through the tension. "Any sick fuck who did that to you will do it to another. No doubt about it."

I glance at Widow, noting the hard set of his jaw and the steel in his eyes.

As a father, I know he's seeing this through a different lens—imagining if it had been his own daughter, Zoe, in Aggie's place.

His hand rests on the butt of his gun, a clear indication of where he stands on the matter.

Turning back to Aggie, I watch as she processes Widow's words.

Her fingers twist in the hem of her shirt, a nervous habit I've come to recognize.

I want nothing more than to pull her into my arms, to shield her from this brutal reality, but I know she needs to make this decision on her own.

My mind races, torn between my duty as a member of the Reapers Rejects MC and my growing feelings for Aggie.

The clubhouse, our home, seems a world away from this grim chamber.

I think of the life I want to build with her, wondering how this moment will shape our future.

"Ghost," I say softly, using the nickname that's become so natural. "Whatever you decide, I'm here. You don't have to carry this alone."

Aggie takes a deep breath, her emerald eyes flickering with a mix of emotions. "Aye, Widow's right. He does deserve it."

I nod, relieved and proud of her strength. "I made sure you didn't have to watch the torture, Ghost. If you don't want to see this, you don't have to."

She turns away, her blonde hair swinging with the motion. "I don't want to see it."

I can see the tension in her shoulders, the way her hands clench at her sides.

My heart aches for her, knowing the weight of this decision.

I pull out my gun, the metal cool and familiar in my hand.

Trevor's unconscious form is still before me, covered in barbed wire and blood.

For a moment, I see red, remembering what this piece of shit did to Aggie.

My finger itches on the trigger.

"This is for my girl," I think, aiming at Trevor's head.

The sound of the gunshot echoes through the room, loud and final.

Aggie flinches at the noise but doesn't turn around.

I holster my weapon and move toward her, my steps quiet on the blood-stained floor.

Coming up behind her, I resist the urge to wrap my arms around her waist.

Instead, I lean in close, my lips near her ear.

"Trevor won't ever bother you again, or any other woman," I murmur, my voice low and intense.

She turns to face me, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

"Thank you, Jolt," she whispers, her voice thick with emotion. "For protecting me, for being willing to do these sorts of things."

I shrug, trying to lighten the mood. "It's my job, darlin'." But even as I say it, I know it's more than that. I'd move heaven and earth for this woman, club be damned.

Widow's gruff voice cuts through the heavy silence. "We gotta head back to the club, prospect. We'll get this cleaned up later."

I snap my head toward him, confusion knitting my brows. "What's going on?"

Widow's face is etched with concern, an unusual sight that sets my nerves on edge. "Paulie just rolled up with his family. Some shit went down. We need to get back to the clubhouse, pronto."

My mind races, trying to piece together what could've happened.

Paulie's one of our most reliable informants at the moment.

If he's showing up with his whole family in tow, it can't be good.

"All right," I nod, turning to Aggie.

Her emerald eyes are wide, a mix of worry and exhaustion clouding their usual fire.

"You okay to ride, babe?"

She squares her shoulders, that Scottish stubbornness shining through. "Aye, I'm good."

We file out of the butcher shop, the stench of blood and death clinging to our clothes.

Widow locks up, his movements quick and efficient.

The night air hits us, cool against my skin, and I take a deep breath, trying to clear my head.

As we mount our bikes, I can't help but steal glances at Aggie.

She's perched behind me, her arms wrapped tightly around my waist.

Despite the circumstances, her touch sends a jolt of electricity through me.

The ride back to the clubhouse is tense, the roar of our engines doing little to drown out the thoughts racing through my mind.

What kind of shitstorm are we riding into?

Who the fuck knows, but one thing I do know is that we'll deal with it, no matter what.

As we dismount, I notice a beat-up minivan parked haphazardly near the entrance.

Must be Paulie's.

Inside, the air is thick with tension.

Paulie and his family are huddled in a corner, looking shell-shocked.

The rest of the brothers are scattered around, their faces grim.

Aggie squeezes my arm, her voice low. "I'm going to head back and help Sienna clean up from painting. See if she needs more help."

I nod, grateful she won't have to witness whatever's about to go down. "All good. I'll catch up with you later."

As she slips away, I can't help but feel a pang of longing.

Part of me wants to follow her, to lose myself in her warmth and forget about the chaos brewing around us.

But duty calls, and I've got a job to do.

I head inside the clubhouse with Widow just as Damon clears his throat.

His gravelly voice cuts through the tense silence. "Now, say what happened again."

I shift my weight, eyes darting between Damon's stoic face and Paulie's trembling form.

Paulie's clutching one of his kids, a little one, no older than five, like a lifeline.

His wife sits nearby, a girl of maybe seven on her lap, while a newborn sleeps in a car

seat at her feet.

The picture of domesticity, shattered by fear.

"It... it was Serpent," Paulie begins, his voice cracking. "He found out I was feeding the club information."

My fists clench involuntarily.

Serpent—the Kodiak MC Prez.

That motherfucker's been a thorn in our side for too long.

Paulie swallows hard, continuing, "They... they burned down our house. Serpent probably thought I was inside."

The words hit me like a punch to the gut.

Jesus Christ.

I've seen some fucked up shit in my time with the club, but torching a family home?

I glance around the room, taking in the reactions of my brothers.

Widow doesn't seem surprised in the least bit, while Dixon looks like he's aged ten years in the last ten minutes.

The kid in Paulie's arms whimpers, and I'm struck by how small, how fragile they all look.

These aren't hardened bikers or ol' ladies who know the threats that come with club

life.

They're innocents, caught in the crossfire of our world.

"Fuck," I mutter under my breath.

This changes everything.

It's one thing to go to war over territory or business, but when families get involved?

Hell, that's when shit gets real.

Damon nods slowly, his eyes hardening. "Yeah, he probably did think you were inside. Sick bastard."

The tension in the room is palpable.

I can feel the anger radiating off my brothers, a living, breathing thing.

Paulie's wife clutches their daughter tighter, as if she could shield her from the danger that's followed them here.

Damon's gaze sweeps the room, landing on each of us.

When he looks at me, I see the wheels turning behind his eyes.

He's weighing options, calculating risks.

This is why he's our president.

In moments like these, he's always ten steps ahead.

"All right," Damon says, his voice low and controlled. "I'll make a call. We've got connections south of the border. I can probably get you and your family to Mexico."

Paulie's eyes widen, hope flickering across his face for the first time since he arrived.

His wife lets out a shaky breath, her shoulders sagging with relief.

But Damon's not finished. "There's a catch, though. You'd be one of us, Paulie. You'd be prospectin' like the rest of these guys have."

I can't help but smirk at that.

We've been prospects for what feels like forever, jumping through hoops to prove our worth to the club.

But this?

This is different.

Paulie's not just looking for a patch—he's looking for salvation.

Damon continues, a hint of amusement in his voice, "Hell, they've been prospectin' too damn long if you ask me."

My heart skips a beat. Is he saying what I think he's saying?

I exchange a quick glance with Turmoil, seeing the same surprise mirrored in his eyes.

As Paulie processes Damon's words, I find myself torn.

Part of me is thrilled at the prospect of finally earning my patch, of truly belonging. But another part of me knows that bringing Paulie in, protecting his family, it's going to bring a shitstorm down on all our heads.

Paulie takes a deep breath, his gaze darting between his wife and kids before settling back on Damon.

His voice is rough with emotion when he speaks. "We'll take it. The spot in Mexico. We'll leave as soon as we can."

I watch as his wife clutches their newborn closer, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

It's a mix of relief and fear—I've seen it before on the faces of those who've had to leave everything behind.

Dixon steps forward, his presence commanding attention even in the crowded clubhouse. "We'll make calls first thing tomorrow," he says, his tone leaving no room for argument.

Then, his voice softens slightly as he looks at Paulie's family. "Until then, we'll have our ol' ladies get you and the family set up. What size clothes do y'all need? We'll make sure you're taken care of."

I can't help but admire how much the club is willing to help others.

It just proves we're good people, not scum like so many people want to think.

Paulie's wife speaks up, her voice barely above a whisper. "The baby's in newborn sizes. Our girl's in 3T, and our other girl's in 5T." She pauses, looking down at herself. "I... I don't know what size I am anymore. After the baby..."

Izzy steps forward, her braids swinging as she moves. "Don't worry, honey. We'll figure it out."

Her eyes, dark and determined, meet mine for a moment. I know that look—she's already planning, already thinking of how to make this family comfortable in the midst of their upheaval.

As the others start discussing logistics, my mind wanders.

I think of Aggie, of how easily it could be her in this situation.

The thought sends a chill down my spine, makes my fists clench at my sides.

I'd burn the world down before I'd let that happen to her.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Aggie

The old sedan the club let me and Sienna use groans as I navigate through the late afternoon traffic, the steering wheel hot beneath my palms.

I can't help but smile despite how hot it is outside.

Today isn't like every other day, it's my birthday!

I'm officially nineteen years old today.

I've never really been one who's been a fan of celebrating birthdays.

They never felt overly important, but something about this year makes me excited.

Maybe it's because I'm in Nevada, starting my life, and I have an incredible man by my side.

"Any plans for tonight?" Sienna asks from the passenger seat, her gaze fixed on the bustling streets outside.

"Plans?" I repeat, unsure what I should say. "Nah, I don't think so. It's just another Thursday, really."

My grip tightens on the steering wheel, feigning nonchalance.

I didn't want to get my hopes up, that there would be some sort of party or something for me.

I really should've said if I wanted something done, honestly. It's my own fault.

My birthday isn't something I've made a fuss about, not since I was little.

"Okay then, Miss Ordinary Day," Sienna teases, turning up the radio as a rock anthem blasts through the crackling speakers.

We both know it's more than that, but I appreciate her not pressing the issue.

With the wind whipping through our hair, I know the day is going to be amazing.

We pull into the clubhouse parking lot just as the sun starts to go down, painting the sky in shades of orange and purple.

The usual line of motorcycles are sitting out front, telling me it's a full house in the club tonight.

I park the car in its usual spot, the engine ticking as it cools.

This beast is an old gal, but she's still kicking.

Sienna unbuckles her seatbelt and stretches in her seat. "Come on, let's grab some grub. I'm starving."

"Food sounds like heaven right now," I agree, my stomach growling in response.

We reach the clubhouse doors, and I push them open without hesitation, ready to stuff my bloody face!

Only, when I step inside, the sight that greets me snatches my breath away.

Banners drape from the ceiling, balloons bob against the walls, and the entire place is transformed with festive decorations.

A chorus of shouts erupts as the members of the club appear, grinning and cheering.

In disbelief, my hand goes to my mouth, my eyes darting around the room, taking in the faces of those who've become family in their own rough-and-tumble way.

Jolt's deep voice rumbles through the clubhouse as he strides toward me, his arms open wide. "Happy Birthday, Baby!"

Shock still paints my features, but I manage a laugh, throwing myself into his embrace, the warmth of his body grounding me in the surprise of the moment.

I can't believe my eyes right now.

"Did you really do all this?"

Jolt's eyes twinkle with mischief, "Surprised?" he asks, a smug satisfaction in his tone.

"Completely," I admit, my heart swelling until it feels too big for my chest.

This wasn't what I expected—not by a long shot.

Cobra's voice comes from out of nowhere. "Come on, birthday girl! Let's get our drink on!"

With all eyes on me, I let Jolt guide me over to the large bar area.

I look Cobra dead in the eyes, "I wasn't gonna drink. Have classes first thing in the mornin'."

On the other side of the bar is Siren, smiling like the Cheshire Cat.

Cobra chuckles deeply. "Come on, live a little!"

She leans forward against the counter, revealing her colorful dragon and Kraken tattoos that snake around her toned arms.

"C'mon Aggie," she drawls out my name in a way that makes everyone laugh.

"All right, fine, I give in! It is my birthday after all. Guess it's okay if I go a little crazy tonight." I say, pulling away from Jolt, who gives a playful squeeze on my arm before letting me go.

Moving closer, I hop onto one of the tall stools.

As soon as I do, Siren picks up a bottle of Jameson whiskey.

With an expert flick of her wrist, she opens it and pours out three shots; one for Cobra, one for Jolt, and one for me.

As she hands them out, her lips curl into a wicked grin. "To our little Scottish firecracker!" she announces loud enough for everyone in the room to hear.

There's a chorus of 'hear, hear!' and laughter bounces off the walls of the clubhouse.

I can't help but chuckle as I lift my glass.

"Ye all best remember," I begin as I glance at each of them in turn. "You lot are stuck

with me now."

The laughter and banter continue as we clink our glasses together.

The warmth of the whiskey spreads like a wildfire through my chest, leaving a trail of heat that sets my nerves alight.

I slam the shot glass down on the counter and shake my head, chasing away the sting.

Cobra bellows. "Another round!"

Siren doesn't hesitate, pouring the amber liquid, and I have no doubt in my mind I'm about to get plastered tonight.

"Here's to not rememberin' a thing in the mornin'!" Cobra declares, and we all knock back our shots, the fiery liquid now a welcome burn in my throat.

Laughter fills the room again, mixing with the rock anthems blaring from the Bluetooth speakers.

"Let's get some games goin'!" someone yells from the crowd, and before long, we're in the thick of it. A deck of cards appears, and a round of poker starts up at one of the tables.

The stakes are low, but the competition is fierce.

I play my hand with confident smirks and the occasional bluff.

Honestly, I'm having a great time fucking with the lot of them.

Siren jokes at my growing pile of chips. "Damn, Aggie, you sure you didn't grow up

in a casino?"

"Nah, just got some birthday luck," I reply, sending her a wink that sparks another round of laughter.

As the game winds down, the mood shifts.

The music slows to sultry rhythms, and couples start pairing off for slow dances.

Sienna nudges me forward, and I find myself swaying gently in Jolt's arms, his hand warm and steady on my lower back.

"I hope you're having a very happy birthday, Ghost," he murmurs, his breath warm on my neck.

The sensation sends shivers down my spine, and I tilt my head back to meet his gaze.

"Best birthday yet," I admit, a genuine smile playing on my lips.

The soft glow of the clubhouse lights casts a golden hue over everything, turning the moment into something almost magical.

"Only gets better from here," he assures me, and I actually believe him.

The slow dance becomes less about the rhythm and more about the connection, our bodies moving together instinctively.

My heart flutters as his fingers trace the curve of my waist, pulling me closer.

"Look at them go!" Cobra calls out, his voice teasing but affectionate.

I glance over to see him dancing with Izzy, their movements more suggestive than ours, a playful challenge in their eyes.

Jolt whispers, his lips hovering near mine. "Seems like we've got some competition."

"Let them have their fun," I reply, smiling slyly. "We've got our own kind of celebration."

Around us, the atmosphere thickens, each couple lost in their own world.

After a while, it feels particularly stuffy and I need some air.

"Jolt," I say, my voice barely above the music, "let's take this outside."

He grins, "Lead the way, birthday girl."

Hand in hand, we slip away from the crowd out into the night.

The cool night air hits us, but it does nothing to calm the heat that radiates between us both.

"Aggie," he growls, his voice a low rumble that vibrates through me as we round the corner of the building.

"Shh," I whisper against his lips, silencing any words with a fierce kiss.

My fingers find the hem of his t-shirt, slipping underneath to trace the warm skin of his waist.

His tattoos feel like braille under my touch, each line a story I'm desperate to read over and over.

Jolt's hands are just as eager, skimming down my back to cup my backside, pulling me into him.

His erection presses against me, hard and insistent, and I gasp into his mouth.

There's an urgency in our movements, a roughness spurred on by liquor and raw need.

"Fuck, Aggie..." His hands fumble with the button on my jeans, and I help him, yanking the fabric down along with my underwear in one swift motion.

The cool air brushes against my bare skin, sending shivers up my spine that have nothing to do with the temperature.

My back presses against the rough exterior of the clubhouse, the stucco scraping slightly against my skin.

But any discomfort is lost in the sensation of Jolt's body pressed against mine, his dark green eyes locked onto mine with an intensity that could set fire to the very air around us.

"Need you now," I pant, accent thick as ever.

"Got you, baby," he murmurs, and then he's lifting me up with his powerful arms.

My legs wrap instinctively around his hips, and I can feel the head of his cock nudging at my entrance.

"Jolt—"

He thrusts into me in one smooth motion that steals my breath away.

We're frantic, the kind of sloppy, desperate sex that speaks of too much alcohol and not enough forethought—but it's perfect.

His pace relentless, each thrust pushing a moan from my lips, as he hits spots deep within me that leave my vision speckled with stars.

"God, yes," I cry out, clinging to him, my fingernails digging into the muscle of his shoulders.

"Aggie..." Jolt grunts, his voice strained with effort.

I look down to see his tribal tattoos flexing with each movement, a mesmerizing dance of ink on skin.

"Harder," I demand, egged on by the fierceness in his gaze.

He gives me exactly what I want, his grip tightening as he pounds into me, the sound of flesh slapping against flesh mingling with our ragged breaths.

The world narrows to this moment, to the intoxicating mix of pain and pleasure, to the feeling of being utterly consumed by someone who matches your passion so completely.

"Jack," I say, using his real name.

I find myself using his birth name more frequently lately.

The pressure builds inside me, coiling tighter and tighter until I'm teetering on the edge.

And then, with a few more primal thrusts from him, I'm tumbling over, crying out his

name as waves of ecstasy crash over me.

Jolt follows soon after, his body tensing as he buries himself deep within me, his release hot and pulsing.

He collapses against me, both of us slick with sweat and spent from how hard we were going.

For a moment, we're still, nothing but the sound of our heavy breathing and the distant echo of music from the party.

I let my head fall back against the wall, eyes closed as I savor the lingering aftershocks of pleasure coursing through me.

"Best birthday ever," I manage to say, and Jolt chuckles, his breath tickling my neck.

"Only the best for my girl," he replies, kissing me softly.

We slowly disentangle ourselves, pulling clothes back into place with unsteady hands.

Jolt fastens my jeans for me and zips my fly. "Wanna head back in there, or cuddle up and watch some TV?"

He damn well knows what I want to do. "Now, what do you think?"

Jolt throws his arm around my shoulders, "Let's get back to the trailer, birthday girl."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Jolt

My palms are slick with sweat as I dismount my bike, my boots hitting the cracked asphalt with a thud.

"What's this about?" I mutter to Turmoil, who's parking his bike next to mine.

He shrugs, showing me he doesn't know jack shit either. "Your guess is as good as mine, brother."

But I can see the tension in his jaw, the way his fingers twitch toward the knife at his hip.

We're all on edge, have been since shit's been getting more intense with the Kodiak MC.

As we file into the clubhouse, the bar's deserted, pool cues abandoned mid-game.

It's too quiet, like the calm before a storm that's about to rip through our world.

Booger jerks his head toward the chapel doors. "Prospects, get your asses in there now."

I exchange a glance with Turmoil, trying to read his expression.

But his face is as unreadable as ever, a skill I'm still trying to master.

I take a deep breath, readying myself for whatever's waiting on the other side of those doors.

The chapel's dimly lit, our officers are already seated around the Reaper's Reject table, faces grim.

Damon walks into the chapel and takes a seat at the head of the table.

Widow looks over to the group of us prospects, "Stand against the wall,."

We all take our places against the wall just like Widow asked us to do.

I scan the room, trying to gauge the mood.

Booger's fidgeting with his rings, a sure sign he's itching for a fight.

Kade's face is set in stone, but there's a glint in his eye that makes me nervous.

Dixon's arms are crossed, and even Mouser seems a bit on edge.

Cobra and Hawk are always on edge, so I don't pay much mind to them.

Whatever's going on, it's a big deal.

Damon clears his throat, and the room falls into an expectant hush.

"Brothers," he begins, his voice low and gravelly, "it's no surprise we've got a situation on our hands."

My mind races, trying to piece together what's transpired over the last couple of days.

Is it Sally?

Is it the Kodiak MC?

Or is it something else entirely?

"As you all know," Damon continues, "we've been keeping tabs on Sally's movements. Our intel suggests she's made a move we can't ignore."

I feel the tension in the room kick up a notch.

Sally's been a thorn in our side for far too long, but this sounds different.

Kade leans forward, his scarred knuckles white as he grips the edge of the table. "What's the bitch done now?"

Damon's eyes sweep the room, landing on each of us in turn.

When his gaze meets mine, I force myself to hold it, even as my heart hammers against my ribs.

"She's proving Zane, Amara and I right—Sally's headed south," he says finally. "To Mexico."

A murmur ripples through the room.

Mexico means our charter down there—more specifically, Amara's charter.

It's the one that's been keeping the peace and running our operations across the

border.

Sally's an idiot for targeting them.

She wasn't successful in Montana, or even here, so why in the fuck would she head to Mexico?

The woman is obviously unhinged.

"What does that mean for us?" Cobra asks, voicing the question we're all thinking.

Damon's lips curl into a mirthless smile. "It means, brothers, that we've got a fight on our hands with the Kodiak MC. And it's time to show these fuckers exactly who they're dealing with. Sally enlisted their help, and she's leaving which is one thorn out of our side. Now it's time to yank out the other one."

I can feel the energy in the room shift, brothers wanting blood on their hands for the shit we've had to endure.

This is what we live for, what we as prospects have been training for.

Booger leans back in his chair, a wicked grin spreading across his face. "About fuckin' time. I was starting to think we'd gone soft."

There's a rumble of agreement from the other officers.

The tension in the room is thick enough to cut with a knife as we all process the bombshell about Sally.

Damon holds up a hand, silencing the chatter. "Before we get into the details, there's something else we need to address first." His eyes land on us prospects, and I feel my

breath catch in my throat. "You sorry sons of bitches have been prospectin' long enough. It's time to make a decision."

My heart skips a beat.

Is this it or am I fucking hallucinating?

The moment we've all been waiting for, working our asses off for?

Damon continues, "I'm callin' a vote. Do we patch these boys in, make them full members of the Reapers Rejects MC?"

The room falls silent, and I swear I can hear my own pulse pounding in my ears.

This is really it.

Everything I've worked for, everything I've sacrificed, it all comes down to this moment.

The officers and full patches exchange glances, a silent conversation passing between them.

I hold my breath, afraid to hope, afraid to let myself believe this might actually be happening.

Finally, Damon speaks. "All in favor?"

Hands rise around the table, one after another.

I count them silently, my heart in my throat.

It's unanimous—everyone wants us to be full patches.

Damon nods, a hint of pride in his eyes. "It's settled then. Mouser, get the cuts."

Mouser stands, heading for a closet in the corner of the room.

He returns with a box, and I can feel the electricity in the air as he starts handing out the fresh cuts.

When he gets to me, I almost can't believe it.

The leather is heavy in my hands, the stitching perfect.

And there, where the "Prospect" patch used to be, it now says "Full Patch."

I run my fingers over the words, a lump forming in my throat.

Hell, my fucking name is even on the damn thing.

"Congratulations, brothers," Damon says, his voice gruff but warm. "You're full members of the Reapers Rejects MC now. Wear those cuts with pride."

I slip my old cut off and the new cut on, feeling the weight of it settle on my shoulders.

It's more than just leather and patches—it's the sense of belonging, it's the fact I have a family even when my blood is a thousand miles away.

It's everything I've been searching for since I first saw Victor ride off on his bike all those years ago.

Kade, his face a mask of barely contained rage, slams his fist on the table.

The sound echoes through the clubhouse, making me flinch.

"Not tryin' to rain on anyone's parade, but what the fuck does this mean for us?" Kade growls, his eyes locked on Damon. "What are we gonna do about those Kodiak bastards?"

My heart's pounding so hard I'm sure everyone can hear it.

Damon doesn't answer immediately.

Instead, his gaze sweeps across the room, taking in each of his officers.

I watch as his eyes finally land on Booger, and there's a silent exchange between them that speaks volumes.

Booger clears his throat, his gravelly voice filling the room. "Those Kodiak fuckers have gotten cocky. Stupid, even." He leans forward, a predatory grin spreading across his face. "And in their stupidity, they've left themselves wide open."

I can't help but lean in, hanging on every word.

"Why don't you elaborate, Boog?" Widow asks, voicing the question we're all thinking.

Booger's grin widens, revealing teeth stained from years of too much coffee and whiskey. "They've been leaving their clubhouse unguarded. Practically begging for us to come in and take what's ours."

The room erupts in a chorus of low whistles and muttered curses.

I can feel the excitement building, a dangerous energy that threatens to consume us all.

Damon nods slowly, a cold smile playing at the corners of his mouth. "Good work, Booger. Looks like we've got ourselves an opportunity, brothers."

I catch Widow's eye across the room, and I can see the same mix of excitement and apprehension

Dixon leans forward, his scarred knuckles rapping against the worn wooden table. "Elaborate, Booger. What's their pattern?"

Booger's eyes gleam with a predatory light as he explains, "Almost all of them leave on Fridays and head down to the Strip. Like clockwork, man. They're creatures of habit, and it's gonna be their downfall."

My heart races as I process this information.

It's Friday.

Today.

The realization hits me like a punch to the gut.

What the hell are we about to do?

Damon's smirk grows wider, more menacing.

He looks around the table, his gaze lingering on each of us in turn.

When those ice-cold eyes land on me, I fight the urge to flinch.

"Tonight," he says, his voice low and dangerous, "we're going to fuck everything up for the Kodiak MC."

The tension in the room ratchets up another notch.

I can feel the adrenaline starting to pump through my veins.

Damon continues, his words dripping with venom. "Their predecessor, the Bears, fucked with us for many years—specifically the Montana charter. We're not going to let history repeat itself."

"Blood will be shed tonight," Damon declares, "and fire will burn everything they love to ash."

Before I can stop myself, the words tumble out of my mouth. "What's the plan?"

All eyes turn to me.

Shit.

Did I overstep?

But Damon just nods, approval glinting in his eyes.

"Glad you asked, Jolt," he says. "You're about to get a crash course in how we handle business."

Damon leans forward, his massive forearms resting on the table.

The dim light of the clubhouse catches on his rings, making them glint ominously. "We're taking the attack to them," he growls, his voice a low rumble that sends

shivers down my spine. "Burning down their club, and killing whoever of them is there."

My heart races at the thought.

I swallow hard, trying to keep my face impassive.

Damon's eyes narrow as he continues, "Women and children are off-limits, as always. We're not fuckin' animals."

A chorus of grunts and nods ripples around the table.

Even with all of the fucking chaos going on, there are lines we don't cross.

It's one of the things that separates us from everyone else.

Mouser speaks up, his voice cutting through the tension. "What about civilians? Kodiak's got some legit businesses mixed in with their illegal shit."

"Collateral damage," Damon says with a dismissive wave. "We're not aiming for 'em, but if they get caught in the crossfire, that's on Kodiak for putting them in harm's way."

The cold calculation in his voice makes my stomach churn.

This is the price of the life I've chosen, I remind myself.

Dixon clears his throat, drawing everyone's attention. "Doc and Kade will be staying back at the clubhouse," he announces. "In case of any... issues."

I glance over at Doc, noting the flicker of disappointment in his eyes.

"Any questions?" Damon asks, his gaze sweeping the room.

The silence is deafening.

We all know what's at stake tonight.

What we're about to do will change everything—for us, for the club, for our enemies.

There's no going back after this.

I take a deep breath, steeling myself for what's to come.

Tonight, I'll either prove myself worthy of that patch... or die trying.

Booger leans forward, his eyes glinting with malice. "Those Kodiak fuckers have gotten cocky. They think they're untouchable."

Dixon nods, a grim smile on his face. "Time we showed them how wrong they are."

I clear my throat, surprised by the steadiness in my voice. "What's our endgame here? Are we just sending a message, or..."

Damon's eyes lock onto mine, and I see a flicker of approval there. "We're ending this, once and for all. Tonight, we burn their clubhouse to the ground and take out anyone who gets in our way."

I nod, feeling a mix of excitement and nerves coiling in my gut.

This is it—my first real action as a full patch.

I'm determined not to let them down.

"Remember," Damon adds, his voice hard, "women and children are off-limits. We don't fuckin' touch them, even if they've got us starin' down the barrel of a gun. You get that weapon out of their hands and tell them to get the fuck outta there."

There's a chorus of agreement around the room.

"You've got two hours to get your shit together," Damon says, standing up. "We ride at midnight."

As we file out of the chapel, you can feel everyone's energy.

It's not long before the rumble of engines fills the night air as we pull out of the clubhouse.

Cobra shouts over the roar of his Harley. "Nervous, Jolt?"

I flash him a cocky grin. "Nah, just ready to crack some skulls!"

But the truth is, my heart's pounding like a jackhammer.

This is my first real action as a full patch, and I'm determined not to fuck it up.

As we tear down the deserted streets, the wind whips at my face.

It's exhilarating, this feeling of power and purpose.

For a moment, I think of my brother and how many times I'm sure he's done this.

We slow as we approach the Kodiak MC clubhouse.

It's eerily quiet, no signs of life.

"Looks like a fuckin' ghost town," I mutter, unease creeping up my spine.

Damon signals for us to cut the engines.

The sudden silence is deafening.

We dismount, weapons at the ready.

"Stay sharp," Widow hisses. "This smells like a trap."

We're about a hundred feet from the clubhouse when all hell breaks loose.

The night erupts in a hail of gunfire, muzzle flashes lighting up the darkness like deadly fireworks.

"Fuck!" I dive behind a nearby car, my heart in my throat. "So much for the element of surprise!"

Kodiak members pour out of the clubhouse, guns blazing.

I see Hawk go down, clutching his shoulder.

Damon yells, making a dash for better cover. "Jolt! Cover me!"

I pop up, squeezing off rounds, the recoil jarring my arms.

My mind's racing, adrenaline pumping.

"We're sitting ducks out here!" I shout, ducking as a bullet whizzes past my ear.

I can hear the screams of the wounded, the barked orders of our officers.

It's chaos, pure and simple.

As I reload, I catch a glimpse of a Kodiak member taking aim at Booger.

Without thinking, I swing my gun around and fire.

The man drops like a stone.

"Nice shot, kid!" Booger calls out, giving me a quick nod before returning fire.

My hands are shaking, but I feel a surge of pride.

I just saved a brother's life.

This is what it means to be a Reaper's Reject.

The gunfight rages on, bullets flying in both directions.

We're taking them down, but they're not going easy.

I grit my teeth and push forward, following Damon's lead as we bum-rush the clubhouse.

The gunfire's died down, but my ears are still ringing.

We burst through the doors, weapons at the ready.

"Clear the rooms!" Damon barks. "Watch for stragglers!"

The inside of the clubhouse is a mess of overturned furniture and broken glass.

I kick open a door, my heart pounding in my chest.

Empty.

"Jolt, over here!" Cobra calls out.

I round the corner to find him standing over a cowering Kodiak member.

The man's eyes are wide with fear.

"Please," he whimpers. "I got kids..."

Cobra looks at me, his expression hard. "What do you think, Jolt? You want the honors?"

I hesitate, my finger on the trigger.

This isn't what I signed up for.

Before I can decide, a woman's scream pierces the air.

"Mommy! Help!"

We spin around to see a group of women and children huddled in a corner, terror etched on their faces.

One of the women is clutching a toddler to her chest.

"Jesus," I mutter. "What do we do?"

A gunshot rings out in the background and I turn back for a split second, seeing the

former Kodiak member bleeding out on the floor.

Damon appears beside us, his face grim. "Tell 'em to get out. Now."

I nod, relief washing over me. "You heard him, ladies. Take your kids and go. We're not here for you."

The women don't need to be told twice.

They scramble past us, some sobbing, others shooting us hateful glares.

I can't blame them, if our girls were in their shoes, they'd be doing the same.

As the last of them disappears out the door, Cobra turns to me. "You good?"

I nod, trying to hide the tremor in my hands. "Yeah. Let's finish this."

Outside, I hear Hawk's voice. "Fire in the hole!"

The unmistakable whoosh of a Molotov cocktail follows, and suddenly the air is filled with the smell of smoke and burning gasoline.

"Time to go," Damon orders. "This place is about to become a bonfire."

We rush out, the heat of the flames already licking at our backs.

I turn to see the clubhouse engulfed, orange flames reaching for the sky.

As we mount our bikes, I catch Cobra's eye.

The roar of our engines drowns out the crackling flames behind us as we tear down

the empty streets.

My heart's still pounding, adrenaline surging through my veins.

I can't wipe the grin off my face, even as the stench of smoke clings to my clothes.

My hands grip the handlebars tighter, steadier now than they've ever been.

We ride in formation back to our clubhouse, the night air cool against my face.

As we pull into the lot, I catch sight of my reflection in a parked car's window.

There's a wild glint in my eyes I've never seen before.

Damon cuts his engine first, and we follow suit.

The silence is almost too fucking much.

"Well, boys," he says, his voice gruff but satisfied. "I'd say that was a successful night's work."

Laughter and whoops of agreement erupt around me.

I join in, feeling like I'm floating on cloud nine.

Cobra claps me on the back, nearly knocking me off balance. "How's it feel, Jolt? First night as a full patch, and you help take down our biggest rival."

I shake my head, still in disbelief. "Man, I... I don't even know how to describe it. It's like..."

"Like you're high as a kite without touching a damn thing?" Hawk interjects with a knowing smirk.

"Yeah," I nod, chuckling. "Exactly like that."

Damon gestures toward the clubhouse. "Let's take this inside, boys. Time to celebrate."

As we file in, I can't help but be surprised at how different everything feels already.

It's the same clubhouse I've been in a thousand times before, but now?

Now I'm not just some prospect hanging on the fringes.

I'm part of something bigger.

I've crossed a line tonight, one I can't uncross.

And you know what?

I wouldn't want to if I could.

This is who I am now—a full patch member of the Reapers Rejects MC.

And damn, does it feel good.

EPILOGUE

Aggie

My eyes widen as I take in the luxurious surroundings of the restaurant.

Crystal chandeliers cast a soft, romantic glow over white tablecloths and gleaming silverware.

The gentle notes of a live piano float through the air, mingling with the low murmur of conversation and the clink of wine glasses.

"Wow," I breathe, unable to keep the awe from my voice. "This is... fancy."

Jolt grins at me from across the table, his deep green eyes twinkling with amusement. "What, you don't think I can clean up nice, Ghost?"

I laugh, taking in his crisp black shirt and the way his dark hair is artfully tousled.

It's a far cry from his cut and grease-stained t-shirts. "I didn't say that. Just... this isn't exactly our usual hangout, is it?"

He reaches across the table to take my hand, his thumb tracing circles on my skin.

The touch sends a shiver down my spine. "It's Valentine's Day. Thought I'd make it special."

I feel a warmth bloom in my chest at his words.

It's moments like these that remind me why I fell for him in the first place.

Behind that carefree exterior and wicked sense of humor, Jolt has a heart of gold.

"Well, ye have certainly succeeded," I say, squeezing his hand. "Though I hope ye know I'd be just as happy with pizza and beer at the clubhouse."

Jolt's eyes darken slightly, and he leans in closer. "Oh, I know. But I wanted to spoil you a bit. Show you off." His voice drops to a husky whisper. "Let everyone see how damn lucky I am."

I feel heat rush to my cheeks, and I'm grateful for the dim lighting.

Even after all this time, Jolt still has the ability to make me blush like a schoolgirl.

I clear my throat, trying to regain my composure. "Well, aren't ye the charmer tonight?"

He winks at me. "Always, Ghost."

The waiter arrives then, presenting us with menus bound in rich leather.

As I scan the options, my eyes widen at the prices.

I've never been anywhere this posh before, not even back in Montana

A part of me feels out of place, like at any moment someone's going to realize I don't belong here and kick me out.

Jolt must sense my unease because he reaches across the table again, this time to

brush a strand of hair behind my ear.

"Hey," he says softly. "You okay?"

I nod, forcing a smile. "Yeah, just... this is all a bit overwhelming."

He studies me for a moment, his brow furrowing slightly. "We can go somewhere else if you want. I just thought..."

"No," I interrupt, feeling a pang of guilt.

Here he is, trying to do something nice for me, and I'm acting like a scared little girl.

I take a deep breath, squaring my shoulders. "No, it's perfect. I'm just not used to all this. But I want to be here, with you."

The tension in Jolt's face eases, replaced by a soft smile that makes my heart skip a beat. "Good. Because there's nowhere else I'd rather be."

As we continue to scan the menu, I can't help but realize how far we've come.

If someone had told me a few months ago that I'd be sitting in a fancy restaurant on Valentine's Day with a member of the Reapers Rejects MC, I'd have laughed in their face.

But here we are.

"So," Jolt says, breaking into my thoughts. "What looks good to you?"

I scan the menu again, my eyes catching on unfamiliar French words. "Uh... to be honest, I have no idea what half of these things are."

Jolt chuckles. "Yeah, me neither. Want me to order for both of us? I promise I won't pick anything too weird."

I nod, grateful for the offer. "Please. Just... no haggis, okay?"

He raises an eyebrow. "Isn't that a Scottish thing? I didn't think they'd have that here."

"They don't," I say with a grin. "But with my luck, they'd find a way to sneak it in just to torture me."

Jolt laughs, the sound warm and rich. "No haggis, got it. Though I gotta say, I'm curious now. What's so bad about it?"

I wrinkle my nose. "Trust me, ye don't wanna know. Let's just say there's a reason I refuse to eat it."

When the waiter returns, Jolt orders with a confidence I wouldn't have expected.

I catch words like "filet mignon" and "crème brûlée," but most of it goes over my head.

What I do notice is the way Jolt's eyes keep drifting back to me, a soft smile playing on his lips.

As we wait for our food, I take a sip of the champagne Jolt ordered.

The bubbles tickle my nose, and I can't help but giggle.

"This is nice," I say, gesturing around us. "But ye know you didn't have to go to all this trouble, right? I would've been happy to go with ye to In N' Out."

Jolt reaches across the table, taking my hand in his.

His touch is warm, "I wanted to," he says softly. "You deserve it, Aggie. After everything you've been through... everything we've been through... I wanted to show you how much you mean to me."

I feel a lump form in my throat, emotion threatening to overwhelm me.

It's moments like these that make me realize how far I've come from that wee lass in Scotland who was scared shiteless.

The one who watched her mother suffer at the hands of a monster.

The one who thought she'd never trust anyone again.

"Jolt," I whisper, my voice thick. "I..."

He squeezes my hand. "I know, Ghost. I know."

We sit in silence for a moment, the weight of unspoken words hanging between us.

I think about all we've been through—the danger, the fear, the moments of pure joy.

It hasn't been easy, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

"So," I say, clearing my throat. "Tell me about your day. How are things at the club?"

Jolt's eyes light up, and he launches into a story about some of Boog and Cobra's latest antics.

I listen, laughing at all the right moments, but a part of my mind is elsewhere.

Things with the club have been calm lately, but I've grown up in this life.

I know things aren't always as good as they seem.

Usually, when they are it means something is on the horizon.

As our food arrives—beautifully plated dishes that look almost too good to eat—I push the thought aside.

tonight isn't about the club, or the dangers that always seem to be lurking around the corner.

Tonight is about us, about celebrating the love we have.

"This looks amazing," I say, picking up my fork. "Though I have to admit, I have no idea what I'm eating."

Jolt grins. "I promise, it's going to be delicious. We're nothing if not adventurous, right?"

I laugh, raising my champagne glass. "To adventures," I say.

"To us," Jolt counters, clinking his glass against mine.

As we eat, talking and laughing, I can't believe this is real.

Sometimes I actually pinch myself because I'm with the perfect person for me.

He has a way of putting me at ease, of making me forget about the traumas of my past and the uncertainties of our future.

"You know," I say, setting down my fork. "I never thought I'd have this."

Jolt looks up, his brow furrowing slightly. "Have what?"

I gesture between us. "This. Someone who... who sees me. Who understands."

I take a deep breath, forcing myself to meet his eyes. "After what happened with my mum, with my biological father... I thought I'd never be able to trust anyone like this."

Jolt's expression softens, and he reaches across the table to take my hand.

"Aggie," he says softly. "You're the strongest person I know. What happened to you, what you saw... it would break most people. But you? You turned it into armor."

I feel tears prick at the corners of my eyes. "Sometimes I don't feel very strong," I admit.

"That's okay," Jolt says, his thumb tracing circles on the back of my hand. "That's what I'm here for. To remind you how badass you are when you forget."

I laugh, blinking back tears. "Is that so?"

He grins. "Absolutely. It's in my job description. 'Jolt: mechanic, biker, and professional Aggie-ego-booster.'"

I shake my head, marveling at how he can always make me laugh, even in the most serious moments."

The candlelight flickers across Jolt's face, highlighting the sharp angles of his jawline and the intensity in his eyes.

I've never seen him look so... content.

"So," I begin, setting my glass down gently, "you haven't really talked to me much about how it feels to be a full patch."

Jolt leans back in his chair, a slow smile spreading across his face. "It's... different," he says, his fingers drumming lightly on the tablecloth. "Good different, you know?"

I nod, encouraging him to continue.

My heart swells with pride as I watch him, remembering all the long nights and hard work it took for him to get here.

"It's like..." he pauses, searching for the right words. "It's like I've finally found my place. Like all the pieces have clicked into place, you know?"

I lean forward, genuinely intrigued.

"Tell me more," I urge softly.

Jolt's eyes light up, and I can see the passion burning behind them. "It's not just about wearing the patch," he explains. "It's about what it represents. The brotherhood, the trust, the responsibility. I've earned my place in the club, Aggie. I've actually proven myself."

"Does it feel different?" I ask, genuinely curious. "Or maybe I should be askin' if the guys stop treatin' the lot of ye like glorified janitors."

Jolt nods, a hint of pride in his voice. "Yeah, it does. There's a level of respect now, you know? I'm not just another prospect anymore. I have a voice, a say in things."

I smile, reaching across the table to squeeze his hand. "I'm so proud of you, Jolt. You've worked so hard for this."

Jolt's hand shoots across the table, enveloping mine.

His grip is firm, reassuring. "Listen to me, Ghost," he says, his voice low and intense.

"Everything in our lives is coming together. No one will ever instill fear in you or make you feel like that again. Not on my watch."

My heart swells, and before I can stop myself, I'm leaning across the table.

Our lips meet in a kiss that's both tender and fierce.

As we break apart, Jolt's lips brush my ear.

"Marry me," he whispers.

I freeze, my mind reeling.

Did he just...?

I pull back, searching his face for any sign that he's joking.

But all I see is sincerity and love in those familiar green eyes.

I can't help it—a laugh bubbles up from my chest, half nervous, half disbelieving.

"Yeah, right," I say, shaking my head.

My heart's racing, and I'm not sure if it's from excitement or fear.

Jolt's expression doesn't waver.

"I'm serious, Aggie," he says, his voice steady. "I know it now more than ever—we're meant to be together."

My mouth goes dry.

He can't be... can he?

But before I can form a coherent thought,

Jolt reaches under the table and produces a box wrapped in shiny red paper covered in hearts.

"I got you something," he says, sliding it across to me.

With trembling fingers, I unwrap the gift.

Inside is a leather cut, just like the ones worn by the Reapers Rejects MC.

But as I turn it over, my breath catches in my throat.

There, emblazoned on the back, is a patch that reads "Property of Jolt."

Tears spring to my eyes.

"It's... it's like the one my Mum has," I whisper, running my fingers over the stitching.

Jolt's smile is soft, understanding.

"It is," he confirms. "And I meant what I said, Aggie. I'm dead serious."

He leans forward, his eyes intense. "So why don't we get the hell out of this joint and go get a ring right now?"

My head spins.

This is happening so fast, but somehow, it feels right.

I watch, still in a daze, as Jolt signals for the check and pays for our dinner.

As he helps me to my feet, I find my voice. "Are we really doing this?"

Jolt's grin is infectious. "Damn straight we are," he says, leading me out of the restaurant and toward a nearby jeweler.

Jewelry shops are practically around every corner, so it's no shock we find one rather quickly.

The jeweler's shop glitters under the harsh lights, diamonds winking at us from every display case.

My heart's pounding so hard I can barely hear Jolt as he speaks to the saleswoman.

I'm still reeling from his proposal, my mind racing with a thousand thoughts.

"What do you think of this one, Ghost?" Jolt's voice cuts through my thoughts, and I focus on the ring he's pointing at.

It's a ??? carat white gold diamond, round-cut and sparkling even in the dim light of the store.

"It's beautiful," I breathe, unable to take my eyes off it.

Jolt grins, that cocky, self-assured smile I've come to love.

"We'll take it," he tells the saleswoman, not even bothering to ask the price.

As we step out of the store, the cool night air hits my face, and I feel like I'm in a dream.

Jolt takes the ring box from the bag and opens it.

With a gentleness that still surprises me, coming from such a rough-and-tumble biker, he slides the ring onto my finger.

I stare at it, the reality of the situation finally sinking in. "Jolt, I... I didn't actually say yes, you know," I stammer.

He chuckles, pulling me close. "Mhm, but you didn't say no either, did you?" he teases, mimicking my accent.

I can't help but laugh, even as I roll my eyes. "You're impossible, ye know that?"

"That's why you love me," he retorts, planting a kiss on my forehead.

As we make our way back to his bike, I can't stop looking at the ring on my finger.

It catches the neon lights of the Strip, sending little rainbows dancing across my hand.

I think about my Mum, about the cut with Grim's patch on it, about the life she's built with the MC.

As I wrap my arms around Jolt's waist and we roar off toward the clubhouse, I realize this is the best choice I've ever made.

This wild, unpredictable life with Jolt and the club—it's exactly where I want to be.

We pull up to the clubhouse, and I'm surprised to see a crowd gathered outside.

For a heart-stopping moment, I think they all somehow know about our engagement.

Did Jolt plan this?

My palms start to sweat as we dismount.

But before I can say anything, a high-pitched squeal cuts through the night air.

Izzy, one of the other ol' ladies, comes barreling toward us, her face lit up with excitement.

"I can't believe you're having another baby!!!" she shrieks, rushing past us and throwing her arms around Camila, who's standing a few feet away.

I blink, caught off guard by the sudden shift in focus.

The crowd erupts in cheers and congratulations, completely oblivious to the life-changing moment Jolt and I just shared.

I lean in close to Jolt, my lips brushing his ear as I whisper, "Let's tell them another time. We should be celebrating for Camila and Boog right now."

Jolt nods, his deep green eyes twinkling with understanding.

He squeezes my hand, his thumb brushing over the new ring.

The white gold is still unfamiliar against my skin, but it sends a thrill through me every time I feel it.

We make our way through the crowd, offering our congratulations to Camila and Boog.

As the night wears on, I can't help but notice the way Jolt keeps glancing at me, a secret smile playing on his lips.

My heart swells with emotion, but there's still a nagging worry in the back of my

mind.

I pull him aside, my fingers tracing the tribal tattoos on his arm. "Are you sure the club won't be dealing with any threats anymore?"

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't still afraid something bad could happen.

Jolt pulls me close, his strong arms enveloping me.

I breathe in his scent—sandalwood and cedar.

"I promise you, Ghost," he murmurs, using the nickname that always makes my heart skip a beat. "Sally's heading for Mexico, but that'll be just like the rest—unsuccessful. Everything is fine here, for now."

I want to believe him, I really do.

But I've seen enough of this life to know that 'for now' can be a very short time.