



# Juno (The Royal Harlots MC #6)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** Juno was the stable one in her group of friends. At least, that was what everyone thought. She had always been the good girl of her group and that wasn't something that she planned on ever changing. The more time she spent with her girlfriends, the more chances they would have of finding out that her full-time job wasn't on the up and up—at least, not by their standards of her. If the girls ever found out that she was an exotic dancer, she'd never hear the end of it from any of them. No, Juno's good-girl reputation wouldn't allow her to have anything scandalous in her past—especially being a dancer down at the local club. As far as everyone was concerned, she was a secretary at a law firm, two towns over, and that was the story she was sticking with.

Saint wasn't sure that it was Juno up on the stage dancing until he looked into her green eyes. She had worn a costume, complete with a mask to hide her identity, and even though she seemed familiar to him, he couldn't be sure. That's when he decided to walk up to the side of the stage and hand her a twenty. Up close, he might be able to tell if his hunch was correct—not that it mattered. She was his new sister-in-law's best friend, and he figured that made her off-limits. Especially for what he'd want from her.

Promising to keep her secret was an easy decision since he didn't want any of his MC buddies down at that club checking out the hot little Harlot on stage. He'd just keep that bit of information to himself and pull it from his memory now and again when his nights were long and lonely.

Juno is book six of The Royal Harlots MC (A Royal Bastards MC spin-off) by K.L. Ramsey.

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## Page 1

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Juno was the stable one in her group of friends. At least, that was what everyone thought. She had always been the good girl of her little group and that wasn't something that she planned on ever changing. As far as she was concerned, Vixen, Phoenix, and Rebel could go on believing that she was an angel. That's what they called her—the angel of the group, and it used to piss her off, but now, she kind of liked it. Even if it wasn't the truth.

Once graduated from high school, her parents gave her an ultimatum—work a full-time job or go to college or trade school. The last thing she wanted to do was go back to school after graduation. Hell, if she had her way, she would have left like Phoenix had years ago and never looked back. But her friend was always so much braver than she was.

had used her savings to buy herself a used car and damn it, even that old thing was practical. Her friends liked to joke that she'd be by to pick them up in her grandma car, but she found that to be less funny than they did. Her car got her from point A to point B and it was reliable, unlike most of the people in her life. Sure, her girls were always there for her—even Phoenix once she came back to town and hooked up with Riggs. The gang was all together again, and that should make her happy—not stress her out. But it did. The more time she spent with her girlfriends, the more chances they would have of finding out that her full-time job wasn't on the up and up—at least, not by their standards of her. If the girls ever found out that she was an exotic dancer, she'd never hear the end of it from any of them. They'd be impossible to live with—even Phoenix who admitted to the group that she used to dance and strip for money to put food on the table for her daughter, Lydia. No, 's good girl reputation wouldn't allow her to have anything scandalous in her past—especially being a dancer down at the local club. As far as everyone was concerned, she was a secretary

at a law firm, two towns over, and that was the story she was sticking with.

She had found ways to keep her identity a secret, her costumes, and a little imagination. She thought that it was hilarious when she found an angel costume and used that on stage for a while. But her boss, Bruno told her to ditch the good girl routine and find another costume. He said that guys don't want to fantasize about a good girl in the sheets—they wanted the bad girl, and she did as she was told. The thought of losing her job wasn't one that she wanted to entertain. The tips were good and there was no way that she'd make that much money as a receptionist or in any other full-time position. So, she ditched the angel costume and opted to dress as the devil for a while. Bruno was right—her tips increased when she went from good girl to bad girl on the stage, not that she'd admit that to him. He'd ask for more of a cut, and there was no way that she was giving his fat ass any more money than she had to.

Her costumes changed throughout the almost four years that she had worked at the club. Right now, she was playing a black widow, and the regulars at the club seemed to like the idea of being killed off by her. They were all idiots, but those idiots paid the bills and allowed her to move out of her parents' house, and that was her saving grace.

She loved her mom and dad, but they were very religious, and her lifestyle would never mesh with theirs. She never dared tell them about her choice of jobs knowing that they'd probably freak out. Every time her dad asked her how she was affording her new apartment; she'd tell him that she got a raise or a bonus of some sort, and he seemed to buy it. She wasn't sure how many more raises and bonuses she could possibly get, but that was a problem for another day. For now, she was happily living in her own place, under her own rules, and that was a good feeling.

"Honey, you're on," Bruno called from the hallway. He always did like to micromanage the girls, but a part of her wondered if he just liked hanging around to watch them all get dressed. A few of the girls said that he had made passes at them,

but he left alone. Maybe she wasn't his type, and that worked for her. Hell, she didn't seem to be anyone's type, and while she sometimes wondered what it would be like to have a boyfriend who doted on her as Phoenix and Vixen had, she knew that sooner or later, she'd have to tell him about her job, and that would most likely end her "relationship". Honestly, it had never become an issue for her since most of her dates never evolved into a relationship. Even in high school, boys seemed to avoid her like she had the plague. The good girl image didn't seem to appeal to any of the prepubescent boys who didn't know their ass from a hole in the ground.

"I'm coming," she grumbled more to herself than her boss. If he thought she was talking back, he'd give her more shifts and that was the last thing she wanted for the weekend. The Harlots were having a big party at the club to celebrate finally raising enough money to build their own clubhouse. Savage had given them a parcel of land that he owned nearby, and they were going to be able to break ground in just a few months. A lot of the Royal Bastards had guys in various trades, and they offered to lend a hand to save some money. was going to miss hanging out at Savage Hell with the Bastards, but it was going to be nice for the Harlots to have their own clubhouse to call home. Extra shifts would mean that she'd have to come up with yet another excuse to tell the girls as to why she wouldn't be able to hang out with them again.

"What was that?" Bruno challenged. She looked him over and pasted on her best smile, deciding that it wasn't worth fighting with him.

"Nothing," she insisted. "I said that I'm ready to go on, boss," she lied. He made a humming noise in the back of his throat that let her know that he didn't believe a word she had just said, and she giggled as she walked past him.

"Have a good show," he grumbled.

"Oh, I will," she insisted. She walked out onto the stage, her signature song playing in the background. She had chosen it because of the slow, sultry beat that hummed

through the club. It seemed to put her at ease somehow, knowing that it was just her and that song out there. She was able to drown out all the prying eyes of the horny men watching her, and she just danced. It was freeing and something that she had come to love about her job.

She didn't bother looking out into the darkness as she danced her way around the stage. She knew that there was nothing out there for her. Instead, she thought about her grocery list and what she was going to make for dinner that night. If the guys in the club could only read her mind, and stop watching her body, they'd be in for a rude awakening. There was nothing sexy about grocery lists or making dinner, and that thought always made her smile. She finished her routine as the guys around the stage clapped and tossed money at her. It was something that she had gotten used to, even if it was hard to crawl around picking up the cash from the dirty floor when she first started dancing. Every bill she picked up was a chance for her to buy her own place and get out of her rental. That was her goal and if the suckers watching her wanted to help fund her new home, so be it.

dipped down to take a twenty from one of the guys standing at the side of the stage. “,” his deep voice called. When she looked at him in his dark blue eyes, she couldn't help her gasp. Guys from the club had been in before and never recognized her, but Saint had. He was Dare's older brother and one of the guys she tried to steer clear of. Saint was the new Sergeant at Arms for the Royal Bastards, and he wasn't someone to get mixed up with.

“I'm sorry, but you have me mistaken for someone else, sir,” she whispered. She dropped the twenty he had handed her and quickly scurried off the stage, not wanting to give him any extra time to talk to her. She had blown her cover, for the first time in almost four years, and that was going to be her undoing. If anyone ever found out about her working at the strip club, she'd never live it down. She hated to admit it, but her only recourse was to talk to Saint and beg him not to tell anyone that she worked there. Hopefully, he wasn't as rough around the edges as she had heard, because he

was her only chance at keeping her secret.

## Page 2

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S aint wasn't sure that it was Juno up on the stage dancing until he looked into her green eyes. She had worn a costume, complete with a mask to hide her identity, and even though she seemed familiar to him, he couldn't be sure. That's when he decided to walk up to the side of the stage and hand her a twenty. Up close, he might be able to tell if his hunch was correct—not that it mattered. She was his new sister-in-law's best friend, and he figured that made her off-limits. Especially for what he'd want from her.

Most of the guys down at the Bastards saw him as boring. He was an accountant by day, but at night he was the club's Sergeant at Arms, and he felt like a complete badass. He liked being an accountant, as boring as that seemed. He had chosen to go to college for it and when he took the job at one of the largest accounting firms downtown, he felt pretty proud of himself. He was sure that his parents would have felt the same way about him—or at least he hoped that they would have. Losing them at such a young age and having to take care of his little brother, Dare while working his way through college, was a challenge, but one that he didn't mind doing. He had always been the responsible one, and maybe that's why he loved being a part of the Royal Bastards. They made him feel reckless and carefree—two things that he'd never felt before in his life.

Waiting for Juno wasn't something that he planned on doing, but he found himself sitting outside of the shitty club where she worked for almost thirty minutes. When she finally came out, she looked nervous as hell and when she spotted him in the back of the lot and headed straight toward him, he knew that she was probably going to give him hell. The self-preservationist in him wanted to lock his pickup truck doors and take off, but there was something about the look in her eyes that had him sticking around.

She opened his truck door without asking or invitation, and when she jumped up into the passenger seat and shut the door, he knew that he had made the wrong decision about sticking around. “Um, can I help you?” asked. Sarcasm was his go-to move when he felt out of his element and for some reason, Juno made him feel that way.

“We need to talk,” she insisted. She was a natural beauty but right now, he found everything she was doing to be adorable. That was something that he’d keep to himself though because Juno didn’t look like she was in the mood to hear something like that from him.

“Isn’t that something that you’re supposed to say after we’ve been going out for a while?” he asked. Her gasp filled the cabin of his truck, and he couldn’t help his smile. He liked that he seemed to be able to knock her off her game a bit. From what he knew about Juno, she was considered to be a good girl, but that was only what he had heard around town and down at the club. She and her friends were a bit younger than him and didn’t know them in school like his younger brother Dare did.

“Very funny, but can you try to be serious for just a minute?” she asked. That wasn’t something that made him comfortable—being serious. He had spent so much of his day being serious, he really didn’t like to act that way after hours.

“Probably not,” he admitted, “but I’ll try.” She rolled her eyes and looked around the parking lot as though making sure that they weren’t garnering any extra attention. “What can I do for you, Juno?” he asked.

She turned in her seat and looked at him again. This time, her eyes were less angry and if he wasn’t mistaken, she looked worried. “No one can know that I work here,” she almost whispered. “I’ve never told anyone about this place or what I do for a living.”

“Ever?” he questioned.



“Not ever,” she said.

“What do Vixen and the others think that you do for a living?” he asked.

“They think that I’m a secretary for a law firm two towns over,” she admitted.

“And they bought that?” he asked.

“Yep, for almost four years now,” she said.

“Listen, I’m not judging, but why be an exotic dancer if you don’t want to tell all your friends what you do for a living?” asked.

“Because it pays the bills,” she insisted. “My parents wanted me to go to college, but school really wasn’t my thing. So, I made up a story about getting a job at a law firm and that seemed to appease my overly religious parents.”

“I see,” he breathed.

“When I saved up enough money to get my own place, that solved my problem of keeping my secret from my parents,” she said. “And the girls all seem to accept that I work at the law firm, so I really haven’t had to tell anyone.”

“It must be hard to keep a secret from everyone you know. Have you been able to talk about it with anyone?” he asked.

“Not until now,” she said, nodding at him. “You were the first person from town to recognize me, and that’s why I need you to keep my secret,” she said again. He should have let her off the hook and told her that he wouldn’t tell anyone about her being a dancer, but that would end their conversation, and he was actually having a good time talking to her. Yeah, he was playing with fire, but he just didn’t seem to be

able to stop himself when it came to Juno.

“What does your boyfriend think about you working at a place like this?” he asked.

“He doesn’t think anything about me working as a dancer because he doesn’t exist,” she said.

“So, no boyfriend?” he asked.

“Nope, and no girlfriend, husband, secret lover, boo with benefits, or anything else like that,” she insisted. “I’ve never really dated in high school and after I graduated, I got the job here, and never wanted to explain what I do for a living to a man who might tell me that I needed to quit, so I just avoid men altogether.”

He tried to think back through everything that she had just told him, and when he got to the part where she hadn’t dated, ever, he had more questions that he was sure she wouldn’t answer. Plus, her love life wasn’t his business and that was something that he’d do well to remember.

“So, you have no one to talk to about any of this?” he asked.

“No, and as I’ve already said, I’m good with that. Now, will you please answer my question? Will you keep my secret?” He didn’t have to think about his answer. That was the least he could do.

“Fine, I’ll keep your secret,” he promised.

“Thank you,” she breathed.

“But if you ever need anyone to talk to about any of this, just let me know. I mean, I already know your secret, so why not confide in me—you know, if you need to?”

asked. He was pushing her into a corner, and she looked like a caged animal.

“That’s not necessary,” she insisted. “I haven’t needed to talk to anyone about my job so far, and like I said earlier, it’s been four years now that I’ve been working here.” She shot him down cold, and he really couldn’t blame her. Juno was a smart girl, and she seemed to know how to protect her ass at all costs.

“Well, the offer stands,” he assured. He waited her out to see if she was going to say anything else, and after what felt like an eternity, he realized that she was finished.

“Can I give you a ride home?” he asked, hoping to end the awkwardness.

“No,” she breathed, “my car is right over there.” She nodded to the sensible four-door sedan that sat alone in the back of the parking lot. She opened the door and started to jump down from the passenger seat. Before she shut the door, she turned and stared him down one last time.

“Remember,” she said, pointing her little finger at him. “You promised to keep my secret. No one else knows, so if you tell someone and it gets around, I’ll know.” She wasn’t very intimidating, but he kept his smile concealed.

“I promise to keep your secret,” he said again. “You have nothing to worry about with me, Juno.” That was the truth too. Dare liked to tell people that was one of the most reliable guys he ever knew. Maybe it was the fact that he had to grow up fast after his parents passed. Raising Dare wasn’t an easy task, but his little brother had built his patience and his ability to help out when needed. Juno seemed like someone who needed some help, and he wasn’t going to look the other way. He’d keep her secret, even if he wanted to run back to Savage Hell and tell every one of the guys how hot Juno looked dancing up on stage tonight. No, he’d keep that bit of information to himself and pull it from his memory now and again.

## Page 3

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Juno felt that their little talk had gone well. She also didn't know Saint well enough to know if she was fooling herself into believing that or if he'd really keep her secret. Either way, she couldn't do anything about it if he ran back to Savage Hell and the Harlots and told them all her news. But then what? Would she finally own her shit, or would she call Saint a liar? She knew that she'd never be able to do that. Saint seemed like a nice guy—mostly, and throwing him under the bus wasn't in her rule book.

She had one of those too—a rule book. Well, it wasn't actually a physical book, but more of a made-up list of things she would and wouldn't do to another person. Murder was at the top of her list, not that she wanted to murder Saint, or anyone else for that matter. She always tried to do the right thing, even if it was hard to do. Lying to everyone about her job was a necessary evil and one that she hated herself daily for doing.

Lying to her parents had become second nature. Her overly religious mother would never understand her dancing for a living. The poor woman would die if she saw her up on that stage every night. As an only child, her parents had high hopes for her. They set goals that she didn't want for herself—like going to college. She hated having to tell them that she wasn't going to further her education, so there was no way that she'd tell either of her parents that she was an exotic dancer.

She unlocked her car and slid into the driver's seat, realizing that she had left her cell phone in the dressing room of the club. "Shit," she grumbled to herself. She grabbed her purse and keys, and ran to the back door, trying to dodge the rain that had just started falling. She said a little prayer that the door was still unlocked and when she tugged it open, she almost wanted to cheer.

“What are you doing back here?” Bruno asked.

“I never left,” she admitted. “I’ve just been sitting out in the parking lot.” Well, that was true for the most part. First, she sat in Saint’s truck to talk to him, and it was parked in the back lot. Then, she got in her car and figured out that she had forgotten her phone. Lying to everyone daily had her trying not to tell fibs to everyone, and this time, she succeeded. Not that she cared about lying to Bruno.

“I mean, why are you back in the club? I’m about to turn off the lights and head out,” he said.

“Oh, I forgot my cell phone,” she said. “I think that I left it in the dressing room.”

He held up her phone in its bejeweled pink case and smiled at her. “You mean this phone?” he asked.

“Yes, that’s the one. Thank you for finding it for me,” she said, holding out her hand. Bruno stuffed it back into his pocket and her heart sank. He was toying with her and had probably had way too much to drink. He was a mean drunk, and she knew better than to fuck with him when he was like this—but she wanted her damn phone back.

“How about we play a little game?” he asked.

“I’m not up for games, Bruno. I’m tired and just want to go home and crawl into bed,” she insisted, still holding out her hand to him. He grabbed her extended hand and pulled her against his body. God, he smelled like booze and cigarettes, and she felt like she was going to puke. was also sure that she’d wear his marks from the way he was holding her wrists.

“You’re hurting me,” she spat.

“I’m all for us going back to your place and crawling into your bed,” he slurred. regretted using those words, but she was really just trying to keep her wits about herself and get the hell out of there.

“That’s not what I meant, Bruno. Please let go of me,” she begged.

“How about you give me a kiss and I’ll think about letting you go,” he said. She knew that Bruno was lying but calling him a liar right now might not be her best move.

“I’m not going to kiss you, Bruno. You’re my boss,” she reminded.

“Right, and as your boss, I’m telling you to kiss me. If you want to keep your job, you’ll do as I say.” She needed her job, but at what cost? She had heard some of the other girls talking about Bruno doing this to some of the women, but she never really thought he’d go after her. He had always seemed harmless—until now.

“I need my job, Bruno,” she insisted. “You can’t do this. It’s illegal.” Thinking that she could use logic to wiggle her way out of this was foolish, but she was out of options and desperate.

“Are you threatening me?” he spat, his hand tightening on her wrist.

cried out in pain, “You’re hurting me, Bruno,” she said, “please just let me go. I won’t tell anyone that this happened. You can even keep my phone, just let me go.”

“I’d listen to the lady, Bruno,” a man’s voice said from behind her. Bruno looked past her as she turned her head to see who was coming to her rescue, but she already had a pretty good idea who it was.

“Saint,” she whispered.

“Who the fuck are you and why are you in my club?” Bruno asked.

“I’m ’s friend, and I’m giving you one more chance to do the right thing here, Bruno,” Saint said.

“Yeah, and who’s going to make me? This is my club and you’re trespassing,” Bruno said. “I’ll call the cops, and you’ll go to jail. Who will help poor, helpless then?” She wanted to insist that she was not helpless and that she could handle herself, but she had done a poor job of it so far. Bruno was still holding her wrist, pressing his fingers into her flesh, and Saint was riding in on a white horse ready to save her. Yeah, she was totally the damsel in distress and that plain pissed her off.

“Go ahead and call the cops,” Saint taunted. “I’m sure that would love to tell them all about you threatening to fire her if she didn’t kiss you. Hell, I’m betting that you were going to ask her for more than that to get her phone back.”

“And there are other girls who he’s done this to. I’m sure that they’ll talk too,” added. She wasn’t sure that any of the other women would come forward to talk to the police about Bruno. Some of them were underage, and although they’d be able to put him away for a long time for having sex with a minor, those girls might be too afraid to stand up to him. Some of them still worked for him and like her, they needed their jobs, or they’d end up on the streets. was hoping that Bruno was dumb enough to believe her threat.

“What’s it going to be? I’m sure that I can do a lot of damage to you and your club before the cops get here,” Saint threatened.

She could almost hear Bruno weighing his options. “Fine,” he spat. He released her wrist and shoved her in Saint’s direction, practically falling into his arms.

“You good?” he asked, checking her body over for any issues.

“I am now,” she said, looking up at him. She knew that the knight in shining armor thing was only in her imagination, but damn if she wasn’t seeing Saint in a whole new light.

Bruno stood there, watching them; his smile was mean. “I see what this is,” he spat. “You two are together and now, you’re upset that I touched your woman.”

“That’s not it at all,” insisted. “You can’t take my phone and then tell me to give you sexual favors to get it back, Bruno.”

“Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do, honey,” he growled. “You’ve been nothing but a pain in my ass since you started here, .”

Saint growled, actually growled, and tried to step around her. “Don’t you fucking talk to her that way,” he shouted. put her arms out, trying to keep Saint behind her body, but it was getting harder to do with every passing second.

“Yeah, go on and tell me that you two aren’t together,” Bruno taunted.

“I’m going to fucking kill him,” Saint breathed from behind her.

“No, you’re not,” insisted. “I need my job, Saint.”

“You should listen to your little girlfriend, Saint,” Bruno said. “Oh, and honey, you don’t work here anymore. You should just go ahead and clean out your locker now because if either of you ever come back here, I’ll have you both arrested. The cops will never believe you if you don’t work here.”

“Bruno,” breathed, “I really need my job. If I’m not working, I can’t pay my rent and will have no place to live.” The thought of moving back in with her parents scared the hell out of her. If she had to beg and plead with Bruno to keep her job, she would.



“You son of a bitch,” Saint spat, trying to get around her. didn’t have the energy to deal with him and Bruno.

“You should leave,” she insisted. “I can handle myself.”

“Really, ? Because when I walked in here, you weren’t doing a very good job of handling yourself. In fact, the only one I saw handling you was that asshole,” he said, looking over at Bruno.

“Take your phone, get your stuff, and get the fuck out,” Bruno growled, tossing her cellphone onto the concrete floor. She picked it up and noticed a crack running down the screen.

“You broke my screen,” she accused.

“You’re lucky that’s all I did, honey,” Bruno said. “Get your stuff.” had nothing in her locker of importance. Just a few costumes and cosmetics. She generally didn’t wear makeup—especially not the kind she wore on stage.

“I don’t need anything from my locker. It’s just a few costumes. Give them to the other girls,” she breathed. She walked past Saint, not bothering to look at him because she was pretty sure that she’d see everything that she didn’t want to see staring back at her—anger, disgust, and maybe even pity. She didn’t need any of that from him. Right now, all she wanted to do was go home and try to figure out how she was going to pay for her apartment because her pretend job at the law firm wasn’t going to pay her very real bills.

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She was almost to her car when Saint growled her name and damn it even that was sexy. Seeing him come to her rescue both pissed her off and had her swooning a bit.

It was nice to have someone in her corner, especially tonight when Bruno got handsy. She didn't want to even think about what might have happened if Saint hadn't followed her into the club. The question was—why did he follow her in? She hadn't even noticed that he was still in the parking lot. Was he watching her or was it just a coincidence?

She turned around to face him, walking straight into his chest. Saint put his arms around her, trying to keep her from falling. Unfortunately for her, she was a natural born klutz. She went down, taking Saint with her, and she was sure that she had done a bit of damage to them both.

"Fuck," she spat, "why would you be right behind me, Saint?" She sounded as though she was accusing him of being the reason that they were both lying on the ground together.

"Don't blame me for this," he said, "you're the one who lost your balance and pulled us both down to the pavement. Are you all right?"

"I will be," she insisted, "I think I'm going to be just a bit banged up. I've had bruises before; I'll heal." She looked him over, realizing that he looked a little worse for wear. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"I think that my arm might be busted. I landed on my left arm when we fell, trying to brace myself," he said.

"You mean, as in broken?" She looked down at his arm and winced. She wasn't a doctor, but it looked broken to her.

"Pretty much," he said, "let's get up off the ground and I'll go get it looked at."

"Wait," she almost shouted.

“Did you hurt yourself and can’t get up?” He looked her over and she shook her head.

“No, I want to ask you a question,” she said.

“You want to have a fucking conversation while we sit on the ground?” he grumbled.

She shrugged, “You’ll answer my questions faster if you want to get your arm checked out.”

“I’m in a lot of pain here, honey,” he admitted. “How about you drive me to the emergency room, and I’ll answer your questions?” She felt like an ass for demanding that he sit on the ground with her while she questioned him.

“I’m sorry, of course you’re in pain. Get in my car and I’ll drive you to the ER,” she offered.

“Your car?” he asked, looking at it as though it had offended him in some way.

“What’s wrong with my car?” She stared him down and he just smiled at her. All her girl parts seemed to do a little dance when he flashed her his sexy smile. One thing about Saint that she knew for certain, he was a heartthrob, and in high school, he had quite a reputation for dating his way through the female population. He was out of school by the time she got to high school, but he was pretty famous around town for his antics. She had been friends with Dare, his younger brother since they were in grade school, and could remember when their parents died. Her mother and father made her go to the funeral to pay her respects to Dare for his loss, and God, she felt out of her element, not knowing what to say to her friend and his older brother. Dare didn’t seem like the same boy she had known since second grade and that made her sad. She worried about her friend, but after a while, things went back to normal between the two of them. Saint became Dare’s guardian, and she remembered him telling her how relieved he was that his brother was going to take care of him and not

put him in foster care where he'd probably have to move away.

Saint stood from the pavement and held his good hand down to help her up. "Well, for one, it's a grandma car," he said.

"It is not," she insisted, taking his offered hand. Saint practically lifted her off the ground completely as he helped her to her feet. "Did my so-called friends tell you to say that?" she asked. "Making fun of her is mean since she might be my new home soon." He rolled his eyes at her as if he didn't believe a word that came out of her mouth.

"No," he said, "I have eyes and can see for myself that it's a grandma car. How about you drive my truck?"

She looked over at his truck and back at him. "You've got to be kidding. I can't drive that thing, it's a tank."

"You'll do great," he insisted. "It's about as long as your grandma car, so you've got lots of practice." She wasn't sure if she wanted to slap him or laugh. He was serious and seemed to be in a good deal of pain, so laughing was out of the question, and unfortunately, so was slapping him.

"Fine, I'll drive your truck, but I want it noted that I'm doing so under protest. And if we get into an accident, I won't be held accountable." Saint unlocked his truck, and she helped him up into the passenger side. He handed her the keys, and she sighed and took them. The thought of driving his truck terrified her. Any newer cars did. She was used to her old car.

She got into the driver's seat and adjusted the seat, having to move it practically all the way up to the steering wheel. "I think that I might be too short for this thing," she breathed.

“Can you reach the gas pedal and break?” Saint asked.

She touched both with her foot and nodded, “Yes,” she said.

“Then, you’ll be fine,” he grumbled. “Can you help me with my seatbelt?” She reached across his body and grabbed the belt, pulling it across his chest and buckling it into place.

“Comfy?” she asked. He gave her a look as though she had lost her mind by even asking him that question.

“I have a broken arm and you’re asking me if I’m comfy?” He had a point. She decided to go with the old adage that silence was golden as she buckled her seatbelt and started the truck. “I’m sorry,” he breathed. “I’m a horrible patient and when I’m in pain, I can be a real asshole.”

“No kidding,” she mumbled to herself.

“Again, sorry,” he said. “I appreciate you taking me to the hospital. I owe you one, .”

“You don’t owe me anything,” she insisted. “You got me out of my jam with Bruno, so let’s call things even,” she said. He had saved her ass back at the club, but it hurt her pride to admit that to him or anyone else. She had always been an independent woman, capable of taking care of herself. But if Saint hadn’t followed her into the club, she didn’t know what would have happened.

“So, you had questions that I agreed to answer while you drove,” he reminded. “Let’s have them.” had almost forgotten what she wanted to ask him until she brought up him rescuing her from Bruno.

“Are you sure that you don’t mind?” she asked, suddenly feeling awful about playing

twenty questions with him while he was in so much pain.

“Ask away,” he insisted.

“Okay, why did you follow me into the club tonight?” she asked. “I thought that we settled things in your truck. You agreed to keep my secret, and we’d go our separate ways,” she said.

“Right, and I was about to pull out of the parking lot when I saw you run back into the club. I knew that no one else was around, and I wanted to make sure that you got back to your car safely. You can’t be too careful on that side of town.” She knew how dangerous that side of town was. She had been working over there for four years now. But working closer to home might have gotten her recognized before now, and she couldn’t risk that happening.

“You didn’t need to wait for me. I can handle myself on that side of town,” she insisted.

“What about your boss?” he asked. “Were you handling yourself with him?” Saint wasn’t playing fair, and that plain pissed her off.

“Hey, you could be a little bit nicer to me. I am driving you to the hospital,” she reminded.

“And I appreciate you doing this for me, but why can’t you accept my help tonight?” She hated asking anyone for help and admitting that she needed it wasn’t something that made her comfortable.

“I don’t like accepting help,” she said. “I appreciate that you got me out of a sticky situation, but I could have handled him.”

Saint sighed and shook his head, staring out the windshield. “You’re hopeless,” he whispered.

“I am not,” she spat.

“You are, but I’ll concede if that will stop this conversation from continuing,” Saint said.

“Deal,” she agreed. She was tired of talking about him coming to her rescue and whether or not she actually needed his help—because she didn’t, but Saint would never accept that. just wanted to concentrate on getting him to the hospital and having him patched up so that she could go home and crawl into her own bed. She might not have her apartment for very much longer and she wanted to enjoy it while she did.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

His arm hurt like a son of a bitch, and arguing with Juno was grating on his last nerve, even if it did help him forget some of the pain. She was the most stubborn woman he had ever known, but he already knew that about her. She was one of Dare's best friends, and while his little brother didn't have any friends over to the house after their parents died, Juno always called him to check on him and was always hanging around him when picked Dare up from school. Juno was a good friend to his brother and even helped him get through losing his parents and having become his guardian. It was an adjustment period for both of them, but he'd do it all over again to keep his brother out of the foster care system.

The thing about Juno was—he actually liked her stubbornness. It turned him on. He had always liked his women a little fiery, and she was an inferno. The problem remained that she was Dare's best friend, and over four years younger than him. He never dated younger women. They usually liked to play games, and he didn't have time for games. But Juno didn't seem the type of woman who liked games either.

He looked over to find her crying and he wondered what he had said to upset her. He knew that he wasn't the nicest guy, but making her cry wasn't the plan. "Why are you crying?" he asked.

She wiped the tears from her cheeks, "I was just thinking that I probably won't have my apartment for too much longer," she said. "I mean, if I can't pay my rent, I'm pretty sure that my landlord won't let me keep living there."

"I'm sure that you'll be able to find another job soon," he assured.

"Not one that will pay my bills," she insisted. "I was barely making it on my own



before losing my crappy job. And all my friends are married and even have kids, so crashing on their couches isn't an option."

"Can you find a cheaper place to live?" he asked.

"I've tried, but all of the rent-controlled apartments are taken, and I had no choice but to take the place that I'm in. I'm going to have to move back in with my parents, and I don't know if I can do that. I'd rather live in my car," she said.

"Well, it is big enough," he teased. She shot him a look, letting him know that she wasn't in a joking mood right now. "Sorry," he breathed.

"If I move back in with them, I'll never hear the end about me going to college. They don't understand that not everyone is cut out for college. Hell, I barely made it out of high school in one piece." wondered what she meant by that, but he was distracted as she pulled into the hospital entrance, and he pointed at the emergency room sign. Juno followed the signs to the back of the building and pulled up to the ER entrance.

"I'll help you out and then park your truck," she said.

"That's not necessary," insisted. "I can walk." He looked around the dimly lit parking lot and thought about all of the bad things that could happen to a woman who was walking alone at night.

"Is this your way of protecting me from all of the imaginary monsters who live in the dark?" He shook his head, but then thought better of lying to her, and nodded.

"I'm just trying to look out for you, Juno," he said. That was partially true. Plus, he was starting to like the little fireball and if something happened to her now, he wouldn't get the chance to ask her out—not that he had fully decided if that was a wise decision or not yet.

“Suit yourself,” she breathed, “if you want to walk, then you can fucking walk.”

“Thanks,” he mumbled. She pulled around to the parking lot and parked his truck in the middle of nowhere. He was pretty sure that she had picked the furthest spot from the emergency room’s entrance just to punish him for being a decent guy. decided to pretend that it didn’t bother him at all to walk so far, even though his arm felt like it was on fire.

They walked in silence to the ER and that was fine by him. He was able to deal with her anger rather than her tears. As soon as they got into the emergency room, Juno took charge, telling the woman behind the desk what had happened in detail, leaving out the part about them being in a parking lot at the strip club. By the time she finished telling the nurse about his accident, she handed him a clipboard with papers attached and a pen.

“Fill these out and bring them back up here when you’re finished,” the nurse ordered.

“Thank you,” said, taking the clipboard from her. Juno followed him over to the waiting room and sat down next to him.

“Do you need me to fill those out for you?” Juno asked.

“I think that I can handle it,” he said, “I broke my left arm, remember? I’m right-handed so filling out the paperwork shouldn’t hurt too much.”

“Suit yourself,” she said. She seemed to say that a lot to him, but decided to ignore her comment and started filling out the papers. He fumbled through his wallet, trying to grab his insurance card out, and failed miserably using only one hand. Juno sat back in her chair and smiled over at him. He could feel her silently gloating when he finally gave up.

“Can you please help me get my insurance card out of my wallet?” he asked.

“But you have your right hand. It’s not broken,” she taunted.

“Juno, for just once tonight could you not give me any shit? I just need help getting my card out of my wallet,” he said.

“Fine,” she said, taking the wallet from him, “but you could have at least said please.”

“Please,” he added as she handed him back the card. He finished filling out the paperwork and took it up to the lady behind the desk.

“Your wife really likes to give you hell, doesn’t she?” He looked back at Juno and laughed.

“She’d not my wife. In fact, we really don’t know each other. She’s my little brother’s best friend,” he explained.

“And she brought you to the ER?” the woman asked. “Well, then, I take back what I just said about her. You should treat her better because she’s a keeper.”

He rolled his eyes at her as Juno shouted, “Thank you,” over her shoulder to the woman. Honestly, she didn’t seem to miss anything, and he was betting that she had heard the woman calling her his wife.

“Have a seat and we’ll call you back soon,” the nurse said. He wanted to protest about having to wait, but he didn’t want to seem like a total baby—especially in front of Juno.

He sat down next to her, and she smiled over at him. “She’s right,” Juno said, “I am a

keeper.”

“I don’t doubt that honey, but I don’t need a wife or a girlfriend, no matter how much of a keeper you are,” he said. He could never see himself as a husband, and being someone’s boyfriend sounded like more work than he wanted. Asking Juno for a night of hot sex didn’t feel right either. He was sure that Dare wouldn’t be okay with that.

“Oh,” she breathed. “I didn’t know.”

“You didn’t know what?” he questioned.

“I didn’t know that you’re gay,” she said.

“What the fuck, Juno,” he growled, “I’m not gay,” he practically shouted. “I just don’t want to be in a committed relationship. It doesn’t mean that I don’t like women.”

“Well, if it makes you feel any better, I wasn’t implying that you marry or date me,” she whispered, looking around the room to see who was watching them. Just about every person in the waiting room had taken an interest in their conversation. If Juno had told her best friends about where she worked, she wouldn’t have had an issue with having a private conversation publicly.

“Noted,” he whispered. The woman from behind the desk called his name and he stood to go back to have his arm looked at.

Juno grabbed his good arm, stopping him. “Do you want me to come back with you?” she asked.

“I’m good,” he lied. He was in a lot of pain and worried that they were going to give

him something that might incapacitate him, and he hated feeling that way. It's one of the reasons why he never drank. The other guys in the Royal Bastards made fun of him, but he never really gave a fuck. He liked complete control, and booze and drugs took that away from him.

"All right—don't say that I didn't offer," she said. "I'll be here waiting to drive you back to the club so that I can pick up my car." He nodded and turned to go back with the nurse who was waiting for him. He didn't bother to tell Juno that he'd probably need her to drive him home since he wouldn't be able to drive if they shot him full of drugs.

"You ready for a few X-rays?" the nurse asked. He wasn't ready for anything that had happened tonight—especially finding Juno up on stage, dancing, while guys threw cash at her. Yeah—nothing made sense tonight and he wasn't ready for any of it.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

Juno thought about calling Dare to tell him that his brother was in the hospital, but then how would she explain to her friends why she was with Saint in the first place? She was going to have to come up with a damn good story at some point because she needed to tell Sprite, Phoenix, and Vixen that she was going to have to move back home with her parents. It was pointless to tell them that she was an exotic dancer since there was no way that Bruno would hire her back now after everything that happened with Saint tonight. She'd have to stick with her cover story and tell her friends that she was fired from the law firm and that she just needed time to find another secretarial position. That would cover her ass with the girls, but how was she going to explain that she had driven Saint to the emergency room for his broken arm—that she caused in the parking lot at a strip club. She checked the time, noting that it was almost two in the morning, and decided that waking Dare up because Saint broke his arm, wasn't necessary. If Saint's injuries were life-threatening, she'd call him, but that wasn't the case.

sat in the waiting room, dozing in and out of sleep when she heard someone walk in and sit next to her. She peeped one eye open to see who it was and found Dare staring back at her. "Why are you here?" She mumbled, trying to figure out if he was really sitting next to her or if her mind was playing tricks on her. She had been trying to figure out what to do about telling Dare when she started to doze off.

"I could ask you the same thing," Dare said. "Does Vixen know your secret?" he asked.

"Um, my secret?" squeaked. "What secret?" She never gave out information without knowing what was going on first. It's how she had kept her big secret all this time.

He sighed and rolled his eyes at her. "I'm one of your oldest friends, so I'm not sure why you are lying to me right now." The problem with Dare was that he could see right through her, and he was right, he was her oldest friend. Still, playing dumb was her only choice here.

"I'm not sure what you're talking about, Dare," she insisted. "I'm not lying to you about anything."

"Then, why did I have to find out from Saint that you two are dating?" Dare asked. "He called to tell me that he fell and broke his arm while you two were out on a date, and you brought him here." Why the hell would Saint tell his brother that? She thought back over what Dare had just told her and realized that Saint was probably trying to cover her ass. He didn't lie to his brother and even covered for how he had gotten a broken arm. The problem was, how was she going to lie to Dare and say that they were dating?

"You okay?" Dare asked. She wasn't but there was no way she was going to tell him that. She felt as though her head was spinning, and all she wanted to do was get off the ride.

"I am," she lied. He sat back in the chair and looked her over, trying to decide if he was going to believe her or not. That's the way Dare always looked at her when he wasn't sure if she was lying to him or not. He was the one that she worried about most when it came to her real secret of working at the club. Being friends with Dare was like being friends with a bloodhound. He was always snooping around, trying to find all the clues. But this time, Saint might have covered both their asses enough to get away with the crazy lie that he told his brother.

"Are you going to tell Vixen?" asked. She knew that her girlfriends would have many questions before giving up the hunt.

“No,” he whispered, “you are.” Shit—Dare wasn’t going to cover for her forever, that much she knew. “She’s one of your best friends, and you and Saint won’t be able to hide your relationship forever. And it’s not my responsibility to tell my wife that you’ve been keeping the fact that you’re dating Saint from her and the other Royal Harlots.”

“Please, just let me tell Vixen,” she begged. The last thing she wanted was to have to confess her life choices to every woman in the Royal Harlots.

“I’ll give you twenty-four hours to tell her, and then, I’ll tell her myself. I won’t lie to my wife and keeping your and Saint’s secret is basically a lie,” Dare insisted. She wouldn’t want him to lie to Vixen, but she was going to have to rehearse her story, and going over everything with Saint would be very helpful. But for now, she was alone and having to deal with Saint’s lie to his brother.

“I’ll tell her,” she lied. She was going to have to come up with some excuse as to why Saint lied about them being in a relationship—but that might involve her telling her friends about her choice of work. Well, what she used to do for work. What really wanted was some sleep to clear her cloudy mind and then she’d have to sit down with Saint and come up with a logical reason as to why they were together tonight.

“I can hang out here and give Saint a ride home if you want to go home. It’s after three in the morning, and you’ve got to be exhausted,” Dave said. She was, but if she left now, how would she get back to her car?

“I’d love to go home, but I drove Saint’s truck here and I’d have to pick up my car,” she admitted without telling him where her car was parked.

“Well, I can run you to your car and pick up Saint’s truck from here in the morning,” he said. “He’s getting his cast on now, according to that very moody woman behind the desk over there,” he nodded to the woman who had cheered for her earlier and



couldn't help her smile.

"I think that she's nice," insisted.

"Yeah, well, apparently she either doesn't like men, or my brother did something to piss that woman off and she's angry at me for being his brother," Dare grumbled.

"It might just be something about you and Saint that she doesn't like," said.

"Impossible," he said. "My wife tells me every day that I'm irresistible." He bobbed his eyebrows at her, and she groaned something about keeping the gross stuff to himself, causing him to laugh. "So, how about I give you a ride before Saint gets released?" She was pretty sure that he wasn't going to leave her alone about going home. She was going to have to come up with a good lie—and fast.

"Well, I promised Saint that I'd be here for him when he got out and that I'd stay the night with him—you know, take care of him," she said, bobbing her eyebrows at him. This time it was Dare's turn to groan in disgust and was pretty sure that she had covered her ass with one darn good lie.

"Okay, I don't need any more details," he grumbled. "Do you want me to wait for him to get out? I can keep you company. We haven't caught up in a long time." Dare was right. They hadn't talked a whole lot since he and Vixen got married. They had all seen each other down at Savage Hell, during parties where both the Harlots and Bastards shared the clubhouse. Soon, the Harlots would have their own club, and she knew that all the women would miss hanging out at Savage Hell. At least they would have parties where they could all hang out. And the guys liked to bring their Ol'ladies to the bar to hang out with them on nights that they didn't have church. But she wasn't anyone's Ol'lady and being invited to Savage Hell might not happen for her.

"I'm sure that Vixen will want you home," she insisted. "No sense in both of us

sitting around in these uncomfortable chairs. You go home and tell my friend that I say hi. We can catch up soon at Savage Hell.” She hated that Dare looked a bit disappointed in being dismissed by her, but if she didn’t talk to Saint first to get their stories straight, they might blow the cover story that Saint had come up with for her. Telling Dare to go home was a necessary evil, even if she had hurt his feelings.

“Okay, well, tell my brother that I stopped by and if he needs anything, to just give me a call. That goes for you too. If you need to go to work and don’t want to leave him tomorrow, just let me know and I’ll come babysit him for a while.” She was pretty sure that Saint wouldn’t let either of them take care of him, and no way in hell he’d let them babysit him. Saint was stubborn, and she was sure that he wasn’t used to having anyone take care of him. He usually played the role of caretaker and giving that up would probably be impossible for him.

“Will do,” promised. “Thank you for checking on us,” she said, almost choking on the word, “Us” but if she was going to keep up the ruse that she and Saint were together, she’d have to use words that involved them being a couple—at least until they could fake breakup.

\* \* \*

woke up to someone shaking her and God, her back was killing her. She opened her eyes to find Saint standing over her, and she quickly sat up. “You must have fallen asleep,” he said.

“What time is it?” asked.

“It’s almost four in the morning. I hear that my little brother stopped by to check on me.”

“Who told you that?” she asked. They were the only two people left in the waiting

room. He nodded back to the woman behind the desk, and she smiled back at both of them.

“I’m guessing it’s almost the end of her shift because she was really nice to me when I came out,” he said. “Are you still okay with driving me home?” Saint asked. “Or at least, back to your car. I should be able to take it from there.”

“No driving,” the woman called, “doctor’s orders.”

“Snitch,” he grumbled.

“How long before he’ll be able to drive?” asked the woman.

“Two weeks,” she said.

“Two weeks?” repeated. “I thought you just broke your arm.” She had a broken arm her senior year in high school, and she could still drive.

“Apparently, I did more damage than I thought. I can’t use my arm at all for two weeks, and then, I have to be seen by an orthopedist to see if I’m healing correctly. If not, I’ll have to have a little operation.” God, she felt awful.

“I’m so sorry,” she breathed, “if I wasn’t such a klutz, you wouldn’t be in this mess.”

Saint shrugged as though it was no big deal. “Don’t worry about it. I was the one who lost my balance and fell on top of you.” That wasn’t the way that she remembered things. She practically pulled him down to the pavement with her, but for some reason, Saint was trying to make her feel better.

“You don’t have to do that, Saint,” she whispered.

“What am I doing, ?” He knew exactly what he was doing and now he was giving her a hard time about it.

“I don’t need you to make me feel better,” she insisted. “I pulled you down when I fell and broke your arm.”

Saint sighed, “Can we talk about this another time? My pain meds are kicking in and I need to get home before I’m out cold. Just drive me to the club—I don’t live far from there.”

“Okay, have you been discharged?” asked.

“I have been,” Saint said, holding up his paperwork in his good hand.

“Great, let’s go then.” She smiled and waved back at the lady behind the desk and walked out into the crisp night air. She was exhausted, but the cold air helped to wake her up enough that she knew she’d be able to drive back to the club.

unlocked Saint’s truck and helped him up into the passenger seat, even though he protested that he didn’t need any help. As soon as she got him buckled in, she shut his door and rounded the vehicle, getting into the driver’s side. She buckled in and started the truck, turning to face Saint.

“Why did you tell your brother that we’re dating and that’s why we were together tonight?” she asked. was going to wait to have this conversation with Saint, but she was pretty sure that after tonight, they probably wouldn’t be seeing each other very much. Their paths barely crossed, and she was sure that wasn’t going to change.

“I was pretty sure that you wouldn’t want me to tell Dare the truth, so I went with the first thing that popped into my head. Why else would we be hanging out, ?” he asked.

“I don’t know—maybe we both ran into each other around town or something. You had to go with a lie that was going to be hard to keep up with?” She sounded a bit pissed off, and wasn’t sure if it was the late hour or the fact that Saint seemed to get on her last nerve for some reason. Sure, the guy was hot as hell, but that really didn’t mean anything to her. He also annoyed the shit out of her, and she had a feeling that would cancel out his hotness factor.

“Hey, I was in a lot of pain when I called to let Dare know that I was in the ER, and I needed to come up with something on the fly. I don’t think you could have done any better,” he spat. She felt like an ass for pressuring him to answer her questions. He was right—if she was in that kind of pain, she wouldn’t be quick on her feet either. Hell, she’d be a complete baby, and coming up with any excuse would have been damn near impossible for her.

“I’m sorry,” she breathed, “you’re right. But now, we have to fake break up over our fake relationship because everyone down at the club will know about this by sunup, and I’m pretty sure that they’ll expect us to be together the next time we show up at Savage Hell.”

“Shit,” he mumbled, “I hadn’t thought of it that way. I’m sure that we can put our heads together and come up with something, but do you mind if we do that tomorrow? I’m so exhausted that thinking straight won’t be my strong suit until I can get some sleep.” She wanted to point out that it was already tomorrow, but she didn’t want to sound like a bitch. Saint laid his head back and was almost asleep when she pulled into the parking lot at the strip club and gasped at the sight of her car.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Someone set my car on fire,” she shouted. The flames were almost out, and her poor car looked more like a charred shell. pulled into the back of the lot and parked Saint’s truck. “Who would do this to my car?”

“Someone with taste,” he said, chuckling at his own joke.

“You’re no help,” she mumbled, “you’re high as a kite and practically useless.”

“Hey,” he said, “I am not. If I was high as a kite, as you put it, would I tell you that you should call the cops and file a police report?” he asked.

In a perfect world, she’d agree with him, but if she did that, she’d have to tell the cops everything—even about working at the club. The small-town gossip mill would have a field day with that news and by sunup, she’d have her phone ringing off the hook from Vixen, Phoenix, and Sprite. She needed time to think, and sleep would probably be good for both of them. She looked over to find Saint already passed out again next to her and she sighed.

“Guess I’m taking you back to your place,” she whispered to herself. The question was, how was she going to get back to her apartment without her car? She took one last look at her old grandma car and felt like she wanted to cry—but she didn’t have time for that now. She needed to get Saint home and they both needed some shut-eye before she figured out the next step in her very screwed-up life.

“I’m just going to take your wallet out of your jacket pocket and look at your license,” she whispered. She knew that he’d probably sleep right through her rummaging through his pocket, but she wanted to be careful not to spook him. She found his wallet and quickly memorized his address. He didn’t live far from her apartment, but his neighborhood was nicer, and he probably lived in a house rather than a tiny apartment.

She quickly returned his wallet to his jacket pocket and turned on the pickup truck. She was going to get him home, and then she’d have to figure out a way to get him into the house and bed—by herself, because the very last thing that she wanted to do was call Dare to help her. No, she’d have to figure this out on her own, and then, when

they were both up in the morning, she and Saint were going to have a come-to-Jesus meeting to get a few things straight. Number one on the agenda was figuring out how to break up with each other and have no one suspicious of them—and that was going to involve one hell of a crazy plan.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

S aint woke up to the smell of coffee and if he wasn't mistaken, pancakes. It had been some time since his home smelled like pancakes—since Dare used to live with him after their parents passed. His little brother loved to make pancakes on the weekends when he didn't have school, and he wondered why Dare would randomly show up at the house to make them for him now.

He stretched and shouted out in pain. His arm hurt like a son of a bitch, and he pulled the sheets down over it. "Fuck," he swore. For just a second, while still in sleep twilight, he had forgotten all about breaking his arm. "How the hell did I get home?" He sounded like a crazy person asking himself that question, but he had no memory of driving back to his house or getting in his bed. The last thing he remembered was Juno telling him that her car was on fire.

"Shit," he grumbled, getting out of bed and finding a pair of sweatpants to pull on. He didn't bother with a shirt because that would have taken him way too long to maneuver over his arm. He needed to call Juno and find out what the hell happened after he was discharged from the hospital, then he was going to have to find a way to get his truck back from her place, and he was hoping that Dare could help him out since he wasn't allowed to drive for two weeks. He'd eat some of the pancakes that Dare was making for him and take his pain meds before heading out. planned on following the doctor's orders to a tee because there was no way that he wanted to go through an operation to fix his arm.

He walked down the hallway to his kitchen, his stomach growling from just the smell of breakfast. He didn't realize how hungry he was until now. "You know, you didn't have to come over here just to make me breakfast, little brother," he said, turning the corner into the kitchen. He stopped dead when he found Juno standing in front of his



stove, flipping pancakes.

She smiled over at him and nodded. “Good morning,” she said.

“I thought that you were my brother, sorry,” he said.

“Not a problem. Dare did stop by the hospital last night,” she reminded.

“I remember that much,” he said, “unfortunately, the rest of it is a bit fuzzy. Did you drive me home?” asked.

“I did,” she said.

“Oh, I appreciate that,” he said. “How did you get me up to my bed?” She was so tiny compared to him, there was no way that she’d be able to get him upstairs on her own.

“That part wasn’t easy. You’re heavy. But you woke up enough to lean on me and practically walk upstairs with help from me. We did have to take a break about halfway up the stairs. You said you needed a nap, but I was lucky enough to convince you to stay awake long enough to get the rest of the way to your room.”

“Well, that doesn’t seem like an easy task,” he said.

“It wasn’t, but I made it work,” she said. She filled a plate with pancakes and poured him a cup of coffee. “How do you take your coffee?” Juno asked.

“Black,” he said. “Thanks for doing all this for me. I bet you’re exhausted. You must have only gotten about an hour’s sleep before you woke up to come back over here.”

“Oh, I stayed here and slept on your couch,” she admitted. “Unless you’re hiding a bed somewhere, I’m guessing that you only have one,” she said.

shrugged, “Nope. I never needed a second bed, so I turned the second bedroom into a home office. It comes in handy during tax season,” he said.

“Tax season,” she repeated, “what happens during tax season?”

“I’m an accountant and tax season is insane. It’s nice to have that little room upstairs to work in late at night.”

“Well, I’m sorry that you had to sleep on my sofa,” he said. “I’d be happy to have you sleep in my bed,” he teased. “It was nice of you to put up with my sofa, but you didn’t have to babysit me,” he insisted. The last thing he wanted to do was put anyone out while taking care of him. He could figure out how to take care of himself.

“I wasn’t babysitting you, I was trapped here,” she said.

“Trapped,” he asked. “How were you trapped?”

“I don’t expect you to remember that my car was on fire. I didn’t want to borrow your truck to go home without your permission and well, you were a little out of it.”

“Wait—your car was on fire in the club’s parking lot?” asked.

“Actually, it was almost burned out by the time we got there, but yes. Someone set my car on fire and now, I have no job and no car.”

“What did the police say? Do they have any leads about who did that to your car?” He had a pretty good idea about who did this to her old car—Bruno. The guy seemed pretty pissed at her and maybe firing her wasn’t enough for him. He seemed like the kind of guy who would want the last word and setting Juno’s car on fire would definitely give him that.

She sat down at the table next to him with her own plate of pancakes and a cup of coffee. “Um, I didn’t call the police,” she admitted.

“Why the fuck not?” asked. “Your car was vandalized, and you didn’t think to call the cops?”

“Well, you were passed out next to me, and calling the cops and sitting there until they showed up, wasn’t something that I wanted to do. You know how bad that side of town is. The cops would have shown up when they had nothing better to do and we’d probably still be sitting in that parking lot waiting. Plus, my car was old, and I probably won’t get anything for it from my insurance company.”

“You still have to report it, Juno,” he insisted.

“Come on, , you and I both know who did this. What’s it going to help if we call the cops? My involvement in the club would become public knowledge and I don’t want that to happen.”

“You can’t let him get away with this, Juno. It’s bad enough that he sexually harassed you and got away with it. He needs to be stopped,” insisted. “If you don’t do it, I will.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” she breathed. Juno dropped her fork on her plate and shoved it back from herself. “You’d throw me under the bus like that?” He would and with good reason.

“If you don’t call the cops, Bruno will just keep coming for you. He feels that you wronged him in some way, and he won’t stop until he’s satisfied that you’ve suffered enough. I’ve known guys like him, and I know what he’s capable of.” Being the enforcer for the Royal Bastards, he came across all types of assholes who wanted nothing more than to hurt him. He couldn’t let Juno get hurt in this mess, and he

knew of one sure way to stop Bruno from doing so. He'd have to call the cops, and Juno would have to tell them about the sexual harassment and her burned car. It was the only way.

\* \* \*

waited until they were finished breakfast and Juno was washing dishes to call the cops. He felt horrible that he couldn't help, but she insisted that she didn't mind. also felt like shit that her car was set on fire. If they had taken her car to the emergency room, instead of his truck, she might still have her car. Bruno didn't know what he was driving, and Juno seemed to be the guy's target, not that it made feel any better about the whole situation.

He was hoping that the cops would show up at his place and Juno would cave and agree to file a report about what had happened to her the night before. just needed them to show up before the pain pills kicked in and knocked him out. He was sure that would happen in the next twenty minutes since he had just taken his pills with breakfast, and he wanted to be there for Juno. But, if he couldn't be there for her, he knew one person who could be, and she wouldn't tell anyone about Juno working at the strip club.

She walked out to the family room, where she had banished him, telling him to sit with his arm on a few pillows. Juno was right that he needed to elevate his arm, but he wouldn't tell her that. His fingers were swelling, and he was sure that it was because he had used his arm more than he should have already. She seemed to always like being right, and that wasn't something he was going to let stand.

"Done the dishes. Would you mind if I took a quick shower? I'm going to have to call one of the girls to come get me and run me home. I don't want them to see me in my club makeup. They'll ask questions since I don't usually wear this much makeup." He had seen her around Savage Hell when the Harlots and Bastards shared the

clubhouse for the night. Juno barely wore any makeup at all, and he thought that she was hot as hell. He really didn't think she needed any makeup but telling her that wouldn't end well. She still seemed pissed at him for everything that had happened the night before.

knew that if she got in the shower before the cops came, she might just hide in his bathroom until she could get one of the women in her little clik to come pick her up and take her home. He was going to have to stall her if he wanted her to give the officers a statement.

“How about if you sit down and take a break?” he asked. “You said yourself that you didn't get much sleep last night.” He hadn't really slept well after they got home from the hospital. His painkillers were barely taking off the edge and trying to sleep while his arm was throbbing didn't work out for him.

There was a knock at his front door, and he let out his breath. “Are you expecting company?” Juno asked. He shrugged and got up to answer the door.

“It's probably just someone who heard that I broke my arm and is stopping by to check on me.” She nodded at him and sat back on his couch, seeming to buy his stupid excuse.

unlocked his door and pulled it open to find Banshee standing on the front porch. “Nice house, ,” she said. “Where is she?” Banshee wasn't one to make small talk. It was probably because she had no extra time for that nonsense, being the Prez of the Royal Harlots in Huntsville.

“She's in the family room. I'll take you there,” he offered. Banshee stepped into his entryway and shut the door behind herself.

“I'm glad that you called me, even though I don't fully understand what happened to

the two of you last night. Judging from the cast on your arm, it was a wild evening.”

“Not just evening, but it was a wild morning too. We didn’t get back here until almost dawn. We’re exhausted, but I’m really glad that you agreed to come by and help Juno out. She needs her club right now.” They walked back to the family room and Juno shot a nasty look. He could tell that she had caught onto his plan, but there was no going back now.

“Why are you here?” Juno asked Banshee.

“I’m guessing that didn’t tell you that he called me and asked if I could stop by to check on you,” Banshee said. He was glad that Banshee didn’t spill the beans about the cops coming over. He was sure that Juno would take off if she had.

“You called her?” Juno stared him down as if daring her to answer her question.

“I did,” he admitted. “I thought that you’d want her help when the cops got here—you know like moral support.”

“I shouldn’t need moral support because I told you that I wasn’t going to file a report,” Juno insisted. God, she was the most stubborn woman on the planet, and even when she was mad at him, she was still hot as hell.

“Can one of you tell me what the fuck is going on here?” Banshee asked. Juno pressed her lips together, and knew that she wasn’t sure what to tell her Prez. She’d never want to lie to her, but he could. He’d stick to the truth as much as possible though. just wished that he could remember what he had told his brother, but his pain meds seemed to wipe out most of his night.

“Juno and I are dating,” he started. Juno held up her hand, stopping him from going forward with their cover story.

“No, we are not dating. Thanks to you, she’s going to find out the truth when the cops question me,” Juno said. He hadn’t really thought about that part when he called the police, but it was too late to call them off. His doorbell rang and he sighed.

“Hold tight,” ordered, “I’ll answer the door and let the cops in. Just answer their questions, honey. You’ll do great.”

He walked out of the family room and was on his way to the front door when he heard Juno say, “Asshole,” and all he could do was laugh. Her sass was going to be the end of him, and for some crazy reason, didn’t care.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

Juno wasn't very happy with Saint for going against her wishes to call in the cops. Now, she was going to have to tell them the story about why her car was sitting at a strip club, a pile of ashes on the asphalt. Calling Banshee was pure stupidity since she'd be there to hear her story and would probably report back to all the women down at the Harlots.

"I hope you don't mind me telling the story once," she said to Banshee. "I'm tired and don't want to have to repeat myself. I need to ask you for a favor. Can you not tell anyone about this? I want to tell the girls when the time is right." wasn't sure if the time would ever be right, but she knew that if her friends heard the truth from Banshee, they might never forgive her.

Banshee nodded, "No problem," she agreed. "All of your secrets will be safe with me. But are you sure that you're not dating Saint?" This was just what didn't need—people believing that she and Saint were dating. It was bad enough that she had to lie to Dare last night. She wouldn't lie to all her friends in the Harlots.

"We're not dating," insisted.

"That's a shame because he seems to really be into you, ," Banshee said. "He has the same look in his eye as my husband gets when he looks at me."

"I hate to disagree with you, Banshee, but I'm sure you're seeing something that just isn't there. He doesn't look at me in any way," insisted.

"You keep on telling yourself that, hun," Banshee said. Her denial wasn't getting her anywhere, and worried that sooner or later, Banshee would walk away from her and



revoke her promise to keep her secret.

Saint walked back into the room, followed by two officers in full uniform. “, this is officer Daniels and officer Riggs. They would like to ask you a few questions about your car and what happened last night between you and Bruno.” She sat down, not bothering to scowl at Saint like she wanted to because it wouldn’t matter now.

Both officers stood in front of her and Officer Riggs pulled a small notebook and pen from his vest. Banshee sat down on the sofa next to her, and pulled her hand into her own, offering comfort. It did that too—gave her comfort, and for a second, she was thankful that Saint had called her.

“Okay guys, shoot,” she said. “I’d like to get this over with.” She could tell by the looks on their faces that they wanted the same.

“Why did you call us, Miss?” the tall officer asked. She was trying to figure out which officer was Riggs, and which one was Daniels. It probably didn’t matter, but was fixated on figuring that out.

“Someone destroyed her car,” Saint said. She shot him a look and he shrugged.

“How about if you start at the beginning and take your time?” the other guy asked.

“You’re Daniels, right?” asked. He nodded and she was glad that little problem was solved. “Well, I was at work last night,” she started, hoping that she wouldn’t have to tell them where she worked.

“And where is your work located?” Riggs asked.

“I used to work at a strip club downtown. It’s on Tenth and Elm Street.” refused to look at Banshee until she squeezed her hand and winked at her as though trying to tell

that she'd be okay.

"I was fired last night," she said.

"Why were you fired?" Officer Daniels asked.

"It's a long story, but here it is in a nutshell. I forgot my phone and ran into the club after it had closed. I was flustered because Saint had found me dancing on stage earlier and I was afraid that he'd blow my cover. None of my friends or family knew what I was doing. They all thought that I was a secretary at a law firm a few towns over. I ran back into the club and my boss, Bruno, was still there. He had found my phone and was playing keep away with it—like a jerk."

"Then what happened?" Officer Riggs asked.

"He told me that he'd give me my phone back if I'd kiss him." Banshee gasped next to her, and worried that she'd change her mind about helping her out.

"Did you kiss him?" Officer Daniels asked.

"Of course I didn't," spat, "how could you even ask me that question?"

"I'm sorry, but we need to cover all our bases," Officer Riggs insisted.

"Okay, then let's skip to the part where he tried to get me to have sex with him or I'd lose my job," said. The looks on each of the men's faces was worth spilling that little secret. "And for the record, I didn't have sex with him either. That's why I'm now jobless," she said.

"So, you called us to file a complaint about losing your job?" Officer Daniels asked.

“She called you to file a complaint about her former boss propositioning her for sex,” Saint growled. He didn’t need to come to her rescue. She was used to doing that for herself, but it was nice to have someone in her corner for a change. didn’t feel so alone.

“Given the fact that she worked at a strip club, I’m not sure that he’ll ever be found guilty,” Officer Riggs insisted.

“That’s discrimination,” Banshee spat. “It doesn’t matter what she did for a living, the guy is a pig and should be arrested.”

“Other girls down at the club were forced to have sex with him,” she almost whispered. “I was lucky that Saint came to my rescue, but Bruno had forced the other girls to agree to have sex with him in order to keep their jobs. Some of them are single mothers and need their job to put food on the table and a roof over their kids’ heads. They had no choice. Others were underage and they were afraid that if they told anyone about Bruno, they would get in trouble for working at the club.”

“I’m sorry that you’ve been dealing with all that alone,” Banshee said.

“Me too,” Saint agreed. He reached for her other hand, and she allowed him to take it into his own. Having Banshee on one side of her and Saint on the other, giving her their support, gave her the courage to continue.

“We’re getting a little off track though,” said, trying to reign them all in. She really didn’t care about Bruno threatening her job if she didn’t have sex with him. What she did care about was Bruno possibly being the one to set her car on fire.

“Okay, how about you get us back on track then,” Officer Daniels said.

“I had to run Saint to the emergency room because we both fell in the parking lot, and

he broke his arm. I felt responsible,” she said.

“Which you weren’t,” Saint interrupted.

“I felt responsible,” she repeated, “and drove his truck to the hospital, leaving my car in the parking lot,” she said.

“Wait—was it the one that someone set fire to?” Officer Riggs asked.

“Yes, how did you know?” asked.

“Someone who lives in the area called us to report a burned-up car down at the club this morning before dawn. I’m guessing that was your car,” Officer Daniels asked.

“Do you get many burned cars parked at strip clubs?” asked. Saint chuckled and squeezed her hand, reminding her that their hands were still joined.

“Being a smart ass won’t help your case,” Officer Riggs said.

“Of course,” she said, “yes, that was my car. Did you find anything out about who set it on fire?” asked.

“We had our detectives go over the car. They were trying to figure out who the dead body in the driver’s seat belonged to. The educated guess was that the body belonged to the owner of the vehicle, but since you’re claiming the car was yours, we’ll have to go down other avenues,” Officer Daniels said.

“Oh, God,” she breathed, “there was someone in the car when it was set on fire?” The thought of anyone meeting their demise like that made her feel sick to her stomach. She hated that someone died in her car. It made her feel as though she was responsible somehow for the person’s death.

“Would you have any idea who the person was?” Officer Riggs asked.

“No,” she quickly breathed, “who would do something like that to another human being?” Saint wrapped his arm around her shoulder and pulled her body into his own. She wasn’t sure why, but it felt natural to have him holding her like that.

“We’re not sure yet,” Daniels admitted. “The car has been towed in to be investigated, and an autopsy is being performed on the victim as we speak. We can contact you when we have more information.”

She nodded, “Thank you.”

“One last question,” Riggs said, “where were you last night between the hours of midnight and two in the morning?”

“I’ve already told you that I was at the emergency room with Saint,” she said.

“We’re there witnesses who saw you there?” Riggs asked.

“Yeah, me,” Saint said. “My brother Dare was there during that time with her and a very grumpy receptionist was behind the desk. I’m sure that between the three of us, has a solid alibi.”

“In that case, you need to stay someplace safe. Do you have somewhere you can stay?” Riggs asked.

“I’m sure that’s not necessary,” said. “My apartment is safe enough.”

“I’d really love to be able to tell you that you’re right, but you’re not,” Banshee said. “You’re not safe anywhere. Come home with me.” The last thing wanted was to stay with her club’s Prez. She was married and had a new baby at home. She didn’t want

to be a third wheel—or in this case, a fourth wheel.

“I appreciate that, Banshee,” she said, “but I don’t want to cramp your style. You have a family and don’t need me hanging around. Plus, if it’s not safe for me anywhere, I can’t put your family in danger.”

“You can stay here,” Saint said. “I don’t have any family, and I can take care of myself if something happens. Besides, I need help getting around for the next two weeks. You can drive me around since you caused this,” he said. Using her guilt against her was a shitty move.

“I can get the Bastards involved, and even have some of the Harlots help out,” Banshee said.

“Sounds like you have a plan,” Officer Daniels said. “We’ll be in touch and if you have any questions, or think of anything else we should know, here’s my card.” He handed her the business card from his shirt pocket. She took it and nodded her thanks. She was sure that protesting having to stay at Saint’s place wasn’t going to get her anywhere. Besides, she kind of liked the idea of getting to know him a little better. He was a conundrum—he looked like a badass biker on the outside, but on the inside, she sensed a sweet gentleness with a hint of nerd, and she dug guys like that.

## Page 8

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He was expecting more of a fight from Juno about staying with him—but she gave him none. He wasn't sure if that made him happy or pissed him off. He liked how feisty she was, but when it came to staying with him, she had no sassy comebacks or anything that he had gotten used to from her over the past 24 hours.

Banshee had stuck around after the cops left, and he was grateful. He wasn't ready to be alone with Juno yet, and that was ridiculous since they had just spent the entire night alone in his house.

Banshee told Juno that she should trust her friends with the truth, but could tell that she still wasn't sure if she should. Juno had spent so much time hiding the truth from her friends that she was worried that they'd be angry with her, and he had to admit that he'd be angry if one of his friends kept a big secret from him—not that he had many friends.

Before Banshee left his place, she had a full schedule lined up of Bastards and a few Harlots to watch his place. She wanted to put someone on his front porch, but refused and told her that it would look bad if the Royal Bastard's Sergeant at Arms had to have a security detail. He was the security team for the club, and he didn't want anyone standing on his porch protecting Juno and him. He meant it when he said he was capable of taking care of himself and that also extended to Juno now that she was staying with him.

"I'll need a few things from my apartment," she said. Juno had spent most of the afternoon sitting on the sofa sulking. He thought that her little pout was pretty cute, but every time he opened his mouth to tell her that, she stopped him dead, telling him that she wasn't ready to talk.

“So, now you want to talk to me?” asked.

“Don’t be an ass,” she grumbled. “I’ve just been through a lot over the past day. I need to get some sleep and that means I need to go over to my place and pack some necessities. Can I borrow your truck?” Juno asked.

“Yes, but you can’t go alone,” he insisted. “It’s not safe. I’m guessing that Bruno knows your home address.” He wouldn’t put it past that asshole to break into her apartment and wait for her to show back up. couldn’t let that happen. “I’ll go with you,” he said.

“Your arm is broken,” she reminded. He didn’t need to be told about his broken arm. It ached every minute of the day, even on the painkillers. He was saving them for the night, so he could stay awake during the day.

“I’m aware,” he mumbled. “Listen, if you want to go by your place and pick some stuff up, you’ll need to let me tag along.” She didn’t look very happy about the ultimatum, but he could tell that she was going to agree with his rules. Juno was a smart woman. She knew how much danger she was in and who they were probably dealing with.

“Fine,” she spat, “suit yourself, but if you’re going with me, you’ll have to help carry stuff down to your truck. When we get back, I’d like to call my insurance company and report the arson of my car. Hopefully, I’ll get enough to buy something new—well, used, but new to me.”

“How long before you’ll be ready to go?” asked. He wanted to get what she needed, come back home, and take a painkiller. He was hurting and not sure how much help he’d be on his own, but he had a plan.

“Ten minutes,” she said.



“Great, I’ll be waiting here for you,” he said.

“Do you by chance have an extra toothbrush?” Juno asked.

“Yep,” he said, “it’s in my medicine cabinet. Help yourself.” He waited for her to head upstairs before he pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and called Dare. He knew that his brother would help Juno and him out. He just hoped that Juno was ready to come clean because pretending to be together, in front of Dare, wasn’t something that he wanted to do. Before last night, had never lied to his little brother, and he didn’t want to start now.

\* \* \*

He quickly called his brother, deciding that it would be better to ask forgiveness rather than permission from Juno. If she knew that he needed help, and called Dare, she’d insist on packing her stuff alone.

“Hey, how’s the arm?” Dare asked. “Sorry that I didn’t stick around the ER last night, but Juno refused to leave and said that it was no use us both sitting there all night.”

“She refused to leave?” asked.

“Yep,” Dare said, “your new girlfriend seems very protective of you. And why the hell didn’t you tell me that you two were dating?” This was where things were going to get tricky. He wouldn’t lie to his brother, but he needed to come up with a good cover story that involved the truth.

“You know how it is with new relationships. We just don’t want to jinx things.” hadn’t lied. What he had with Juno was turning into a friend’s relationship, even if he wanted it to be more. And they did just meet (officially), so that would make it new.

“I’ve never known you to be superstitious, ,” Dare challenged.

“Yeah, well, Juno is,” he said. He knew that she was superstitious just by spending the day together. Juno had knocked on wood twice and had even tossed salt over her shoulder when she spilled some on the table during breakfast.

“Is Juno ready to tell Vixen the truth?” Dare asked. worried that Dare knew more than he was letting on and that he’d need to tread carefully if he didn’t want to blow Juno’s cover.

“The truth?” asked.

“Yeah, you know about the fact that you two have been dating behind all our backs,” Dare said.

“I take it you two talked last night about our secret while I was having my arm cast,” he said. His brother would have insisted that Juno tell Vixen the truth or he would. He was a stickler for the truth—usually. Of course, when Vixen needed Dare to pretend to be her boyfriend to get rid of her stalker, he had no problem doing that.

“Yep, and I told her that she needed to tell Vixen within the day, or I would. You know that I won’t lie to my wife. Hell, she’ll murder me if she finds out that I knew about this and didn’t tell her immediately. I don’t want to die, man,” Dare said.

couldn’t help his chuckle. His brother was usually over dramatic, but this time took the cake. “You are such a drama queen,” teased.

“I am not,” Dare grumbled. “So, did you just call me to give me shit, or did you need something?”

“Actually, I do need something. Can you meet me and Juno over at her apartment?”

It's a long story, but she needs to pack some of her stuff and stay with me for a while." He hoped that Dare didn't ask too many questions because he wasn't sure how much longer he'd be able to keep up the whole relationship lie with his brother.

"How long will you be out of commission?" Dare asked.

"Two weeks, why?" asked.

"Because I figured that she'd insist on staying with you while you recovered. Like I said, your girlfriend seems very protective of you." wished that his brother would stop referring to Juno as his girlfriend. Every time he said that felt even more guilty.

"Yeah," said, "and you know how stubborn she is. I told her that I didn't need her to play nurse, but she insisted."

Dare groaned on the other end of the call. "Man, I don't need to hear about you playing nurse with my best friend. We're going to need to come up with some boundaries if this is going to work out. The first one is that I don't need to hear about your sex life." That worked for because he currently had no sex life, but his brother wouldn't believe that they weren't having sex already. He knew too well to believe that.

"Listen, would you be able to come by Juno's place and help me get everything that she needs into my truck? Doing things one-handed won't help her out, and I want to do this quickly so that I can get home and take some pain meds."

"Of course, I don't mind giving you both a hand," he said. He started laughing and wondered what Dare found so funny.

"What's funny?" asked.

“I said that I can give you a hand,” Dare repeated. “Pun intended,” he joked. rolled his eyes at his brother’s joke, knowing that he wouldn’t be able to see him. “You just rolled your eyes, didn’t you?” Dare asked.

“No,” mumbled.

“You do know that I can read you better than anyone else, right? I can also tell when you roll your eyes at me, even over the phone.” Dare seemed to be feeling pretty smug with himself for figuring his brother out.

“Whatever,” grumbled. “How about you meet us over at her place in twenty minutes? Oh, and Dare, leave the corny jokes at home,” he insisted, ending the call. The last thing wanted to do was give his little brother time to make a sarcastic comment back. He was sure that Dare would have plenty of them by the time they got to Juno’s place—and that thought made him smile.

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

Juno knew that telling her friends that she had been lying to them wasn't going to be easy. But she knew that she had to come clean with them all and the best way to do that was to call them and ask them to meet her at her place. She wanted to give them as little details as possible, but she knew that they'd all have questions.

She texted their group text on her cell phone and sent Vixen, Sprite, and Phoenix a message to meet her at her apartment in thirty minutes. She figured that would give her some time to pack and if the girls took the news badly, she'd be able to quickly escape. She couldn't hide forever, and she knew it, but wasn't sure how to say the words about working in a strip club, let alone ask her friends for forgiveness.

She was thankful when the three of them sent back texts saying that they'd be there. It was how things worked between them. If one of them was in need, they sent out a group text and the others showed up. She loved them, and opted that once she came clean with them, she'd still have them as friends because living without them wasn't an option.

She found Saint waiting for her at the front door and asked if she was ready to go. She nodded and took the keys from him, wondering why he was wearing a goofy grin. Usually, he was a grumpy ass—especially after he broke his arm. She was sure it had everything to do with his pain levels, but the few other times that she had seen Saint, he didn't seem overly friendly.

They made the drive over to her apartment in complete silence, and that worked for her. If she started gabbing, she'd spill the beans about inviting her three friends over to come clean with them. She didn't want Saint telling her that she was doing the right thing, or that it was a good idea to be straight with her friends. She already knew all

of that, but she didn't feel that telling them the truth was the right thing. It might just cost her the only true friends that she ever had.

She parked in her assigned spot and cut the engine. Saint looked at Vixen, Phoenix, and Sprite standing in front of the apartment building's entrance. "You want to tell me why they are here?" Saint asked.

shrugged, "I asked them to come over to help me pack," she admitted, leaving out the part about wanting to tell them the truth. "And what about him?" She asked, nodding to Dare who was pulling his motorcycle helmet off just a few spots over.

"Oh, I asked him to come over to help you pack," he said.

"So, you lied and told me that you'd be able to help me with everything, but then, you called Dare to ask him to meet us here because you wouldn't be able to help at all with your broken arm. Did I get that right?" loved watching Saint squirm a bit, and the way that his cheeks seemed to heat with embarrassment was the cutest thing ever.

"Yeah," he mumbled. "I didn't want to let you down, and my arm hurts like a mother fucker. I thought that Dare could do the heavy lifting." Well, that was actually nice, and not at all what was expecting.

"Oh, that's actually sweet," she breathed.

"And I'm such a monster that you weren't expecting me to be nice?" Saint questioned.

"That's not what I meant," she insisted. "Just never mind. Let's get me packed up while our friends are still willing to help. Once I tell them all that I've been lying to them the past four years, I'm betting they won't be so willing to help me."

“You’re going to tell them the truth?” she asked.

“I am,” she admitted. “You said it yourself—I can’t keep lying to everyone and my secret is already out there, so it’s only a matter of time before everyone finds out anyway.”

“Well, if it means anything, I think that you’re doing the right thing by telling them. So, does this mean that we are officially fake breaking up?” Saint asked.

She smiled and nodded, “Yep, I guess that’s what it means. Thanks for trying to protect my secret by being my fake boyfriend, Saint,” she said. leaned down to pick up her purse as Saint leaned in towards her. He brushed his lips against hers and she gasped. “What was that, Saint?” asked. She touched her fingers to her lips, as though trying to figure out if they were still there.

“I’m so sorry,” he breathed. “I thought that you were leaning in to kiss me. I guess I misread the situation.”

“Um, yeah,” she whispered. She looked out the windshield to where her friends were smiling back at her. Yeah, this just made things a bit more complicated, and that was the last thing that she needed.

“It won’t happen again,” he assured. “I’m sorry, .” He started to get out of the truck and grabbed his left arm, trying not to hurt him.

“What if I want it to happen again?” breathed.

“Do you?” Saint asked. “Do you want me to kiss you again?” looked back at her friends as Dare knocked on the driver’s side window. She knew that her time was just about up, and she wanted to give Saint an answer. He deserved at least that much for getting mixed up in her mess.

“I do,” she whispered, turning to push her door open as Dare moved out of the way.

“Took you guys long enough. Play kissy face on your own time. I didn’t know that you were going to invite my wife and the other women to help out. If I had, I would have ridden with Vixen,” Dare said.

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Saint said, standing on the other side of the truck. “I didn’t know that was inviting them. I guess we got our wires crossed, but I appreciate you doing this for us.” There was that pesky word that got her heart pumping, and her body worked up—“Us”. Hearing Saint refer to the two of them as an “Us” was quickly becoming something that she liked hearing and worried that it was the one word that could completely break her heart if Saint changed his mind about her.

\* \* \*

had fielded questions from her girlfriends about her and Saint dating, and she was just about out of lies to tell them. They had finished packing her stuff—more than she’d need for just two weeks, and helped her put everything in the back of Saint’s truck. That worked for her because she wasn’t going to be able to keep her apartment for much longer, so the stuff that was left would be pretty easy to move later when she had to move back in with her parents.

They were all standing around the parking lot when announced that she had something that she needed to tell them. Everyone gathered around her and Saint, and she suddenly felt sick. How was she going to be able to get the words out? She wasn’t, and Saint seemed to notice that. He took her hand into his and squeezed it.

“You’ve got this,” he said when she looked up at him. All could do was stand there, holding his hand and smiling like a crazy person at him.

She swallowed past the lump in her throat and nodded. “I never worked at a law



firm,” she said, her voice a little shaky.

“Where did you work then?” Sprite asked.

“I’ve been working at the strip club downtown for the past four years. I couldn’t make enough money to get this place anywhere else. Secretarial jobs don’t really pay, and there was no way that I could have stayed with my parents any longer than I did. You guys know how they are.” She looked at her friends and they all stared back at her in disbelief. “Say something guys,” she begged.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Vixen asked.

“I didn’t tell anyone,” admitted. “I was ashamed of where I worked, but I couldn’t quit because I needed the money.”

“Why come clean now?” Phoenix asked. “I mean, you know about my past, why lie to me?”

“I didn’t want you to have to keep a secret from everyone else,” admitted.

“And I kind of blew her cover,” Saint said. “I was at the club last night and I figured out that it was up on stage, even with her mask, her eyes gave her away.”

“Then, my slime ball boss took my phone and told me that I needed to kiss him if I wanted it back. He said that if I didn’t give him what he wanted, he’d fire me,” filled in.

“Right, and that’s when I went back into the club to make sure that was okay and found her fighting with the asshole, and got her out of there,” Saint said. “We were in the parking lot, and she fell, pulling me down with her, and that’s how I got this.” Saint held up his arms, showing off his cast.

“So, you two aren’t dating?” Dare asked.

“Um, no. I told you that because I needed to cover for . I didn’t want to be the one to tell you her secret. I promised her that I wouldn’t.”

“So, you lied to me?” Dare asked. hated that she had put Saint in that position. She felt bad that he lied to his brother to keep her secret. She shouldn’t have asked him to promise her not to tell anyone.

“It’s my fault that he lied to you. I didn’t want anyone to know, and I panicked. I shouldn’t have asked Saint to lie to you,” she said.

“You keep talking about your job as though you don’t work there anymore,” Vixen said.

“Yeah, that’s because I don’t work there. I refused to have sex with my former boss, so I was told to clear out my locker. Oh, and he set my car on fire after I drove Saint to the hospital in his truck.”

“So, we think that the asshole former boss is the person who set your hideous car on fire, right?” Dare asked.

“First, my car is not hideous,” protested, “and yes, we think that Bruno is the one who torched my car.”

“May your grandma car rest in peace,” Vixen teased.

“I guess I deserve you making fun of my car—you know, since I’ve lied to you for four years now,” said. “The question is, will you guys forgive me at some point? I know that it’s going to take some time.” She felt as though she was holding her breath waiting for them all to give her some sign that they’d eventually forgive her.

“I’m kind of happy to find out that you’re not dating my brother,” Dare said. “And I really don’t care where you’ve been working over the past four years. We’re good.” She didn’t have the heart to tell him that she had just asked his brother to kiss her again. That was a far cry from the two of them dating, but if had her wish, she’d at least end up in Saint’s bed. Being a virgin at her age was embarrassing. Maybe Saint wouldn’t want her long-term, but she’d like to feel wanted for just a few days before he kicked her to the curb.

“Thank you,” she said as Dare pulled her in for a hug.

“Yeah, I’m good too,” Vixen said, joining her husband and for a group hug. “You’re my friend and if you felt that you needed to keep what you do for a living from us, then you must have had your reasons.”

They released her and then turned to find both Phoenix and Sprite staring her down, arms crossed over their chests. “I’m not sure why you didn’t come to me,” Phoenix said. “I’ve never hid my having to dance in clubs to put food on the table for my little girl.”

“I know that, and I’ve wanted to tell you all about my job, but I was too ashamed,” she almost whispered.

Phoenix crossed the sidewalk and pulled in for a hug. “You never have to feel that way around us, right Sprite?” she asked. They both looked over at Sprite as she sighed and walked over to join their hug.

“She’s right, but don’t lie to us again, ,” she insisted.

“Never,” said. She meant it too. She had learned her lesson the hard way and from here on out, she was going to be completely honest with her friends—and she was pretty sure that now included Saint. She just hoped that he’d be able to handle her

truth because having him push her away now would hurt like a son of a bitch.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

Saint had convinced Juno to give up her apartment to help save money. Her insurance company had sent her a few thousand dollars for her car, which surprised the hell out of him. He was sure that she'd owe them money for that hunk of junk. For now, she was trying to save every penny and even though he could drive again, he chose to lie and tell her that he needed her to drive him around still. He told her that the doctors were worried that his arm needed more time to heal and that they advised him not to drive or do anything strenuous for at least another month. Juno seemed to buy it and moved in with him to get her funds to stretch. She also decided to hold off on finding a car until she found another job. He wanted to tell her that she could stay for as long as she wanted, every time she talked about finding a job and getting herself another place to live. He was sure that she wouldn't want to put him out, but he had already gotten used to having her around.

The problem was, that he was a chicken and didn't want to spook Juno and have her run off. He hadn't kissed her again after the first time that he got a taste of her while all their friends watched. She had dropped a bunch of hints, letting him know that she wanted him to kiss her again, just as she had admitted in his truck, weeks ago, but he wasn't sure if that was a good idea or not. Well, not until Juno agreed to move in with him. He worried that she'd eventually leave him for a new life, and even though he tried to fight them, his feelings for her were evident—at least to him. Juno seemed oblivious to the fact that he was falling for her. She had him wanting things that he never thought he'd want with a woman—starting with a long-term relationship.

Juno had been out job hunting all day and had decided to do something nice for her and make dinner before he told her that he had feelings for her. Sure, he was buttering her up, feeding her well, hoping like hell that she'd admit that she felt the same way. He had his hopes up, and all he could think about was moving her into his

room—permanently.

When she moved her stuff into his house, he promised that she could have her own room, and she agreed. She brought her bedroom furniture with her and set up the bedroom across the hallway from him. He hated not moving her into his room up front, but he wanted Juno to come to him on her own terms. She told him that she wanted him to kiss her again, and yet, she made no move and sent him no signals. He was so damned confused by Juno that he wanted to yank his hair out. But tonight, he planned on that all changing. Tonight, he was going to stop being a chicken and tell Juno what he wanted from her. Hopefully, she'd feel the same way, but he wasn't holding his breath.

Juno had taken his truck to run to the police station because they had more questions for her. Plus, she wanted to put a restraining order against Bruno. He offered to go with her, but Phoenix and Vixen had already volunteered to tag along with Juno. The three of them walked through the front door and stood in the entryway saying their goodbyes as though they wouldn't see each other tomorrow night down at the Harlots. Sprite and Phoenix stuck their heads in to tell him hello before they headed out. He liked the way that Juno's friends accepted the two of them living in the same house, but he was sure that she had told them all that it was strictly platonic. He hated that because all he could think about doing was claiming Juno as his and never looking back.

Juno walked into the living room and plopped down on the sofa next to him. "Did you have any trouble down at the station?" asked.

"Nope," Juno admitted. "It went smoothly."

"Great," he said.

"What smells so good?" she asked. Straining her neck to peek into the kitchen.

“I made us some dinner,” he said, feeling pretty proud of himself.

“That’s so nice,” she said.

“Don’t get too excited,” insisted. “I’m not much of a cook, but I’m pretty good at winging it.”

She nodded, “Winging it sounds good to me,” she said. “Hell, any food sounds good to me today. It’s been a long fucking day and I’m ready for a shower and a bed. I was up most of the night worrying about the questions that they wanted to ask me at the precinct.”

“You should have told me,” he insisted, “I could have kept you company while you worried.”

“There was no sense for the both of us to be up all night. Plus, you need your sleep to heal. You don’t want to take a chance that you’ll have to have surgery.” Every time she brought that up, he felt like an ass. His doctor cleared him a couple of weeks ago from the possibility of having surgery, but in order to keep Juno with him, he had to lie to her.

“I’m feeling pretty good,” he said. That part was true at least. didn’t have to take prescription painkillers in a while and his pain was manageable with over-the-counter pain relievers. “Come in the kitchen and we can eat.” She followed him into the kitchen, and he pulled out the chair for her, trying to be a gentleman.

“This is really nice,” she breathed. “Is there a special occasion you’re celebrating? Is it your birthday and I missed it?”

He chuckled, “No,” he said, “I just thought that we needed to do something nice. It’s been a rough few weeks for you having to lay low from Bruno and everything. I

decided to make you a nice dinner and hopefully, we can talk.”

“Talk,” she squeaked, “what’s there to talk about?” He could tell that Juno knew exactly what he wanted to talk about with her. She was a bigger chicken than he was and that made him want to laugh. Weren’t they a pair?

“I think that we need to talk about that kiss,” he said.

“What kiss?” Juno asked, still playing dumb.

He sighed, “The only kiss that we shared, Juno. You said that you wanted me to kiss you again. Is that still true?” He asked.

Juno shyly nodded her head, “Yes, but I just assumed that you didn’t want to, or that you changed your mind.” He was an idiot. Here she had been waiting all this time for him to make a move, and he was too scared to do it.

“I haven’t changed my mind,” he admitted. “I was just being a chicken, and I’m sorry that you thought that I didn’t want to kiss you.”

“So, what now?” Juno asked. He knew what he wanted to do, but he had promised her dinner. None of that mattered to him now. He wanted his chance with her and if he let it pass him by again, he might not get a third chance with Juno.

He stood and pulled her up from her chair, wrapping his arms around her waist, and sealing his lips over hers. She tasted like sunshine and honey, just the way she did the last time he stole a kiss from her. But this time, he was going to take his time and thoroughly kiss her. And from the way Juno moaned into his mouth, she didn’t seem to mind.

He broke their kiss, leaving them both breathless. “Wow,” she breathed. “I’m pretty



sure that I've never been kissed that way before."

"Surely, you've been kissed before," insisted. "You are twenty-two, right?" He asked.

"Yep, I'll be twenty-three next month," she admitted. "And I've been kissed before, but it was more like our first kiss. No boy has ever kissed me like you just did."

"Man, honey," he corrected. "I'm a man."

"I've noticed," she whispered, giving him an outrageous wink. He loved the way that she could give him shit one minute and make him laugh the next.

released her, the wheels finally clicking into place. "Wait, if you've never been kissed that way before, what else have you never done, honey?" He had a pretty good that he wasn't going to like her answer, but he needed to know what he was getting into with Juno.

"I'm a virgin," she whispered. felt as though his heart might beat right out of his chest. How could she still be a virgin at almost twenty-three?

"Did I just hear you say that you're a virgin?" asked.

She giggled, "You look just as upset as when I asked you to pick me up some tampons at the grocery store, . It's not a big deal. I've just never found anyone I wanted to have sex with." Yeah, having to pick up her girly stuff from the store wasn't a chore that he enjoyed, but he couldn't send Juno to do it while Bruno was still out there. No one had been able to track him down, and that had feeling completely uneasy about the whole situation.

"You never had a boyfriend?" asked.

She shrugged, “Not really. I’ve gone on a few dates here and there, but with my job, it was hard to get too involved with a guy. I didn’t want to get a lecture about dancing for a living or anything like that. So, I kind of steered clear of men.”

“I guess that won’t be a problem for you now,” grumbled.

“No, it won’t be, but I’m still not interested in men,” she insisted. “Well, not all men, because I do like one in particular.” held his breath waiting for her to admit that she liked him and when she smiled at him, it took everything in him not to pull her into his arms and kiss her senseless again.

“Is it me?” he asked. He needed to hear her say the words before making his next move.

“It is,” she said, “if that’s all right.” It was more than all right with him, but for some reason, forming sentences wasn’t easy for him right now.

He nodded and she wrapped her arms around his neck again, going up on her tiptoes to kiss him. He pulled her tighter against his body and took over the kiss, leaving him wanting more from her.

lifted her into his arms and started for the stairs with her. “Where are you taking me?” Juno asked.

“I’m taking you up to my bed,” he said. “Tell me now if I’m going too fast for you, and I’ll stop.”

“I’ve been waiting for you to make a move for weeks now. You are definitely not going too fast for me, . I’m just worried that I won’t do this right.” He sat on the edge of his bed, keeping her on his lap. Maybe he was afraid that if he let her go, she’d disappear, or maybe he just liked having her close.

“There is nothing to ‘Do right,’” he assured, “just do what feels natural to you. I promise to try to go easy on you since it’s your first time, but it will hurt.”

“I’m aware,” she said, wrapping her arms around his shoulders, “but I’ve already told you that I want this, . I want you.” That was all the reassurance that needed.

He flipped her onto the mattress and covered her body with his own. “Well, then, you’re wearing too many clothes,” he teased. He had spent the past few months wondering what Juno would look like naked. He already had a pretty good idea of what she’d look like since she had paraded around in her T-shirt and panties every morning. He wanted to tell her to put on some clothes, but then the masochist in him decided that wasn’t what he really wanted. Watching her like that made him half crazy with lust, but he couldn’t help himself. No matter how much he tried to fight it, wanted her, and nothing was stopping him now from taking what he wanted.

made quick work of stripping her bare and stood on the side of the bed to admire his handy work. “Beautiful,” he breathed, looking her over.

“Your turn,” she said, laying back on the bed, waiting for him to give her a show. She was going to have to be disappointed because if he got naked now, things would be over way too quickly.

“In due time,” he said, “I’m not finished with you yet.” She pouted up at him, making him chuckle as he kissed his way down her sexy body, giving her breasts some extra attention. The little moans and breathy sighs had him wanting to scratch all his plans, get naked, and sink into her body, but she deserved better than that.

settled between her legs and looked up her body to find her watching what he was about to do next. “Just relax, honey,” he ordered. She nodded and laid back, squeezing her eyes closed.

“You are going to need to tell me what to do, . I’m out of my element here.” Juno wasn’t out of her element at all. He saw her up on stage, and watching her dance was sexy as fuck. The last thing she needed was instructions from him.

“You’ll do perfect, honey,” he assured. He dipped his head to lick through her wet folds, making her nearly buck off the bed. “Hold still,” he ordered, wrapping his big hands around her body to grab her luscious ass, spreading her open more for what he hoped would be intense pleasure for her.

could tell that she was close when she started to ride his tongue, taking what she needed from him. Her natural instincts were kicking in and God, she was so fucking sexy as she chased her orgasm. And when she shouted out his name, losing herself as she rode his tongue, he nearly came in his damn pants.

“You’re fucking perfect,” he praised.

“That was fucking perfect,” she whispered, her voice hoarse from shouting his name. She looked like someone messed her up—her hair, her makeup, and damn if she didn’t look perfect. “Why are you looking at me that way?” Juno asked.

“Because you look sexy as hell right now,” he admitted.

“Now, you keep saying things like that to me, you might never get rid of me, .” He was sure that she was teasing him, but he wanted to tell her that it would be just fine with him. decided to keep that bit of information to himself as he stood to pull his clothes off.

Juno went up on her elbows to watch him, and when her eyes darted to his cock, he covered himself. “Shit, honey,” he grumbled, “if you keep looking at me that way, this will be over before it begins.”

“You’re big,” she whispered. “How will we fit?”

“We’ll fit,” he promised. “I’m sorry that this is going to hurt you.”

She shook her head, “I’m not,” she assured, “I know how this works, . Please, just make me yours.” He climbed back onto the bed and covered her body with his own.

“Ready?” he asked. She smiled and nodded up at him and he held his breath as he started to slide into her drenched opening. The little whimpers coming from her parted lips were nearly his undoing, but he knew that he had to do this next part. He pushed his way completely into her and she cried out. God, he felt like an ass.

“Are you okay?” asked.

“No,” she breathed, “yes. I will be, just give me a minute.” He held as still as he possibly could and when Juno wrapped her legs and arms around his body, he knew that she was good to go. “I’m okay now,” she said. That worked for him because he was sure that he wouldn’t last very long inside of her.

pulled out of her body and slammed back into her hot core, over and over, until she was shouting out his name again. That was all he needed to find his own release, losing himself deep inside of her body. He collapsed on top of her and her arms tightened around his shoulders.

“Was that okay?” Juno asked.

“It was more than fucking okay,” he admitted. It was perfect. Who would have thought that his brother's friend from grade school would grow up to be the perfect woman for ? Not him, that was for sure, but she had, and now, he had no plans to let her go. At least, not anytime soon.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

Saint had moved her into his room the next morning, and she had to admit, she liked the fact that he wanted her close. She felt the same way about him. Every night, they slept tangled up with each other in his bed, and every morning, he treated her with a cup of freshly brewed coffee, and morning wood that she couldn't seem to keep her hands off of. It felt as though they were quickly becoming a couple, although living with him was harder than she imagined it would be. When he asked her to bring the rest of her stuff over, she was a bit sad about giving up her apartment. She had worked hard to pay for her first place, and she took pride in that fact. Letting it go now felt as though she was giving up on her dreams. She knew that finding new dreams wasn't going to be easy, but it was what she had to do.

"You about ready to go?" Saint asked. He was taking her to the Friday night co-party at Savage Hell. It had felt like forever since she hung out with her club, and seeing all the Harlots was just what she needed right now.

Of course, Saint had a few rules that she had to promise to follow—the first one being that she had to stick to his side. She had no problems with being close to Saint so that rule would be an easy one to follow. She thought it was cute the way that Saint wanted to protect her. It was nice to have someone on her side.

She quickly checked her makeup in the bathroom mirror and nodded, "Ready," she agreed. She grabbed her purse, and Saint handed her a leather jacket and a helmet. "What's this?" she asked.

"It's a jacket and helmet," he said.

"While I can see that, I'm wondering why I need them," admitted.

“We’re going to take my bike to the club,” Saint insisted.

“But you only got your cast off yesterday. Do you really think that’s a good idea?” asked. She didn’t want to push his recovery. If he wanted to get back to one hundred percent, he would need to continue to take it easy.

“It’s doctor approved,” Saint promised.

“Cross your heart?” asked.

Saint crossed his heart with his finger, “And hope to die.”

“I guess we can take your bike then. I’ve never been on a motorcycle. I could never afford one of my own, and unlike the other women in the Harlots, I’m kind of afraid of them, if I’m being honest.”

“You’ll be great,” Saint promised, “besides, all you have to do is wrap your arms and legs around me and hold on tight.”

“Well, I think that I can manage that,” she said.

“Good, then put on the jacket and helmet. I’ve also ordered a pair of leather boots for you. They are at the front door waiting for you to try on. I hope I got the right size,” he said. No guy had ever treated her like Saint did. Not only did he take care of her, he was protective and for the first time, in a long time, she felt safe—like nothing and no one would ever be able to touch her.

They both geared up and her new boots were not only kick ass, but they fit perfectly. Saint got on his bike first and started it and then motioned for to hop on the back. She did as he wanted and wrapped her arms around him, almost as though she was holding him in a chokehold.

“Not so tight, honey,” Saint said. “I need a little bit of mobility to drive.”

“Sorry,” she shouted over the engine.

“Ready?” He asked. She wanted to tell him that she wasn’t ready, but she also knew that Saint wouldn’t ever put her in danger. She trusted him, and that wasn’t about to change now. She nodded and he took off out of the driveway, heading for Savage Hell.

The ride to the club was exhilarating and being wrapped around Saint while the bike hummed under her, was a complete turn-on. “How did you like it?” He asked, pulling off his helmet.

“I think that I liked it too much,” she admitted. handed him her helmet and he put it on the handlebars with his own.

“What does that mean?” Saint asked.

“It means this,” she rounded his body and straddled his lap. kissed him like she couldn’t get enough of Saint.

“We have an audience, honey,” he said. She turned around to find Vixen, Sprite, and Phoenix standing at the back door, all three smiling like crazy women at her.

“Shit,” she whispered.

“Right, we need to stick a pin in this until later. I have a feeling that they have a few questions, and I need to talk to Savage. Then, we can go home and pick up where we left off.”

“On the bike?” asked.



“On the bike,” Saint whispered into her ear, making her shiver.

“Tease,” she whispered back. Saint lifted her off his lap and put her on her feet next to the bike. Within seconds, the girls surrounded her asking a million questions. felt like her head was spinning and she knew that they wouldn’t let her go until she answered all their questions.

“Hey, how about we give a break,” Banshee insisted. “We can grab a few beers and find a quiet place to interrogate her.”

“Gee, thanks,” grumbled. She turned back to find Saint standing behind her.

“I’ll find you soon. I just need to talk to Savage and then, we can spend the rest of the night together.” He bobbed his eyebrows at her, causing the rest of the women to groan, as he walked into the back of the bar.

“Ahh, the carefree days of kids not being cock blockers all night,” Phoenix said.

“I’d love to tell you that you’re wrong, but I can attest to that being true,” Banshee agreed.

Banshee grabbed them all beers and told them to get settled in the back corner of the bar. grabbed the booth that they usually shared and braced herself for the questions that the girls were going to throw at her. Banshee set the tray of drinks on the table and slid into the booth next to .

“So, let’s have it,” Banshee ordered.

sighed, “You all have eyes and could see that Saint and I are together,” she said.

“Last time we saw you at your old apartment, you said that you two weren’t

together,” Vixen reminded.

“Yeah, well, things can change. It happened a couple of weeks after I officially moved out of my apartment. I wasn’t lying when I told you that we weren’t together.” Since she had come clean with her friends, she hated thinking that they might never believe her again. didn’t want them to think that she had lied to them again.

“It’s okay,” Phoenix said. “You don’t have to worry about explaining yourself, babe. We believe you.”

“You do?” asked.

“Yep,” Sprite said, “I just have one question—are you happy?”

looked across the bar at Saint and smiled when he caught her sneaking a peek. “I am,” she admitted. “I didn’t think that I could be this happy, actually.”

“Oh my God,” Vixen breathed, “you’re in love.”

“Am not,” said, defiantly.

“Yeah, you are,” Phoenix insisted. sat back in the booth and sighed. Was she in love? How would she even know if she was? She didn’t have much experience with men, nor did she have anything to compare her feelings for Saint with.

“I have no idea what I am, but right now, all I know is that I like being with him. I’ll figure out the rest as I go,” said

Saint cleared his throat, and she nearly jumped out of her skin. How much of their conversation had he heard? hoped like hell that he didn’t hear the part about the girls saying that she was in love with him. She didn’t want her friends to scare him away,

and had a feeling that admitting that she in fact did love him would have him running for the hills.

“Can I steal away?” Saint asked. “The clouds are looking nasty out there and I think we should head out since you don’t have any experience on a bike.” She giggled at how obvious Saint was being, and the rest of the women seemed to catch on.

“It looked like she was getting plenty of experience on your bike earlier,” Banshee teased. could feel her cheeks’ heat and Saint pulled her from the booth, into his arms.

“Missed you,” he whispered into her ear. Saint gently kissed her lips and damn it, the women around her seemed to swoon.

“Time to go,” she grumbled. “I’ll see you guys later,” she said to her friends.

“Don’t forget that we have church on Tuesday,” Banshee reminded. “We’re going to start working on the plans for our new clubhouse.”

“I can pick you up,” Phoenix offered.

“I can bring her in,” Saint said. “I have some business with Savage, and we were planning on meeting next week anyway.”

“Thanks for the offer, Phoenix,” she said. “I’ll call you if Saint changes his mind.” She and Saint quickly said their goodbyes and headed out to his bike. The sky was dark gray and worried that they wouldn’t make it back to Saint’s place before the storm hit.

“Let’s get a move on,” Saint ordered. “I want to get you and my bike home before this hits. Then, I’m going to strip you naked and fuck you over my bike. You good with that?” Saint asked. She shivered and eagerly nodded her agreement. had a

feeling that even if she stayed with Saint forever, things would never get boring between the two of them.

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S aint felt like he couldn't get home fast enough. He didn't give a shit about beating the incoming storm. All he wanted to do was get Juno home, strip her bare, and make good on all the dirty promises that he had made her.

Hearing her talking to her friends about whether or not she was in love with him stung a little. He knew for a fact that he was in love with her, and he was willing to bet that she felt the same way about him. He could see it in her eyes every time she looked at him. Not telling her friends that she had fallen for him was understandable, but for some reason, he wanted to hear those words from her.

pulled onto his street as it started to rain. By the time he pulled into his garage, they were both soaked through. Juno removed her helmet and giggled, and God, it sounded like magic.

“What's that for?” He asked.

“I haven't gotten trapped in the rain like that for a long time. It was fun,” she admitted.

“Well, I'm glad that you had fun,” he said. He decided to have a little bit of fun with her himself. wanted to see if Juno would give him the whole truth if he asked her a few questions about earlier.

He watched as she pulled her jacket off and realized that he could see through her white T-shirt, and she wasn't wearing a bra. “You're trying to kill me,” he mumbled. She looked down her body and back up at him, wearing her sexy smile.

“Let’s play a game,” he said. He didn’t feel like playing games right now, but he needed her to give him the words, and he had a feeling that the game he had in mind would drive her crazy and get her to admit the truth.

“What kind of game?” Juno asked.

“Twenty questions,” he said, “you answer a question honestly, and I take off an article of clothing. If I think that you’re lying, you take off something.”

“Wait, do I get to ask you a question?” she asked. If he didn’t agree to answer some of her questions, she might tell him no.

“Okay,” he breathed, “you can ask me questions too, same rules.”

“Deal,” she said, holding her hand out to him as though they were brokering a business deal. He took her hand into his own and pulled her against his body, sealing his lips over hers.

“You’re not going to make this easy, are you?” Juno asked. He knew that the more that he distracted her, the more she’d tell him. He lifted her into his arms and walked her over to his bike. He sat her up on the seat and pulled her legs around him as he pressed his cock to her core. He could feel her heat through her jeans.

“Now you’re just teasing me,” she panted.

“First question,” he said, “did you tell your friends that we’re together?” He kissed down her jaw and tugged her shirt up her body, not taking it off until she decided to answer him.

“Would it piss you off if I told you that I did tell them that we’re together?” Juno breathed. He could tell that she was completely turned on, and it would be tough for

her to tell him lies in her current state.

“Not at all,” he admitted, as he finished tugging her white T-shirt over her head. He sucked one of her nipples into his mouth, loving the way that she moaned out his name. “We are together, right?” asked her.

“Yes,” she hissed.

“Say the words, honey,” he ordered, “tell me that we’re together.” He kissed his way over to her other breast and gave it the same attention as the other one.

“We’re together, ,” she shouted. He knew that she was going to go off soon and he’d only have a few more questions before she would be shouting out his name.

He kissed his way down to her jeans and unbuttoned them. “Did you tell them that you love me, honey?” asked. He could feel her body still as he started to tug her jeans down her legs. She wasn’t wearing panties either and all he wanted to do was sink into her body and fuck her on his bike, just like he promised.

“What?” Juno asked, as though she didn’t hear him. His hands stilled halfway down her thighs, leaving her jeans in place.

“You have to answer my question, honey, if you want me to fuck you.”

“That’s not fair,” she insisted. “Plus, you haven’t answered any of my questions.”

“Okay, shoot,” he said.

“Fine,” she said, “do you love me, ?” Juno asked, cutting right to the chase.

He smiled at her and tugged his shirt over his head. “That one is easy,” he said. “I am

in love with you, Juno.” Her gasp filled the garage, and he leaned over to kiss her.

“Now, how about you answer my question?” asked. He could see her wheels turning as she tried to decide if she wanted to tell him the truth or not. “You can tell me the truth, honey,” he whispered to her.

She nodded, “I’m in love with you too, ,” she admitted. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to high-five her, say thank you or fist pump the air. All seemed like the wrong things to do, so he did what he had been wanting to do since they got to Savage Hell. finished stripping them both and pulled her into his arms. He sat down on the seat of his bike, letting Juno straddle his lap as he sunk balls deep into her body. God, she felt like heaven, and knowing that she loved him felt the same way. She rode him and he knew that they were both going to go off at the same time—Juno would just need a little help. He snaked his hand down between their bodies and ran his thumb over her clit. Juno cried out and when she finished having her orgasm, he grabbed her hips and helped her up and down his cock until he came deep inside of her.

Juno collapsed on top of him and wrapped his arms around her sated body. She was quickly becoming his everything and he had a feeling that it wasn’t going to change any time soon. And for the first time in his life, he was good with a long-term relationship because it was with Juno.



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Living with Saint quickly started to feel right to her, and found herself finally okay with having had to give up her place. It was starting to feel like home, and she had a feeling that had everything to do with the man she had fallen in love with. The only problem was that Saint hadn't talked about the next steps between the two of them, and she could understand that since they had only been together for a few months now, but a part of her wanted to shout at him to stop being dense and to ask her to make their situation more permanent.

was doing dishes when she heard the front door open and close. It was so quiet, she thought that maybe Saint had gone out, but he wouldn't do that without telling her.

"Saint," she called, with no answer. "Saint, are you there?" asked. He walked into the kitchen and the look on his face had her worried. "What's wrong?" Bruno turned the corner behind Saint, ordering him to put his hands in the air. He shoved Saint into the kitchen and that was when saw the gun that Bruno was pressing into Saint's back.

"Don't do this, Bruno," almost whispered. "I'll do whatever you want but leave Saint out of this."

"He put himself in the middle of this when he showed up at my club and threatened me," Bruno shouted. "So, he'll be sticking around. I just can't have him getting in our way while we talk." Bruno cold-cocked Saint on the back of the head with the gun and he fell to the floor. started to go to him, and Bruno shouted for her to stop, pointing his gun at her.

"Now that your boyfriend is taking a little nap, how about you and I have a chat?" Bruno asked. She didn't answer him because he wasn't really asking her a question.

had no choice in any of this because if she did, she'd tell Bruno to go fuck himself.

She looked over at Saint and back to him. "You didn't have to knock him out," she spat. "I told you that I would have done whatever you wanted if you just left Saint alone."

"Really?" Bruno asked. "You didn't seem very willing to do what I wanted the night I had to fire you. I guess your new boyfriend is generous and paying your way until you can find another club to strip in." He didn't have a clue what Saint did for her or what her future plans were.

"I'm not going to be stripping anymore," she insisted.

"Well, I guess that my next question, for you to come back to the club, isn't going to fly," Bruno said. "But we can talk about all that later. For now, how about if you sit down in one of those chairs?" She looked at the kitchen chairs as though they somehow offended her. Maybe they did because she had a pretty good idea of what he was going to do to her if she followed his orders.

"What then?" asked.

"Well, I guess that's up to me," he said, "but I'm pretty sure you won't like what I'll do if you don't sit the fuck down in one of those Goddamn chairs." knew that he would make good on every promise he was making to her but not saying aloud.

She walked across the kitchen and sat down in the closest chair. Bruno tossed her a wad of rope and instructed how to tie herself up. When she didn't tie her legs to the chair tight enough, he made her redo the restraints. When she finished with her legs, he talked her through wrapping the rope around her wrists and when he seemed satisfied with her progress, he took over for her, after setting the gun on the table. It was so close—just inches away from her grasp, but being tied up, she couldn't get to

it.

“You were a Girl Scout, weren’t you?” Bruno taunted, but wasn’t in the mood to share her past with the asshole.

“None of your fucking business,” she spat. He slapped her across the face, and she whimpered.

“Next time, I’ll use my fist instead of the palm of my hand. When I ask you a question, I expect an answer. Now, were you a Girl Scout?” He was asking her that question again to prove a point, not because he cared if she was in Scouts or not.

“Yes, I was in Girl Scouts,” she grumbled.

Bruno ran his hand down the cheek that he had just slapped. She could taste the bile in her mouth. Just his simple touch made her sick. “There now, was that so hard?”

“No,” she said through clenched teeth. didn’t want to play games with him anymore. She wished Bruno would just get on with whatever he had planned for her. “What’s the end plan, Bruno?”

“Again, that’s for me to know,” Bruno said. “You’ll find out soon enough, but for now, I’m going to need you to be quiet while I make a few calls. Can you do that?”

Her smile felt mean, and she knew that he could see her hatred for him in her eyes if he looked hard enough. “Sure,” she lied.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” Bruno spat. “It’s also why I’ve come prepared.” He pulled a syringe out of his jacket pocket and held it in front of her. “You’re going to take a little nap for me, . Then, when you wake up again, we can have a little bit of fun.” She was sure that his idea of fun and hers were very different. also knew that

she wasn't going to like any of Bruno's planned fun.

He pulled the cap from the needle and squirted some liquid from the tip. "What is that?" stuttered.

His laugh was mean and meant to frighten her, but was sure that he couldn't scare her any more than she already was. Bruno shoved the needle into her arm, and she winced, trying not to let him know that he was hurting her. He seemed to get off on punishing her for some imaginary wrong that she had done to him.

"You don't need to know what's in the syringe. Just take a little nap," Bruno insisted. She looked over to where Saint still lay on the floor and sobbed. His face smashed against the floor was the last thing that she remembered seeing as she drifted off. She wanted to shout at Saint to wake up and keep his promise to keep her safe, but she couldn't. couldn't do anything but silently pray that Saint woke up soon because whatever Bruno had given her was enough to knock her out for some time.

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woke when the sunshine filtered through the kitchen window. She tried to open her eyes, but every time she did, she immediately closed them. The light felt as though it physically hurt her. She was sure that her head felt worse every time she moved and some things like blinking felt excruciating.

"Welcome back," Bruno said. "You were out for a while."

"How long?" she asked. She tried to clear her throat and failed. It felt as though she had swallowed glass and her mouth was dry. "Can I have some water?" asked.

"We'll get to that," Bruno said.

She looked over at Saint and gasped. He was still lying on the floor, but now he was face up. “What did you do to him?” accused.

“Well, your boyfriend woke up and left me no choice but to help him to take another nap—this time, a bit longer. I gave him the same thing that I gave to you. He’ll be fine, but I couldn’t have him trying to take me down, and your boyfriend seems to have a one-track mind.”

Bruno pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and put one in his mouth, grabbing a lighter from the same pocket. “I’d rather that you don’t smoke in my home,” she said. He laughed at her again and lit his cigarette, tossing the pack and lighter back on the table.

“I think that you keep forgetting who is in charge, ,” he insisted. She did not doubt that Bruno was in charge. He was holding all the cards, but she planned on changing that soon enough.

watched Bruno pace the floor in front of her. He picked the gun up from the kitchen table and wondered why he was suddenly acting squirrely. He was agitated and the gun in his hand worried her. He looked so out of control; she worried that he’d end up shooting one of them by accident.

“Why are you here, Bruno?” she stuttered. “You still haven’t told me.” had a pretty good idea as to why he was there, but she knew that if she could keep him talking, Saint might come to. She looked over at his lifeless body on the floor in the corner of the kitchen and sobbed. What if he never came to? What if Bruno had killed him? knew that thinking like that wouldn’t help her keep her head clear, and right now, that was exactly what she needed to deal with him.

“I’m sick of you telling me no,” he admitted.

“And you thought that you’d show up here, drug me and my boyfriend, and I’d magically tell you yes? That’s ridiculous, Bruno, even for you. Be better than that. If you leave now, I won’t tell anyone about what happened here. No one will ever have to know.” He seemed to be able to see right through her lies. She had no intention of just letting him go if he freed her. She’d fight like hell and Bruno seemed to know that.

“Well, that was the plan,” Bruno said. “I’d really like to do this the easy way. I’m tired and would like to get on with my day.”

“Maybe you should take one of your shots,” she offered. “You’ll get a good nap.” Bruno stood and she clenched her jaw, waiting for the pain that was going to follow his beating. He hadn’t ever hurt her before, but she had watched him hit a few of the other girls. Every time she tried to help them, Bruno threatened that she’d be next if she stuck her nose where it didn’t belong.

“Is that how this is going to work?” asked. “You’re just going to beat me up every time I say something that you don’t like.” She could see Saint stirring in the corner of the room, and knew that keeping Bruno’s attention wasn’t optional. She needed to buy Saint some time to come to. With any luck, he’d be able to use the fact that Bruno thought he was out for a while to his advantage.

“I think that you need to be taught a lesson, ,” he said. “Your mouth has always been an issue, and I let it slide because I liked you, but now, I see who you really are. Maybe a few beatings will teach you how to behave and keep your mouth shut. Or we can always give your pretty lips something to do. I’m betting that you give pretty good head.” The idea of putting any body part of Bruno’s in her mouth made her physically sick. She noticed that Saint’s eyes were open and staring at her. She was cloudy when she woke up, but he seemed hyper-focused and for just a second, she felt bad for what Saint was about to do to Bruno.

“Before you start teaching me a lesson, how about you tell me why you set my car on fire?” she asked.

Bruno laughed, “Honestly, I did you a favor. That hunk of junk was way past its prime.”

“It was my car, and whether you thought that it was junk or not wasn’t the point. You can’t just go around setting other people’s cars on fire,” she insisted. Scolding Bruno might not have been the best idea, but she knew that keeping him talking would distract him from everything that was about to happen around him.

“Who was in the car?” she asked.

“Well, that’s a bit of a funny story,” Bruno said. He would think that finding a burnt body in her car would be a funny story. “You see, Erica caught me tossing gasoline on your car and when she tried to stop me from lighting the match, I pushed her, and she fell and hit her head.”

“Oh, God,” breathed. Erica was one of the girls down at the club. had always suspected that she was underage but never asked the girl. Sometimes it was best for her to stay out of the other girls’ business. She’d worry less about them if she did.

“If it makes you feel any better, she died instantly when her head hit the pavement. She left me with no other option than to put her into the car and set it on fire.”

“She was just a kid,” spat. “You killed her and now, her family might never know what happened to their daughter.”

“You’re right because I erased all the video footage from the parking lot and destroyed her personal belongings. And now, I’m going to get rid of the only other person who knows the story. No one will remember Erica or you, .” He raised his gun

and pointed it right at her chest. The time for talking was over, and if Saint didn't get up off the floor, they'd both be dead in just minutes. She shot Saint a pleading look and Bruno laughed at her.

"He can't save you now, honey," Bruno taunted, "he'll be out for hours. I'm just upset that your boyfriend won't show me the same fear that you just did since I plan on finishing him off after I'm done with you."

"I wouldn't show you fear anyway, asshole," Saint insisted. He stood from the floor and tackled Bruno, wrapping his arms around Bruno's knees. The gun went off and for a split second, was sure that Saint had been shot. But, when he grabbed the gun away from her former boss and stood from the floor, she saw no blood, or any sign of a gunshot wound.

"Are you okay?" asked Saint. "Where did he hit you?"

"I wasn't hit, honey," Saint said.

"Is he dead then?" she asked.

"Nope, just knocked out." Saint put the gun on the kitchen table and turned to look over. "Shit," he grumbled, quickly untying the ropes that bound her. "You're hit, honey."

"No," she insisted. "I'm not." looked down her body and found her shirt bloody around her abdomen. "I don't feel it. Maybe he didn't hit me. Maybe that's old blood." She knew that it was just wishful thinking on her part. The blood spot on her shirt was growing and Saint grabbed a few dish towels and held it to her wound. winced in pain, suddenly feeling where she had been shot.

"Is it bad?" she asked.



Saint lifted her shirt, and she could tell by the look on his face that it wasn't good. "No, you're going to be fine," he insisted. "Hold these towels to your wound and I'm going to call for help." nodded, taking the towels from him and pressing them to her abdomen.

Saint quickly called the cops and used the rope that had bound her to the chair to tie Bruno up. He took the blood-soaked towels from her and pressed them tighter to her stomach. "Sorry, honey, but I have to keep pressure on this, or you'll bleed out before the ambulance gets here."

"Will you stay with me?" asked. She was suddenly exhausted and all she wanted to do was sleep.

"Keep your eyes open, baby," Saint insisted. "You need to stay awake for me." She tried to smile, and nod, but wasn't sure if she did or not. All she could think about was closing her eyes for just a few minutes and catching some sleep. It had been a long day, and all she wanted was some rest.

"I just need a nap," she insisted.

"Nope," Saint said, "no naps. Do you hear me, ? You need to keep those eyes open, beautiful."

"I like it when you call me that," she whispered. "You make me feel that way."

"Good, because I plan on calling you that for a damn long time, honey. I just need you to keep your eyes open."

could hear the sirens in the distance, and she knew that the ambulance was almost to the house. She just hoped that they would make it on time because, despite her best efforts to do as Saint ordered, she was having a hard time keeping her eyes open.

“Hello,” someone called as she started to drift off.

“We’re in here,” Saint shouted, “please, hurry. She’s lost a lot of blood and she’s trying to fall asleep.” She wanted to tell him not to worry about her, but the words wouldn’t come out of her mouth. As she let the darkness consume her, she knew that leaving Saint wasn’t an option, but she had no choice.

“Please stay with me, ,” Saint begged. “I love you.” She wanted to give him the words back, but she couldn’t. She let sleep take her and just hoped like hell that she’d wake up at some point to tell Saint that she loved him too.

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could hear voices, and she wasn’t sure if that was a good or bad thing. Her world was still dark, and she wondered if that was because she was sleeping or if she was dead. “When will she wake up?” a woman asked. She had an Irish accent and for a second, wondered if it was Banshee.

“I don’t know,” a man said, “they won’t tell me anything.” would know that voice anywhere. It was Saint and that had to mean that she was still alive. She tried to open her eyes but couldn’t seem to muster the energy to do so.

“I’ve called her parents, and they will be here in the morning. Her dad can’t drive in the dark and her mother doesn’t have her license anymore,” Banshee said. “I offered to pick them up, but they said they needed some sleep. The cops talked to them and told them what happened. I’m betting they didn’t leave out the part about dancing for that slime ball at his club.”

“Shit,” Saint grumbled. “ isn’t going to like that they know what she did for a living.”

“No,” muttered.

“, honey, wake up,” Banshee breathed. shook her head, and Saint chuckled.

“She’s hard to wake up in general. I have to bribe her with coffee. I’m sure that with all the drugs in her system, she’ll need to sleep for a while.”

opened her eyes to find Banshee and Saint standing over her bed. Monitors were beeping and tubes were everywhere. She tried to sit up a little bit and cried out in pain. “Just lay back,” Banshee said. “I’ll go fetch the doctor.” Saint thanked her and watched as she left the room.

“How are you feeling?” Saint asked.

“Like I got run over by a truck,” she whispered, her throat feeling dry. “Can I get some water?” Saint handed her a glass of water and told her to sip it. She did as ordered and handed it back to him.

“How long have I been out?” asked.

“Since yesterday,” Saint said. “They got the bullet out and stopped the bleeding, but you lost your spleen.”

“Did I need my spleen?” she asked.

“Apparently not, but you are going to be stuck here for the better part of a week,” Saint said. groaned and he laughed. She never thought that she’d hear his laugh again, and she didn’t plan on ever taking it for granted in the future.

“I love you too,” breathed. Saint looked at her as though she had lost her mind and she remembered that he had said that to her yesterday, as she was falling asleep. “Just before I fell asleep, you told me that you love me. I wanted to say it back, but I didn’t get the chance, so I’m saying it now.”

“Marry me,” he whispered, taking her completely off guard.

“What?” asked. “We haven’t discussed the future,” she reminded, “and now, you’re asking me to marry you?”

“I am,” he said. “Almost losing you made me realize how much I love you. I don’t want to live another day without you being my wife,” he said. “So, when you get out of here, how about if you marry me?”

She didn’t have to think about his proposal. wanted to be his wife more than anything. “I’d marry you right now if we could figure out how to swing it.” When Saint smiled down at her, knew that he was planning something already. “What are you thinking?” hesitantly asked.

“Well, I’m thinking that Savage can legally marry people, and I have a good friend who works down at the courthouse and can get us a marriage certificate and notarize it himself. We can get married right here in this room. Did you really mean it when you said that you’d marry me today, honey?” Saint asked.

“Yep,” said. “I don’t have a dress, and I’m sure that I look a mess, but I’d marry you anyway,” she said.

“You don’t look a mess,” he insisted, “you look beautiful.”

“You have to say that, Saint. I’m about to be your wife and can make your life miserable if not,” she teased.

“Well, I wouldn’t want that.” He kissed her forehead, “You get some sleep, and I’ll get everything together. Does about six tonight work for you?” Saint asked.

“I’ve always wanted an evening wedding,” she joked. “How romantic.”

He chuckled and gently kissed her lips. “You’re going to be a handful, aren’t you?” Saint asked.

“I never claimed that I wouldn’t be,” teased. She watched as Saint left, and she already missed him. couldn’t believe that he was going to be all hers in just a few short hours. Resting wasn’t an option, because she needed to get ready, and she knew just the girls to help her do it.

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Vixen, Phoenix, and Sprit brought everything that she requested and were working on her makeup and hair when a nurse came into the room. “What are you all doing in here?” she asked.

“We’re getting ready to get hitched tonight at six,” Vixen said.

“She can’t get married,” the nurse insisted. “She just had surgery.”

“I’m aware,” said, “but it’s all set up. I’m going to be married right here, in this bed,” she said. She stared at the nurse as if daring her to say that she couldn’t.

“Has this been approved by the head nurse?” she asked.

“Actually, it has been approved by Joan and she’s even coming to the ceremony,” said. “There is always room for one more. Would you like to join us?” The nurse’s sour expression seemed to instantly change as she smiled and nodded.

“I’d love to,” she said. “I just need to get your vitals, and then, I’ll get out of your hair. If you need anything just push the red button to call the nurse’s station.”

“Thank you,” said. “Can I also ask you one more favor?”

“Of course,” the nurse agreed.

“I overheard that my parents were notified about me being in here, and I’d like to make sure that they won’t be admitted to see me. I don’t feel like they have my best interest at heart, and it would upset me to have them here.”

“I can let hospital security know that they are not permitted entrance. I’ll be back in a few minutes to get their names and information to give to security.” She quickly took her vitals and left the room. Her friends were so quiet, but she was sure that had everything to do with the fact that she had just barred her mom and dad from seeing her.

“Okay, let’s have it,” said.

“Are you sure that was the right thing to do?” Phoenix asked.

“Yes,” breathed. “The cops told my parents what I did for a living, and they couldn’t be bothered to rush over here. I’m done worrying about their opinion of my life. I’m going to marry the man I love, and I don’t need their disapproval hanging over us like a storm cloud.”

“I get it,” Sprite said, “and whatever you decide about your parents, we have your back.” Her friends all nodded.

“Thanks, guys,” she whispered.

“There, all done,” Vixen said, standing back to admire her work.

“Not bad at all,” Sprite teased.

“We asked the head nurse if we could change you into a white dress that we brought along, but she said that wouldn’t be safe to do with all your tubes and junk. But it

doesn't matter what you're wearing, you're going to be a beautiful bride and Saint is so lucky to have you."

"You're right, he is lucky to have me," joked. Saint walked through the door at that exact moment, making the girls laugh. held her side as she tried to giggle, but God it was painful.

"I take it that you four were talking about me?" Saint grumbled.

"Yep, and your timing is perfect," insisted. Saint was followed into the small room by Banshee and her husband, Cian, Dare, and the rest of the guys. Last, Savage walked in with the two nurses she had invited on his arm. That man could send any woman into a frenzy. It didn't matter that he was married to Bowie and Dallas.

"Ready to get married?" Saint asked. She looked him over, noticing that he had gone home to shower and change into a suit, and she suddenly felt underdressed.

"I'm sorry that I can't change into a dress," she whispered to him. "I can't chance pulling my tubes out."

"I don't give a shit what you're wearing, honey. All I want is for you to be my wife." He leaned down to kiss her lips, and she smiled up at him.

"Well, then, I'm ready to marry you," she agreed.

Saint sat down on the bed next to her, holding her hand in his. Savage took that as his cue to start the short ceremony. By the end of their vows, everyone in the room was crying, including Saint and even Savage. couldn't have asked for a more perfect wedding, even if she wasn't wearing a white dress, she'd remember this day for the rest of her life.

“You may kiss the bride,” Savage said.

“Gently,” the nurses said in unison, making them all laugh.

“Love you,” she whispered to Saint as he dipped his head to gently kiss her.

“Love you too, wife,” he said. “Oh, and when we get the doctor’s okay, I’m planning a real honeymoon for us. How do you feel about someplace tropical?” Saint asked.

“I feel like I need to hurry up and heal,” teased. He dipped his head to kiss her again and Dare groaned.

“Give it a break, man,” Dare mumbled. Savage signed the marriage certificate that Saint’s friend hand-delivered to Savage Hell for him.

Savage handed the certificate to Saint and turned around to the rest of the group. “Okay, everyone out. Let’s give the happy couple some privacy—if that’s all right with you ladies,” he said to the nurses. They both looked up at him with hearts in their eyes and nodded. couldn’t help but roll her eyes at the nurses as they all filed out of her room.

“Happy?” Saint asked as the door closed behind the crowd of people filing out of the room.

“Very,” she said, “are you happy?”

“Very,” Saint said. “I never thought that I would ever settle down—until I found you. I fell hard for you, and had the cast to prove it for a while,” he teased.

“Yeah, yeah,” grumbled. “You never told me what happened to Bruno,” she said.



“He’s behind bars and will stay there for the rest of his life. He confessed to killing Erica and setting your car on fire. He also is facing charges of raping some of the girls that worked at the club. You won’t ever have to deal with him again,” Saint promised. “You’ll finally have your happily ever after.”

She knew that was true—and it was all because of the man sitting next to her on the hospital bed. “Thanks for being my knight in shining armor,” she said.

“Any time,” he agreed, “but for the record, honey, you are no damsel in distress.” could see that now. She was stronger for going through everything these past few months, and with Saint by her side, she’d be able to handle anything that life could possibly toss her way. They were a team now, and she wouldn’t change that for anything.

The End

What’s coming next from K.L. Ramsey? You won’t want to miss Rebel (Royal Harlots MC book 7) is coming in 2025!

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

Rebel Harris wasn't sure how she had gotten herself in the latest mess that she was in, but sitting behind bars really drove home the fact that she had royally fucked up. She was in town to visit her little brother, and she almost made it to the bar that he told her about in his last text message. That was almost ten days ago, and her brother never went radio silent for that long—especially with her. It was just the two of them since their mom died three years prior and she needed to find him. Not just because she had promised her mother that she'd take care of Jace, but because she couldn't imagine not having him in her life. worried the worst had happened to him, and that's why she was currently sitting in jail with no bail available until her court appearance in the morning.

She didn't mean to be going forty-eight over the speed limit through town, but she was. Sure, she had always had a lead foot, but her anxiety over Jace had taken over her common sense and apparently her ability to find the brake pedal. At first, she thought that she'd be able to outrun the cop who was tailing her with his lights flashing in her rearview, but that turned out to be one of her biggest mistakes. She didn't outrun him in her crappy little car, and all she accomplished was pissing officer moody off enough to put her in cuffs and toss her into a jail cell for the night.

used her one phone call to text her brother again, telling him about landing herself in jail, and if he got the message, to please help her out of this jam. She really didn't know why she had bothered to send the text since Jace hadn't responded to any of her messages in ten days now, but she just couldn't give up hope that he was alive and well somewhere and just ignored her. It wouldn't be the first time that had happened. had found herself in hot water a lot over the years, always leaning on her little brother to bail her out of trouble. Maybe he was finally sick of her bullshit—or maybe he was in trouble this time and she wouldn't be able to help him while sitting in a jail cell.

The only good thing she had done was to keep Jace in the dark about why she was there each time that he bailed her out.

After her mother passed, and agreed to take care of her little brother, she realized that she had to be able to work to put food on the table and clothes on the growing boy's back. She was only eighteen, but old enough to be Jace's legal guardian. So, she quit high school during her senior year and started looking for full-time work, but no one wanted to hire her to work between the hours of eight in the morning and four in the afternoon, while Jace was in school. She knew that she'd never be able to afford a sitter, especially while earning the minimum wage. That was when she decided to answer an ad for a local strip club. She got the job and went home every night feeling dirty, but she could afford a babysitter for Jace and all the rest of the things that he'd need to grow up. When things started getting tight with their finances, she had to make some hard and fast choices. That was when she began accepting the offers that came in nightly for men she danced for. She'd make them get a hotel room and meet them after her shift. She gave them an hour of her time, and they paid her one hundred dollars in cash. After some time, she had a few regulars set up, and going home to her innocent little brother became harder and harder.

As Jace got older, she worried that sooner or later, he'd figure out her secret, but she was able to keep him in the dark until he graduated from high school and moved out to go to college. He had gotten enough money in scholarships that he was able to pay for his schooling. He'd come home once in a while, but for the most part, she was on her own. She kept her job, but meeting Johns in a hotel room was a thing of her past. She found a way to stop dancing and when she found a decent job at a little clothing boutique downtown, she felt like things were finally going her way—until Jace went radio silent for ten days.

The cop who booked her walked back to the holding cell she was in and unlocked it. "I guess it's your lucky day. Someone is here to bail you out, so you won't be sticking around until morning."

“Is it my brother?” asked.

“I have no clue who the guy is. How about you come with me, and you’ll find out soon enough,” the officer said. stood and followed the officer out of the holding cell. She hoped that Jace was standing on the other side of the door as they walked into the station, but her hope was quickly dashed. She looked around the room, trying to find him, but he wasn’t there.

“So, who bailed me out?” asked.

“That guy over there,” the officer said, pointing to a big guy standing in the corner of the room. He was casually leaning against the wall as though he had nowhere better to be. He had on a black, form-fitting T-shirt; his arms covered in tattoos, making wonder what he had underneath his shirt. She was always a sucker for a man with tattoos. The guy had a beard, and she never really cared for them, but on him, it worked.

“Come with me and we can get you out of here,” the officer ordered. She wanted to protest and tell him that she needed to know who was bailing her out, but doing so might land her back in the holding cell. decided that getting out of there was worth having to go with a complete stranger, even if he looked like her could snap her in two if he wanted to.

She followed the officer out to the hallway where he handed her a plastic bag with her name on it. Her wallet, keys, and a few other items were inside—but her purse was missing. “Where is my purse?” she asked.

“I’ll have to check with the arresting officer, but this was all that was checked in,” the officer said.

“It was brand new. I just got it last week,” she insisted.

“And if it was in your possession when you were arrested, it would have been in that bag,” he said, nodding to the plastic bag still in her hand. She quickly opened it and checked to make sure that everything was still in her wallet. She was relieved to see that everything was there, but it irritated her that her new purse was missing.

“Leave it alone,” a man said from behind her. “I’ll get you a new fucking purse, but we need to get on the road.” She turned around to find the big guy who had been standing in the corner, minutes earlier, right behind her.

“That’s not necessary,” she insisted. “I can purchase my own purse. It’s a matter of principle. If the officer who arrested me took my purse, then he should have to replace it.”

“Now wait a minute,” the officer releasing her shouted.

“Sir, I forgot to give you this. All her items wouldn’t fit in one bag, so I put her purse and a few other things into this second bag,” the clerk from behind the desk said. He handed it to the officer before he could continue with the rest of his lecture, and smugly took it from him.

“Thank you,” she spat. She really didn’t mean it, but she also knew that accusing the arresting officer might land her in more trouble than the speeding ticket she was currently facing.

“Yeah,” the officer grumbled. He handed the guy behind her a few papers and told him that she had to appear in court in one week. He promised to text the guy the details and sent them on their way. Honestly, couldn’t get out of that building or away from those officers fast enough. She had almost forgotten to find out who was bailing her out.

They walked out into the cool night air and she stopped dead in the parking lot. She

turned to find the big guy looking a bit confused. “Did you forget something?” he asked.

“Nope,” she said, “I’m just wondering who the hell you are and why you bailed me out. The only people who knew that I was in there were the officers and my brother, Jace. Care to tell me who you are?” didn’t want to look a gift horse in the mouth, but she was free and capable of taking care of herself from there.

“Jace sent me,” the big guy said. “My name is Henry, but everyone calls me Bolt.”

“Well, Henry, that is a very strange nickname,” she said. “How did you get it?”

“The guys down at the Royal Bastards gave it to me. It’s my biker name.”

“That still doesn’t explain the unusual nickname,” she insisted. “What does it mean?”

If she wasn’t mistaken, the big guy actually blushed, although it was hard to tell in the dark. “It’s a long story,” he insisted.

“Well, I have no place to be,” said.

“I do,” he said, “I promised Jace that I’d get you back to the club safely.”

“You talked to my brother?” asked. “Is he okay?”

“For now,” Bolt said. She hated how cryptic he was being with her. All she wanted was some answers.

“What the hell does that mean?” she asked.

He grabbed her hand and tugged her along to the bike sitting back in the corner of the

parking lot. “What are you doing?” she asked.

“You ask a lot of questions,” Bolt insisted.

“And you don’t answer any of them,” she spat, pulling her hand from his.

He opened one of the containers on the side of his bike and pointed to it. “You can put your stuff in there,” he offered.

“I’ll just put it in my car,” she said. “I can follow you wherever we are going.” There was no way that she was getting onto the back of that death trap. never liked motorcycles, and when Jace told her that he was getting one after he graduated from high school, she wanted to tell him that if he did, he’d be grounded for a month, but threats like that didn’t work on him at that point. And when he rode away on his motorcycle, all she could do was hold her breath and pray that he didn’t do anything stupid.

“Your car is impounded, honey,” Bolt said. “Plus, it’s not safe to drive.”

“My car is perfectly safe,” insisted. “Why would they impound it?”

“Because it’s evidence now,” he said.

“Evidence for what?” she asked.

“Again, it’s a long story and one we can get into once we reach Savage Hell. For now, I just need you to trust me when I tell you that staying here only puts us both in danger.” She wanted to ask more questions, but knew that he wasn’t going to give her the answers that she was looking for. Her only option was to trust the man that her brother sent to bail her out, and then, hopefully, someone would be able to clear a few things up for her.

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Bolt knew that Rebel had questions. Hell, she had asked him a dozen of them since they met. Jace owed him big time for picking up his inquisitive older sister, but then, his partner hadn't really asked him for a lot of favors over the years. One thing was clear—Jace had never told his sister that he was an FBI agent and telling her for his partner wasn't going to happen. That was between Jace and his sister, and getting in the middle of family issues was something that tried to avoid at all costs.

"You ever been on a bike before?" asked Rebel. She looked the motorcycle over as though it somehow offended her and shook her head. She shoved the two plastic bags, with her stuff inside, into the saddle bags on his bike and took the helmet that he handed to her.

"It's easy," he insisted, "I'll do all the work. All you have to do is hold on tight to me. We're only about an hour from the club, so it shouldn't be too bad."

"I wish that you sounded more confident about that," she teased. "But, if it means that I'll get to see Jace, I'll do it." He wasn't about to admit that she wasn't going to be able to see her brother any time soon. Jace was deep undercover and that was where Bolt should be too, but he bailed out when his dad got sick. His boss told him to go home to be with his father, and he had to admit that he was thankful that he did as ordered. His father was terminal and didn't tell anyone until it was almost too late. got to spend two days with his dad before he passed, and after he got past his anger, he knew that he had been given a gift.

The problem was, after he buried his dad, he couldn't just go back undercover and pick up where he had left off. The guys in charge would ask him too many questions, and that would put not only him but also Jace in danger. Still, he hated leaving Jace



all alone in that world with no backup.

They were working for human traffickers and the thought of not putting them all behind bars made him sick. Every day, he watched the eyes of the women who they had brought in to be sold. Most of them looked to be underage, and the thought of any man laying a finger on them pissed him off. He and Jace were able to get some of the girls out of there and back home to their families, but they couldn't save all of them without blowing their cover.

They got back to Savage Hell just past midnight and a few of the Royal Harlots were still hanging around, talking about the new clubhouse that was being built for them. They were going over the final alterations and he hated interrupting, but he needed to find Savage.

Banshee met him at the door, "We're running a bit late," she said.

"I'm not here to interrupt, Banshee," he assured. "I have a meeting with Savage."

"Oh, he's back in his office," she said. "I'm Banshee," she said, holding out her hand to Rebel.

"Rebel," she said, shaking Banshee's hand. "I'm trying to find my brother Jace. Would you by chance know where he is?"

"No, sorry, love," Banshee said, laying on the Irish accent a bit thick. She looked over at and sighed. "Guess you all have a lot to discuss. I'll leave you to it then. Good meeting you, Rebel."

"What did she mean by that?" Rebel asked. "What would we have to discuss? I don't even know you."

“No, but you will soon enough. We need to talk about Jace, and Savage can help fill in some of the blanks.” knew that she wasn’t going to like the fact that her little brother had kept the truth from her all these years, but that wasn’t something that he could help. He was going to have to break his rule about not getting involved in other people’s family business because Rebel had a right to know where Jace was and what he was doing. He’d start at the beginning, and hopefully, by the end of the story, he’d have all her questions answered—hopefully being the keyword.

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led the way back to Savage’s office and knocked on the door. “Come in,” Savage growled from the other side of the door.

“Maybe we should come back another time,” Rebel insisted.

“His bark is worse than his bite, I promise,” assured.

“I’m not interested in experiencing his bark or his bite. Maybe this was a bad idea,” she mumbled. He thought it was too, but there would be no turning back now. When Jace called him and said that he needed a favor and that he didn’t have much time to explain, promised to help him with anything. He just never imagined that the anything would be an anyone—namely, Jace’s hot, older sister.

They walked into the dimly lit office to find the big guy sitting behind a desk. “What is it with bikers having tattoos and beards?” Rebel whispered.

“It’s a look,” the big guy said. “I’m Savage.” He held his hand out to her, and she hesitantly shook it.

“Rebel,” she said. “I’m looking for my little brother, Jace.” Savage looked at and he shrugged.

“How much does she know?” Savage asked.

“Nothing,” said. “Seems Jace kept her in the dark.”

“Jace kept me in the dark about what?” Rebel asked.

“You might want to sit down for this next part,” Savage said.

“I’ll stand, thanks,” Rebel spat.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, she’s pretty damn stubborn,” said.

“Just like Jace,” Savage said.

“I’m standing right here,” she shouted. “Stop talking about me as though I’m not here. And I’m not stubborn. Now, tell me what’s going on.”

“Bossy too,” Savage joked. She sunk into the sofa and sighed. She was really a handful, and although she was off limits to him, liked his women feisty.

“I’m sitting,” she said, “can one of you please tell me what’s going on.”

Savage sat down next to her. “First, you have to know that Jace didn’t want to keep this from you, but he had no choice. He’s an FBI agent and has been deep undercover for months now.”

“FBI,” she repeated, “what is he undercover for?”

“He’s trying to bring down a group of human traffickers. I was his partner until my dad died, and I was pulled out of the assignment. My boss gave me the choice of staying undercover with Jace or spending my father’s last few days with him. Your

brother convinced me to go home to see my dad.”

“That sounds like Jace,” she whispered. “We lost our parents when he was so young, I’m sure he’d like a few days with our father. You were right to spend time with your father, ,” she said.

“Maybe,” he breathed, “but when the funeral was over, I wasn’t allowed to go back in because my boss felt that I might blow Jace’s cover, so it was safer for him to work alone—but he had no backup. I don’t know how he is or what’s going on with him. I’m sorry that I can’t give you more information. Well, except for the fact that Jace thought that you were in danger. It’s why he called you to come to the bar. He wanted you here so that we could help keep an eye on you.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” she insisted, “if you can’t tell, I’m a grown woman, .” Oh, he could tell that she was a woman and that was the problem. Jace made him promise that if things went sideways, he’d take care of Rebel. He just didn’t imagine that she’d go and get herself arrested in town. If someone was after her, they’d be able to find her easier now. Hell, they probably knew exactly where she was and that was why he told her to leave her car at the precinct. It wasn’t safe for her to be on her own.

“I actually have a little bit more information about Jace. I did some digging tonight while was picking you up, and I found out that Jace went off-grid. My source thinks that the traffickers found out who he was, and they have a price on his head. He knew that might happen to you too, so he told you to come here. If they know he’s an FBI agent, they’d come after his family—namely you, and you don’t want to know what they’d do to you once they found you,” Savage said.

“I have a pretty good idea what they’d do to me. What will happen to Jace if they find him?” Rebel asked.

“You don’t have to worry about Jace,” insisted. “He knows how to take care of himself.”

“And here I was, worried that my little brother had gotten himself in trouble when he stopped calling me. I just had no idea that he could handle the trouble and was trying to take care of me,” Rebel said. “So, what now? Where should we start looking for Jace?”

“We’re not going to look for Jace, and you definitely aren’t looking for him,” Savage said.

“We have specific orders from your brother that you’re to stay with me,” said. “I promised Jace that I’d keep you safe until he can figure out what to do about the traffickers.”

“And I told you that I don’t need a babysitter. It’s nice of my brother to try to protect me, but I can also take care of myself,” Rebel insisted. She wasn’t going to make any of this easy on him.

“Savage, can I borrow your truck? Take my bike in case anyone follows us. Plus, I don’t want Rebel jumping off the back of my bike trying to get away. I’ll take her to one of the club’s safe houses and will call when I get us settled and it’s safe,” said.

“There is no us and I’m not going anywhere with you,” Rebel spat.

“Suit yourself,” said. Savage tossed him the keys to his truck, and he hoisted Rebel over his shoulder. She gave him a fight, but he had expected her to. She shouted at him to put her down, kicking and screaming at him as he walked out of Savage’s office. He swatted her ass, telling her to calm down, but that only seemed to piss her off more. Yeah, Rebel was a handful, and he had to admit, she felt right up against his body—not that he’d break the bro code and do anything about it. He owed his partner

at least that much.

Rebel (Royal Harlots: Huntsville Chapter Book 7) Universal Link- Coming soon!

What's coming next from K.L. Ramsey? You won't want to miss Falling for the Knockout! It's the first book in a new MMA/Boxer series called No Mercy and is coming in May 2025!

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Anthony Vitale, Jr. was living in his father's shadow. He'd usually tell people that it started when he stepped into the ring as a boxer, just as his father had thirty years earlier, but it probably started when he was born and given his father's name. Sr. had always wanted a boy to train to be just like him—it was inevitable, but him dying when Tony was only ten kind of ruined his plans. At least, that's what his mother told him. He didn't remember a lot about his father, but from the things he held onto, she wasn't kidding when she told him that his father wanted him to follow in his footsteps.

Being second generation Italian, born in the States, kind of sealed his fate. When his mother had trouble filling in details about his father as he grew up, he went to his grandfather. His Nonno Elio was born in the "Old Country" as he called it. He told Tony stories about being a kid in Sicily and when he finished with those tales, they moved on to stories about his dad, but most of them involved boxing. He knew that his grandfather was proud of his son's boxing career, but Tony needed details about his father's life that didn't involve the sport that ended up killing him.

Sr. was fighting outside of his weight class during his fatal last bout. Under his direction, his cornerman had paid off the referee to let him fight someone who was one weight class above his, and that proved deadly for his dad. Sr. was stubborn, and getting the shit beat out of him wasn't enough to have him stop the fight. Hell, his cornerman or ref should have called a technical knockout, but a TKO wasn't how Sr. wanted to win. And when his body hit the mat in the eight rounds Sr., gone. He never stood a chance, and when he didn't come home that night, his mother woke Tony to tell him about Sr. and it felt as though she was letting him know that a complete stranger had died. Her tone was flat and almost uncaring, and Tony was too young to know back then, but his mom was in shock. Later, when he told her that he wanted to

get into boxing, she said that he'd end up like his father and admitted that she just couldn't take that again.

She had checked out for some time, leaving Tony to practically raise himself during his teenage years. At first, he was fine with the lack of attention, but after a while, he began to feel like it was him against the rest of the world. That's when he started fighting—not in a ring, but on the streets. Tony showed up from school with more scrapes and broken bones than his mother could keep up with, and that was when she sent him to live with his Nonno Elio. He couldn't fault his mother—he had become a handful, but his grandfather was just as ill-equipped to take care of an angry, confused teenager as his mom was. His Nonno tried, and that meant something to Tony, even if he wasn't ready to admit it.

The stories about his dad helped too, and when his Nonno Elio gave him his first pair of gloves and signed him up at the local gym to spar with other teenagers from town, he was hooked. His coach taught him patience and how to throw a right hook. His grandfather cheered him on, and his mother became even more distant. She refused to watch any of his bouts, saying that she wouldn't live that life again and lose someone else that she loved. He resented her for that decision, but a part of him was glad that she wasn't there. It gave him the push that he needed to be as ruthless with his opponents as he wanted—well, within the limits and rules of boxing.

Tony graduated from high school and told his grandfather that he wanted to become a boxer. There was no point in telling his mother since she wasn't really talking to him at that point. She would have only tried to talk him out of it anyway, but his Nonno didn't. He even became one of his cornermen and traveled with Tony everywhere that he went. He was the one who convinced Tony to go professional and join the World Series of Boxing, or WSB. Nonno Elio was even trying to convince him to train for the Olympics, but Tony knew that was just a pipe dream. He had to focus on one goal at a time, or he'd never get anywhere. That was something that he had learned about himself the hard way. Plus, Tony was pushing thirty-two, and that was usually when



most boxers retired. He knew that making it big at his age was a long shot, but he couldn't give up now—he'd already come so far.

It was why he was at the gym every morning at four and back after work every day for more training. Unfortunately, boxing didn't pay the bills—yet, but that was the dream. So, for now, Tony was going to keep his day job working at his grandmother's bakery. She passed a few years back but taught him everything he knew about running the bakery and making her special recipes from Italy. Plus, he made enough to pay the bills and got to help his Nonno keep the bakery afloat. His grandparents started the bakery over forty years ago, and selling the business wasn't something his grandfather thought he could do. He knew that if his Nonna was alive, she'd try to tell him that he had options besides boxing, and he knew that was true. A part of him wondered what his life would look like if he took over the bakery and quit boxing, but he knew that he'd miss that part of himself. Hell, he would miss the bakery if he gave it up, so for now, he'd do both. It was his way of keeping his Nonno happy and his grandmother's memory alive.

Tony pulled open the back door of the bakery and the smell of freshly baked bread hit him in the face. Just his luck that he'd given up all bread while he was getting ready for his upcoming fight, to make weight. He knew that he'd find Aurora in the kitchen, making everything that they'd sell for the day. Hiring her was his Nonno's idea and a damn good one. Tony was running himself to the ground making sure that he was at the bakery early enough to bake everything that they needed for the day, and working out twice a day. His grandfather placed the ad behind his back and when pretty little Aurora showed up the next day, he couldn't be mad at his Nonno. She was a professionally trained baker, which was more than he could say, and she seemed to really love the bakery. Nonno liked to tell him that his grandmother would have approved of Aurora, but Tony was sure that it was for his benefit. His grandfather seemed to like to stick his nose into Tony's love life—or lack of love life and give him unsolicited advice. Sure, Aurora was beautiful, but he already had too much on his plate to consider adding dating to it.

Aurora smiled at him as he dropped his stuff back in the office. She always smiled at him. Hell, she was friendly and probably smiled at everyone, but for just a few minutes each morning, he felt like the luckiest man on the planet because Aurora smiled at him. “Morning,” he whispered. Tony was never sure why he whispered to her every morning. Maybe it was because it was still dark and quiet outside in the world. Or maybe he was afraid to speak too loudly to her for fear that she was just a figment of his imagination.

“Good morning,” she whispered back as though playing along with some silly game that neither of them was actually playing. “I’d point out that you’re twenty minutes late, but when your grandfather isn’t here, you’re my boss and I really need this job.” Tony wanted to point out that he technically wasn’t her boss, even when Nonno Elio wasn’t there, but his tongue didn’t seem to want to work. Aurora had that effect on him—rendering him speechless. She must have thought him to be an idiot. Half the time, he just smiled and nodded when she’d say something, or even ask a question. Tony just couldn’t help himself though. Around her, he couldn’t seem to speak.

“You okay?” she asked, “you seem a bit out of it this morning.” He wanted to point out that he always acted this way around her, but didn’t want to draw attention to his own shortcomings. He nodded and she smiled at him as she pulled a tray of fresh bagels from the oven.

“I’m betting that you’re not a morning person,” she said. “I mean, judging by the way you never seem to want to talk to me in the morning. Or the other answer could be that you just don’t like me. Is that it, Tony? God, I hope that I didn’t do anything to upset you.” He smiled over at her and shook his head. It was a simple gesture that had her deflating some. Tony was going to tell her that he never really talked much in the morning to anyone, but that wasn’t the truth. In fact, on the mornings that his grandfather came into the bakery, to check on them, he talked his Nonno’s ear off.

“I just need some coffee, and I should be fine,” he lied. Coffee wasn’t going to help

him come up with something clever to say. No, he was probably doomed to keep repeating their silent song and dance every morning until he either worked up the nerve to talk to Aurora, or she ended up leaving the bakery after getting sick of his shit.

“I don’t think that’s the case,” she challenged. “You don’t seem any more sociable after coffee.” Aurora huffed out her breath put another tray of bagels in the industrial oven and shut the door. “Listen, just forget that I said anything. Is Elio coming in this morning?” she asked. It had been a few weeks since his grandfather made his way into the bakery. He got the flu and then, walking pneumonia. His nonno spent a lot of time in bed, resting and recovering, as per the doctor’s orders.

“I’m not sure if he feels one hundred percent still,” Tony said. “He has a doctor’s appointment this afternoon, and hopefully, we’ll get some good news.”

“I’m going to cross all of my fingers and toes,” Aurora said. “Can you do me a favor and call me—you know, to give me an update?”

“Of course,” Tony agreed.

“Do you need my number?” Aurora asked. He didn’t want to tell her that he already had her number programmed into his cellphone. He put it in the day she applied for the job and even had a picture of her with her contact information. He had snuck a quick pick while she was decorating some cupcakes. It made him feel a bit creepy, but he just couldn’t help himself.

“Um, no,” he breathed. “I’m sure that my grandfather has it.”

“Don’t be silly,” she insisted. “Give me your phone.” He hesitated, not sure that he wanted to just hand over his phone to her. What if she saw her number and the picture he sneaked of her? That might send her running out of the bakery, and his poor

grandfather would have to find someone else to hire.

“How about you just call me, and I’ll save your info,” he offered.

“Oh, sure,” she said. “I’m sorry that I was so pushy. Of course, you don’t want to just give me your phone. That’s your private property. Um, what’s your number?” she asked. Tony rattled off his number and pulled his phone from his pocket when it buzzed from her calling him. He sent the call to voicemail and pretended to type in her name which was already attached to her number in his contacts. Tony was careful not to show his screen to her and felt like a complete ass for not just telling her the truth. He liked her. Hell, he more than liked her, but he was too much of a chicken to tell her that. And there was the fact that he didn’t have time to add dating to his daily calendar—it was already too full for him to handle and there was no way that he’d do things half-assed with Aurora. She deserved someone who could give her their full attention, and that was just not him.

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A uroora was sure that Tony hated her. That had to be the case because every time she saw him he had some excuse to run off and do something in the back office or even have an errand to run. He avoided talking to her and having any type of conversation with him was painful. had thought about quitting a few times, but she loved her job. She loved Elio too, but she wasn't sure how much longer she'd be able to work around Tony and ignore her own feelings for him. Sooner or later, she'd burst and everything that she had been holding in would finally come out. Tony would surely hate her after that if he didn't already.

She usually got to the bakery before Tony and his grandfather. Poor Elio had been so sick lately, she worried that he might never be able to come back to the bakery. That would leave her alone with Tony, and working with just him, day in and day out felt wrong. Elio had hired her behind Tony's back, and she was sure that had to do with why he hated her. He didn't seem pleased when his grandfather introduced her as their new employee. He told Elio that he didn't need any help around the bakery, even though his grandfather insisted that he did. Sometimes, when it was the three of them at the bakery, she felt like a third wheel. She'd even talked to Elio about Tony avoiding her and the sweet old man told her to give his grandson some time—but she knew that no amount of time would help her case. She was sure that there was nothing more that she could say or do to get Tony to accept her working there, or to like her. She was going to have to be resolved with being the outcast, and that usually worked for her. But there was something about the sexy, Italian boxer that had her wishing otherwise.

And now, he was standing in front of her, pretending that he didn't already have her number in his phone. She had chanced a peek at his phone when he left it sitting in the kitchen to run back to the office. She found her phone number and a picture that

she didn't know that he had taken, listed in his contacts. She wasn't sure how she felt about that. On one hand, it creeped her out, and on the other, she thought that it was super sweet. And if given the same opportunity, to sneak a picture of him and save it to her phone, she would.

was a natural born snooper, or that's what her father used to say. She loved looking at other people's private things and when it came to gossip, she wanted to know everything. The old saying, "If you don't have something nice to say about someone, come sit next to me," was her favorite, and that's exactly how she felt about gossip. It was a bad trait to have, and one that she didn't like to tell many people about, so there was no way that she was going to confess to Tony that she knew that he already had her number in his phone.

It was kind of comical watching him pretend to type her information into his phone while she stood there. He did everything that he could to hide his phone screen from her, and her knowing smirk would have given him away, but that would mean that he had actually looked at her. Eye contact wasn't Tony's strong suit, and for such a big guy, he was sure shy when it came to talking to her.

He looked up at her and smiled. "There, you're added to my contacts." He seemed proud of himself, and wasn't sure if she should cheer or giggle at his triumph.

"Great," she said, "you promise to call me when you have any news about Elio?" she asked. She wondered if his gruff, sexy voice would still sound as good over the phone as it did in real life. She had thought about him whispering to her in bed, but that wasn't something that she let herself do often, knowing that he didn't see her that way.

"Yep," he agreed. "I'm going to start putting stuff out. We open in about an hour."

"Yeah, I need to finish making the donuts and then, I'll give you a hand," she offered.

“I’ve got it,” he assured, “no need to hurry.” It kind of hurt her feelings that he was blowing her off and telling her that he didn’t want her help. It felt more like he was telling her that he didn’t want her around, and that was easier, to some degree, for her to accept. At least he was being honest with her, and no hope was better than false hope.

“Suit yourself,” she mumbled under her breath as she walked back to the kitchen to finish frosting and glazing the donuts she made earlier. She wasn’t lying when she told him that she needed this job. But there were other jobs out there, and maybe it was time to start searching again. At least then, she’d be able to get through a day without feeling let down by a man who didn’t seem to know that she was alive.

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Mornings always started out slowly, especially weekends. People usually came in for sweets and bread after church, and this Sunday was no different. She hated when it was slow—it gave her time to think about everything that she was missing in life—including the man who was currently helping a few guys in the front of the bakery. He seemed to know them from the way that he was laughing and carrying on with them. She was right earlier—he talked to everyone except her. It had nothing to do with the lack of coffee or the early hour. He didn’t like her, and watching him with his friends drove that point home for her.

She grabbed the coffee pot and headed in Tony’s direction. If he didn’t want to talk to her, she’d just have to talk to his friends. Maybe one of them would pay some attention to her. God, it had been so long since any guy paid any attention to her. And once they paid her a bit of attention, they seemed to lose interest. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that by the second or third date, the guys all wanted sex, and she wasn’t ready for that next step. She was saving herself for someone special, not that she’d ever find him at this rate. That was probably why she was still a virgin at the age of twenty-three. Her friends from high school were all married and having kids—at least, that was what their social media pages said.

knew that sticking around her hometown, with all her old friends from high school, she'd never meet anyone. She hated that she needed to leave her family, but her mother seemed to understand her desire for a new start. She thought that her fresh start would finally find Mr. Right, but she was wrong. She had been in town for almost a year now, working for Elio, and wishing with all her might that Tony would finally notice her.

"Can I get you guys some coffee?" she asked.

"Oh, I've already got them covered," Tony said. She nodded and started back to the kitchen, just wanting to hide, when one of the guys called her back.

"I could use a refill," he said. She smiled and nodded, grateful that he gave her a reprieve after Tony flat-out dismissed her.

"Sure," she said, filling his mug. "Anyone else?" she asked. They all nodded, and she filled their mugs too. "If you need anything else, just ask Tony," she breathed.

"How about your number?" one of the guys asked.

"And your name," another chimed in.

Tony sighed and introduced her. "Guys this is . She works here, and as for her number, you'll have to discuss that with her. But, if you're as smart as I think you are, you won't give any of them your number." smiled, but her brain was trying to figure out if Tony had really just called her smart. He couldn't have meant it. He never paid her a compliment and honestly, she wasn't sure how to handle it.

", this is Rocco," he pointed to the guy in the corner. "And that's our manager/promoter, Jones." An older man nodded to her, and she did the same back.

"And that's Luca," he said.



The guy sitting closest to her stood and held out his hand to her. “Good to meet you, .”

“Um, thank you,” she said, pulling her hand from his and sticking it in her pocket. “I’m going to go back to the kitchen and start cleaning up,” she stuttered. She was lying. The kitchen had been clean for over an hour because she had been hiding back there, trying to avoid Tony.

She put the coffee pot back on the burner and rounded the corner into the kitchen. pulled her flour-covered apron off and tossed it in the pile of dirty rags that needed to be washed. She took the laundry home every night for Elio, hoping to save him from having to do it himself. She didn’t mind, really, and Elio seemed to really appreciate the help.

“Hey,” Tony said, finding her in the back of the kitchen. He looked around and then back at her. “You either were really fast or you just lied. I hope that my friends aren’t too much. They’re all boxers, and well, Jones’s whole life is boxing. I know that we can all get a bit rowdy, and I had no idea that they were coming today. Heck, Rocco, and Luca are supposed to be off bread, to meet weight for their upcoming fights.”

“Is that why you haven’t had any of my pastries for weeks now?” she asked. thought that it was just another way he was letting her down easily. Now, she felt foolish.

“Yeah, I seem to be more disciplined than the guys,” he joked.

“So, you have a fight coming up then?” she asked. She had hoped that he would invite her to a fight sometime, but why would he? If he didn’t like hanging around her at work, he probably wouldn’t want to hang out with her outside of the bakery.

“Yeah, three Saturdays from now,” he said. “Hey, would you like to come to my next fight?”

“Oh, you don’t have to invite me to your fight,” she insisted. “I know that we’re not friends or anything like that, so you don’t have to pretend to like me.”

He took a step in her direction, and she backed up against the stainless-steel counter. “What makes you think that I don’t like you and that we’re not friends?” he asked.

“Um, you don’t talk to me or anything, so I just assumed,” she said.

“Well, you assumed wrong, . I like you, hell, I more than like you, but you make me a bit tongue-tied.”

“I do?” she whispered.

“Yeah,” he whispered back. “So, tell me that you’ll come to my next fight, ,” he insisted. How could she say no to him after what he had just said to her? She couldn’t.

“I’ll come to your fight,” she breathed. Tony took another step towards her and held her breath waiting for what he was going to do next.

“Thank you,” he said, dipping his head to kiss her cheek. Tony disappeared back into the bakery to find his friends, and stood there like an idiot, holding her cheek that he had just kissed. He liked her—he really liked her.