



Klutch's Kryptonite (Bastard Saints MC: St. Louis, MO #1)

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Category: Romance

Description: ~ Demi ~

I've always dreamed of escaping the chaos of my father's world, where I'm constantly picking up the pieces of his broken promises and battling his relentless addiction. Desperate to leave that life behind, I take a job at The Underground, hoping to earn enough money for a fresh start. But when I catch the eye of Klutch, the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Bastard Saints Motorcycle Club, my plans quickly begin to unravel.

With his piercing blue eyes and fearsome reputation, staying off Klutch's radar feels impossible.

I know I need to avoid the sexy biker at all costs because men like him always get what they want.

~ Klutch ~

I grew up wanting one thing: to fulfill my destiny as my father's successor.

As a brutal cage fighter and a man of questionable morals, I'm a force that commands respect and fear.

The club is my life, and my loyalty will never waver.

Until Demi.

She shows up out of nowhere, threatening to disrupt everything I've been working for.

I should stay away from here, but I don't.

There's something about the new waitress at The Underground that shakes the very core of my allegiance.

In a world where loyalty is everything and love is a liability, will I risk everything I've worked for and possibly my life for a chance to claim Demi as my own?

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Klutch

“Is this for real?” I glance over at Yukon who’s being uncharacteristically quiet and see the big bad enforcer’s mouth is hanging open.

I look back at the massive red brick building we’re moving into today and... Yeah. Mouth hanging wide open is an appropriate response because seriously. This place is not at all what I was expecting. “It’s fucking huge.”

“That’s what she said,” Yukon deadpans, making Beast snort.

Turning my head in their direction, I chuckle. “I walked right into that one.”

Yukon nods, eyes still trained on the clubhouse. “Right into it.”

“Yep,” Beast agrees.

Assholes .

Shaking my head, I look back to the building, then across the parking lot. This place really is amazing.

Not only is this massive warehouse going to be our new home but it also sits on a few acres of land that span out behind the building. There’s room to grow which isn’t something we’re used to.

The Saints were not fucking around when they said they take care of their family.

Which is what we are now since we patched in.

Beast whistles low. “I can’t believe they bought this place for us.”

“Yeah, brother. Me either,” I admit, unable to keep the awe from my voice.

“Check that out.” I motion to the brand new hand painted sign that reads Bastard Saints MC hanging above the entrance. The logo of a skull wearing a blood-red crown with crossbones behind it sits proudly in the center.

Fuck yeah.

The Bastard Saints MC. A mix of pride and sadness fill my chest. Pride for how far we’ve come in such a short time and sadness at the family we lost when we walked away from the Renegade Bastards.

Pee Wee’s massive Ford dually coming through the iron gates pulls me from my thoughts. I turn and watch the VP’s reaction as he cuts the engine.

Not that he hasn’t already seen the property. He’s been here several times in the last couple of weeks working things out with the Saints, but I don’t think he’s seen the sign yet since he never mentioned how badass it was.

His door swings open and he hauls himself out of the driver’s seat. With a thud his heavy boots hit the pavement. The big man’s road name might be Pee Wee but at six feet four and two hundred and sixty pounds, he’s a goddamn monster.

“Fuck yeah!” He slams the truck door shut behind him. “That motherfucker is mint.”

Denali climbs off his Harley and nods. “The Saints really hooked it up.”

“Fuck yeah they did,” Pee Wee shoots back, eyes darting back and forth between the Prez and our new home.

Coming up behind me, my father claps me on the shoulder. “What do you think, mijo?”

What do I think? I spin around, taking in the sprawling property surrounded by the security fence topped with razor wire. “I think it’s nicer than anything we’ve ever had before. I think the Saints didn’t fuck around.”

“No,” he agrees, his eyes twinkling with satisfaction. “They did not.”

Denali nods toward the entrance. “Shall we?”

A chorus of ‘hell yeah’ is his answer.

Like kids ready to see what Santa brought us on Christmas morning, we follow behind him.

Denali steps in front of a high tech keypad and punches in a code. The lock disengages with a solid click. When he pushes the door open, my jaw nearly hits the floor.

“Holy fucking shit.” Beast shoves past me.

Holy fucking shit, indeed.

The inside is nothing like the aged exterior suggests.

Not even close. The wide open common room stretched out before us has been completely renovated.

The concrete floors have been stained in a deep red color, and the walls have that modern urban look thanks to the exposed brick walls.

There are industrial-style lights hanging from the high ceiling that cast a warm glow over everything.

Everywhere I look something shiny catches my attention.

The lights, stainless steel tables and stools, and other shiny fixtures and accessories

“This is fucking crazy, right?” I can’t wipe the perma-grin off my face as I glance over at Pee Wee to gauge his reaction.

“Bro...” He turns towards the massive oak bar that dominates the back wall, mouth hanging open. The dark wood is polished to perfection.

“I’m calling dibs on this spot.” Yukon smirks as he pulls out the black leather stool that sits at the corner of the bar top.

“They even sprung for the good stuff,” Undertaker says, nodding to the top-shelf liquor on full display behind the bar.

And sitting front and center on the bar top is a bottle of Macallan 25 with a big red bow tied around the neck.

Denali walks over and picks up the small white card that’s propped against it. “Welcome to the family,” he reads aloud. “Things only get better from here.”

I tuck my fingers into my mouth and whistle loudly as my brothers cheer. From the look of things so far, they sure as fuck are going to be a lot better than what we walked away from.

Beast slaps me on the back. “We fucking made it,” he says, his usual stoic expression cracking into a rare grin.

I can’t help but smile back. “Yeah, we have.”

Moving deeper into the space, I take inventory of everything.

Tables and chairs are scattered strategically throughout the room, giving plenty of room to kick back and have a beer.

Two brand new pool tables sit under hanging lamps in the corner, their green felt pristine.

The walls are decorated with Harley-Davidson memorabilia, vintage signs, and framed pictures from some of the other Saints chapters.

“This is some high-end shit,” Krypto comments, running his hand over one of the leather sofas positioned near the pool tables.

I round the corner of the bar, curious to see what else has been brought in for our enjoyment.

Through a wide doorway, I discover another open area—a massive lounge with several flat-screen TVs mounted on the walls.

Plush leather couches and recliners face the screens, creating the perfect setup for fight nights and football.

“Check this out,” I call over my shoulder.

Yukon appears beside me, his eyes widening at the sight. “Damn. No more fighting

over Pee Wee's shitty recliner."

"Or his shitty TV," I add with a laugh.

A swinging door at the back of the room catches my attention. I push through it with Yukon on my heels and find myself standing in what can only be described as a chef's dream kitchen.

"Holy fuck," I mutter, taking in the stainless steel appliances, the massive island in the center, and the rows of cabinets that line the walls. "This is nice shit, yeah?"

Yukon moves past me like a man obsessed, his fingers trailing over the industrial-grade stove with something close to reverence. "Eight burners, a flat top grill, and a double oven," he says, his voice hushed. "Do you know what I could do with this?"

I laugh, moving toward the refrigerator. "Let's see if they stocked this too."

I pull open the door and whistle. "Well, we won't starve." The shelves are packed with meats, cheeses, vegetables, and several cases of beer.

Yukon's eyes light up like it's Christmas morning. "No, brother. We ain't going to starve."

"I'll take that to mean you're cooking tonight," I reply, shutting the fridge.

"Fuck yeah, I am." He smiles.

I motion behind me. "I'm gonna check out the rest of the place."

He waves me off, already consumed by something else. Yukon is a master in the kitchen.

Leaving him to check it all out, I head back through the TV room and main room to the staircase nestled between a jukebox and what appears to be bathrooms. The wooden steps creak under my weight as I make my way up to the second floor.

At the top, I find a long hallway with doors on either side. Ten in total, all pushed open.

Curiosity pulls me toward the nearest one.

I step through the doorway and find myself in a fully furnished suite.

The living area is compact but comfortable, with a TV mounted on the wall, a small couch, and a recliner.

I grab the clicker off the coffee table and switch on the television as I walk over to another open door.

Inside is a bedroom with a queen-sized bed already made up with fresh linens, a dresser, and a nightstand.

“Shit,” I mutter, running my hand over the bed. “Memory foam.”

I move to the next open door inside the suite and find a full bathroom.

“Damn. This place is fit for a fucking king.” My eyes sweep across the tiled floor and large walk-in shower.

We really seem to have hit the lottery. I mean, the bathroom is stocked with towels and all the basic toiletries.

We’re going to be able to move right in.

Well, at least those who want to live here, which I do.

I love my Ma and Pop, but I'm not sure I'll survive another night of having to listen to them going at it. Enough is enough.

Spinning around, I head back into the living area. "Shit. There's more," I murmur to myself as I spot the small kitchenette in the corner. The L-shaped counter holds a microwave, sink, and beside it is a mini-fridge.

"Dibs on this one," I call out, though there's no one around to hear me.

I make my way back to the hallway and continue my exploration, finding that all the rooms on the second floor follow the same layout. Private living spaces for the members who need them. The Saints have really thought of everything.

My chest tightens with gratitude. After months of uncertainty and wondering if we'd made the right call by walking away from the RBMC, this feels like validation. We've done the right thing, and now we're being rewarded for it.

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Finding another staircase at the end of the hall, I head up to the third floor.

I'm curious to see what else our new home has to offer.

When I get to the top, I quickly realize the layout is similar to the second floor.

I peek into the first door. "It's more living quarters," I say to myself.

As I turn to head back downstairs, I hear a sound that has my feet moving towards the end of the hallway.

When I get to the last door on the left, I lift my hand and slowly push it open.

There sits Titan in a big black leather computer chair with his mouth hanging open.

"Uhhh, you good, brother?"

His eyes come to me then go back to the computer monitors lining one wall, each displaying a different angle of the property outside. Multiple desktop setups occupy the large L-shaped desk, their towers humming quietly. More tech gear sits on the shelves along another wall.

Titan spins in his chair, his brown eyes lit up as his face splits in a grin that makes him look like a kid on Christmas morning. "Fuck yeah, I'm good," he hoots. "Dude! Look at this shit?"

I step further into the room, looking at all the gear. "Uhm... Yeah." I don't know a

thing about computers. I'm good with my fists, not technology.

Titan shakes his head and laughs. "You have no idea," he replies, turning back to one of the computers. "With this rig alone I could hack into the Pentagon and those smug bastards would never know I was there."

"That's good," I say, though it comes out more like a question.

"Good?" He runs a hand through his shaggy dark hair. "Klutch. The Saints must have dropped at least a hundred grand on all of this shit."

My brows shoot up. "Are you fucking serious?"

His head bobs up and down. "That's not even the best part.

"Titan gestures to the wall of security monitors.

"We've got eyes on every inch of the property.

Motion sensors, heat detection, facial recognition software—nobody is getting within a hundred yards of this place without us knowing exactly who they are. "

The implications aren't lost on me. With the kind of enemies we've made by walking away from Rogue and the Valenciana cartel, this level of security isn't just a luxury—it's a necessity.

"The Saints don't fuck around," I say, echoing my earlier sentiment.

"No, they do not," Titan agrees, still taking it in.

"And check this out." He taps a few keys on one of the computers, and a blueprint of

the building appears on a monitor.

“We’ve got a panic room built into the basement.

Steel reinforced, separate ventilation system, enough supplies to last a couple of months. ”

I shake my head in amazement. “Fucking crazy, dude. It’s like we’re ready for World War III.”

“That’s why they’re still the top dogs,” Titan replies. “Planning and preparation.”

Leaving him to his new toys, I make my way back downstairs to find most of my brothers gathered around the bar. Denali is pouring shots of the gifted Macallan, passing them around with a satisfied look on his face.

“Find anything interesting upstairs?” he asks as I approach.

“There are twenty private suites upstairs. And Titan is in nerd heaven with all the tech stuff the Saints left up there,” I reply, accepting a shot glass.

Denali nods, his expression thoughtful. “The Saints don’t do anything half-ass. When they bring a new charter into the fold, they make sure they’re set up for success.”

“Speaking of which,” my father interjects, raising his glass, “I think a toast is in order.”

We all lift our glasses, the amber liquid catching the light.

“To new beginnings,” Denali says solemnly. “And to the brothers who stood by their principles, no matter the cost. Bastards Saints for life.”

“Bastard Saints for life,” we echo, downing our shots.

The whisky burns a path down my throat, warming my chest. It’s smooth as silk.

“So,” Beast says, setting his empty glass on the bar, “now that we’re officially a Saints charter, what’s next?”

Denali leans against the bar, his expression turning more serious. “Now we prove to them that we were worth the investment. We’ve got a shipment coming in next week from Onyx Beach.”

“Where the fuck is that?” Beast asks, confusion riddled over his face.

Undertaker pours himself another shot, answering absentmindedly. “California.”

I feel my lips turn up. As the road captain, we can always count on Undertaker to know where these random places are. The man is like a walking roadmap.

“Our days of only dabbling in only local business are over. These are the big leagues, boys.” Pee Wee grins.

“I guess now is as good of a time as any to call church,” Denali says as he walks around the bar and grabs a beer from the well.

“Give me one of those,” I say, bellying up to the bar. He hands me one then hands out a few more when Yukon, Pee Wee, and Beast hold out their hands.

“Alright, let’s go.”

I follow Denali and Pee Wee down the hall past the bathrooms and into the one room I haven’t been in yet.

The chapel. Inside is a long wooden table that has been stained and sealed.

It reminds me of a large piece of driftwood.

Burned onto the center is our new logo. A skull wearing a crown with crossbones placed behind it. It's the coolest shit I've ever seen.

"I know I keep saying this, but shit. They really thought of everything," I say, eyeing the beautiful table and the screens that match the ones in Titan's tech room upstairs. Just like in his room the entire property is laid out, every inch under surveillance.

"Right?" Beast says from beside me.

I nod because seriously. They have really thought of everything.

Denali takes his seat at the head of the table and we all follow suit, dropping into our own chairs. Titan hurries in last with a laptop tucked under his arm.

"Sorry. I got caught up with everything upstairs." He shrugs.

"Nerdvana," Yukon teases. Beast holds up his hand and Yukon slaps his palm against the big man's hand. The two enforcers are always giving our tech man shit.

I guess it's too much to hope they'd lay off since everything went down with the Renegade Bastards.

Titan flips them off, not bothered in the slightest by either Enforcer's taunting.

"Okay," Denali starts, drawing every man's attention. "As I was saying. Our first shipment is coming from Onyx Beach. The merchandise will arrive at the funeral home. We'll get the assets put into the transport containers—"

Beast and Yukon both start chuckling at the mention of transport containers.

I feel my own lips twitching. The transport containers Denali is referring to are top of the line coffins Undertaker had custom made.

They have a false bottom. It truly is the perfect setup.

The odds of law enforcement, especially the DEA, pulling over a Hearse and asking to check the contents inside of a coffin are slim to none.

“—and get the truck back on its way to Rochester.”

“This shipment coming directly from the Cuban Cartel?” Pee Wee asks, looking rather uncomfortable in the chair he’s sitting in. At six-foot-four and two hundred and forty pounds of pure muscle, the man might as well be a giant.

Denali nods at his right hand man. “The very same. It’s our first official job as part of the distribution chain.”

“Better than trafficking women and children,” my father mutters, his jaw tightening at the memory.

A heavy silence falls over us all. It’s been nine months since Rogue laid out his plans to partner with the Valenciana Cartel on a human trafficking operation.

The promise of massive profits had tempted some, but when Denali stood up and called it what it was—pure fucking evil—the club fractured right down the middle.

I remember the fury in Rogue’s eyes when my father and I stood with Denali.

The betrayal, the threats, the ultimatum.

We could stay and participate, or we were out bad.

Those were our choices. No biker ever wants to be exiled from his club, from his brothers.

But there are lines some of us refuse to cross.

And Rogue had drawn that line in the sand.

“We made the right call,” I say firmly, breaking the silence. “Rogue lost his fucking mind.”

“Lost his fucking mind, or showed his true colors?” Yukon questions with an arched brow. “The man was always a greedy fucker.”

Undertaker nods in agreement.

“Either way,” Denali interjects, “that’s behind us now. We’ve got a fresh start with the Saints, and they’ve put a lot of faith in us. It’s time to focus on the future.”

“Yeah. Fuck Rogue,” Beast grumbles.

“As much as I wish it was that easy. It’s not.

Yeah, this is our new start, but we can’t get complacent either,” Denali warns.

“The Valenciana family isn’t going to forget that we told them to get fucked.

Not to mention the Cuban’s are their biggest rival.

And Rogue...” Denali blows out a breath. “He certainly hasn’t forgotten what he sees

as our betrayal. ”

“He backed us into a corner,” I counter.

“Maybe so, but I guarantee that’s not how he sees it,” Pee Wee rumbles, his massive hands flexing on the table.

A knot of unease forms in my gut. The Renegade Bastards aren’t to be taken lying down, and Rogue has a particular talent for holding grudges.

When we were unorganized and un-backed, he probably didn’t see us as a threat.

Now that everything's coming together, that will quickly change.

Not to mention the Valenciaga Cartel will have their own ax to grind.

Fuck. Without even throwing the first stone we have some serious enemies to watch out for.

“I’ve already reached out to the other chapters,” Denali continues. “They know our situation and have assured me that an attack on us is an attack on all Saints. We’ve got the full weight of the Saints behind us now.”

Relief washes through me at his words. That’s the difference between where we are now and where we were nine months ago. We aren’t alone anymore. We have brothers scattered across the country who will ride to our aid if needed.

“Looks like things are finally turning around for us,” my father says, clapping me on the shoulder.

The words have barely left his mouth when the sound of gunfire shatters the moment.

Multiple shots ring out in rapid succession.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Even through the thick brick walls of the clubhouse, the sound of automatic weapons is unmistakable. We're under attack.

"Shit!" Beast yells as we all shove out of our chairs and crouch low beside the table.

"Fuck that noise," Yukon shouts, moving toward the door.

"Fuck it." Standing up, I pull my Glock from the holster and rush behind him out the door. At full speed, I run down the hallway into the common room, but Yukon is nowhere to be seen.

"Where is that crazy fucker?" Beast hurries around me to where the front door is standing wide open.

"I don't know." My heart is pounding. It's been a minute since someone opened fire on us.

"You hit?" Denali asks, moving towards the door behind Beast.

"No."

I follow them out in time to see Three black Escalades speeding away from the property. The tires squeal as they round the corner before finally disappearing from view.

"Prospects!" Denali bellows. "Shut those fucking gates!"

The two prospects who've been standing guard scramble to close the heavy steel gates, their faces pale with shock.

Titan comes running down the steps from the main entrance, tablet in hand. "I got it all on camera," he pants. "Clear shots of the vehicles and partial plates."

"Rogue sending a message?" Beast suggests, holstering his weapon now that the immediate threat has passed.

Denali arches a skeptical brow. "Driving Escalades?"

He has a point. Nobody from our old club owns anything that nice.

"Could be Valenciaga," Titan offers, scrolling through footage on his tablet.

I frown, considering the possibility. "Why this?" I wave my hand around. "Why not kick in the doors and take us out with their army?"

"Maybe it was a warning," my father suggests. "A reminder that they haven't forgotten about us."

"Maybe," Denali says slowly.

The implication hangs in the air. Valenciaga and the Cuban Cartel are rivals fighting for control of distribution routes across the Midwest. By aligning with the Saints, we've officially picked a side in a war that has been brewing for years.

A war that, up until now, had nothing to do with us.

"Great," I mutter. "First day here, and we've already got the fucking cartel taking potshots at us."

“Look at the bright side,” Beast says, slinging an arm around my shoulders. “At least we know who it was... sorta.”

I snort, shoving him off. “Yeah, that’s really comforting... sorta.”

“Get inside,” Denali orders before turning his attention to our tech man. “Titan, I want those plates run ASAP. See if you can get any clear shots of the shooters. The rest of you, stay alert. This might not be the last visit we get today.”

We file back into the clubhouse, the earlier celebratory mood extinguished. The attack has reinforced what we already know—we’ve made powerful enemies, but we’ve also made powerful allies.

As I step back into the main room, I catch my father watching me with an odd expression.

“What?” I ask, uncomfortable under his scrutiny.

He shakes his head slowly. “Nothing, mijó. Just thinking that life is about to get very interesting.”

Between our new alliance with the Saints, beef with the RBMC, and finding ourselves smack-dab in the middle of a cartel war, it’s more like things are about to get real fucking crazy.

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Demi

“Girl, I swear if one more person bumps into me, I’m going to lose my shit.” McKenna presses herself against the train’s metal pole as another commuter squeezes past us.

I bite back a smile at my best friend's dramatics. “It’s the morning rush, Kenny. What do you expect?”

She throws her arms up in frustration. “I don’t know. Some personal space?” She narrows her eyes at the man inching closer to where we’re standing.

His brows shoot up to his hairline.

“Don’t even think about it,” my bestie growls.

Holding his hands up in surrender, he slowly starts to back away.

Yeah, buddy. You’re barking up the wrong tree. My girl will chew you up and spit you out.

Kenny turns back to me and continues what she was saying like she didn’t just scare a grown man away. “You’d think people would have some decency to say ‘excuse me’ or ‘sorry’?”

I tilt my head from side to side. “True,” I concede. She has a point. It doesn’t cost anyone a thing to use some manners.

She nods her head as if saying, “Exactly.”

That’s my best friend for you. She’s a foul-mouthed ballbuster who doesn’t put up with anyone’s crap.

“This is us,” I say, steadying myself as the train starts to slow. “Ready?”

Kenny’s face lights up with a genuine smile. “Girl, I was born ready.”

Pushing our way through the crowd, we step out onto the platform at Meramec Community College. The sweltering July heat smacks us right in the face.

“Jesus. It feels like Satan’s armpit.” I fan my face with my hand. The humidity is so dang thick today.

“Can you believe we’re actually doing this?” McKenna links her arm through mine as we walk toward campus. “We survived four years of hell in that shitty high school, and now we’re finally here.”

“I won’t believe it until I’m sitting in an actual classroom.” I want to be excited, but I know better. Lady Luck has burned me too many times. Which is why I make it a point not to get my hopes up.

As much as I know better, a flutter of anticipation explodes in my belly as we approach campus.

As we stroll further onto campus there are students sprawled out on the grass in the quad, textbooks open beside them.

Others hurry between buildings on their way to their next classes.

That's exactly what I want—the freedom that comes with having an education, with having options.

I don't want to spend the rest of my life like my father.

Bumbling around from part-time job to part-time job.

Always owing someone, always looking over my shoulder.

No thanks.

“Look at them.” I keep my voice low as I nod toward a group of nursing students in scrubs that are crossing the quad. “That's going to be me in a couple years.”

“And I'll be on my way to becoming the badass lawyer who gets innocent people out of prison,” she replies, her voice taking on that edge it always does when she thinks about her brother.

Jaxon Lewis was sentenced to life for a murder he didn't commit when McKenna was just thirteen.

His public defender had been so overworked and underpaid that he'd repeatedly mixed up Jaxon's case with others, even calling him by the wrong name in court.

It's the reason McKenna has decided to become a lawyer—to make sure what happened to her brother never happens to anyone else.

“First things first,” I say as we approach the admissions building. “We need to figure out how much this is actually going to cost us.”

McKenna grimaces. “Way to kill the vibe, Dems.”

“Just being a realist, babe.” I shrug. “We both need to find better jobs this summer if we want to make this happen.”

Kenny’s brows snap together. “I thought you were still at Mel’s?”

“I am, but the tips have been really crappy lately. I’m barely covering rent and groceries, let alone saving anything.

” I don’t mention that half my paycheck goes to bailing my dad out of whatever mess he’s gotten himself into at the time.

Not that I really need to, though. McKenna knows all about my dad and his string of get-rich-quick schemes. They never pan out.

McKenna pushes open the door to the admissions office. “Well, I’m definitely looking for something that pays better. Folding clothes at the mall isn’t going to fund my law school dreams.”

The blast of air conditioning hits us as we step inside, and a chill skates down my spine.

“Hi, we’re here to get information about enrolling for fall semester,” I tell the woman at the front desk.

She smiles and hands us each a packet. “The advisors can see you in about fifteen minutes. Have a seat and fill these out while you wait.”

I hand one of the packets to Kenny and walk over to the row of chairs pushed up against the far wall. My stomach twists as I flip through the information.

“Holy shit,” McKenna whispers. “This is a lot of money.”

I swallow hard. “It’s an investment in our future, right?”

But as I scan over the numbers, all I can think is How the hell am I going to make this work?

An hour later, we stumble out of the admissions office, both of us shell-shocked.

“Four thousand dollars,” McKenna says for the tenth time. “Four thousand fucking dollars for one semester. And that’s just tuition and books.”

I nod numbly. “At least there’s financial aid. If we both get those federal grants?”

“Big if,” she cuts in. “And even then, it probably won’t cover everything.”

We make our way back to the light rail station in silence, the excitement from earlier has evaporated. As we wait for the train, I mentally calculate how many extra shifts I’ll need to pick up at Mel’s to save enough by September.

“Maybe we should rob a bank,” McKenna suggests as we board the southbound train.

I snort. “Yeah, that’ll look great on our college applications. ‘Extracurricular activities: armed robbery.’”

“I’m just saying, there’s gotta be a faster way to make money than serving greasy burgers and double shifts at the mall.”

The train lurches forward, and I grab a handrail to steady myself. “If you figure it out, let me know.”

We fall into easier conversation as the train carries us away from campus and back toward our neighborhood. McKenna launches into the latest drama with her ex-

boyfriend, and I'm grateful for the distraction.

"I swear, he's texted me like fifty times since yesterday," she says, rolling her eyes. "Like, you cheat on me with my cousin and think I'm going to give you another chance? Please."

"Men are trash," I agree automatically, though I don't have much experience to base that on. Between school, work, and dealing with my dad, I haven't exactly had time for dating.

"Not all men," McKenna counters with a smirk. "Have you seen the new bartender at O'Malley's? Absolute snack."

I laugh. "You need higher standards than 'has a pulse and looks good in jeans.'"

"Hey, my standards are sky-high. He also has tattoos and can make a mean mojito."

I shake my head. One day she's going to get busted using that fake ID and end up in a world of trouble.

The train slows as we approach our stop. Home sweet home.

"You working tonight?" McKenna asks as we step onto the platform.

I nod. "Four to midnight. You?"

"Nah, I'm off. There's a party at Jessie's I want to hit up." She pauses, eyeing me. "You should come after your shift."

"Can't. I've got an early shift tomorrow." The lie slips out easily. The truth is, I can't afford to go out, not with rent due in a week.

As we round the corner onto our street, a shiny black Escalade catches my attention.

“Whose ride is that?” I ask, nodding toward an expensive looking SUV.

McKenna shrugs. “Probably some dealer’s.”

“Yeah. Probably,” I murmur, quickening my pace slightly.

We climb the concrete stairs to our building, the stairwell reeking of weed. Between the third and fourth floor, we pass two men in expensive suits coming down. They are so out of place in our run down building that McKenna and I exchange wide-eyed glances.

The tall man with slicked-back hair and a tattoo of a V on his neck looks us up and down, making the hair on my neck stand on end. I keep my eyes down until they pass, then shoot McKenna a what-the-fuck look.

She shrugs again, but her expression is tight. “Creeps.”

When we reach my floor, I give her a quick hug. “Text me later?”

“Always do.” She squeezes me back, then continues up the stairs to her apartment on the next floor.

I walk down the dingy hallway to 4C, fishing my keys from my backpack. I jiggle the key in the lock and shove the door open.

“Dad? I’m home,” I call, dropping my bag by the door.

No response. I pull my phone from my pocket and glance at the time. It’s almost one. It wouldn’t surprise me if he’s still asleep.

Must be nice.

I step further into our tiny apartment and freeze. The coffee table is overturned, and magazines and empty beer cans are scattered across the floor.

“Dad?” I say louder. “Are you—” The words die on my lips. Crumpled on the floor behind the couch is my father.

“Dad!” I rush over, dropping to my knees. “Oh my God, Dad, wake up!”

My hands hover over his body. I don’t know where to touch him or even if I should. His face is black and blue, one eye almost swollen shut.

“Dad, please.” My voice cracks as I gently shake his shoulder. “Wake up.”

His one good eye flutters open, unfocused and bloodshot.

“Demi?” He rasps.

“I’m here, I’m here. What happened? Who did this to you?” The questions tumble out as I continue to scan his person for injuries. Someone has really worked him over.

“Frankie’s guys,” he slurs, and I can smell the whiskey on his breath. “I owe... I owe him money.”

My stomach drops at the mention of Frankie Fish. “How much?”

“Ten grand.” He coughs, wincing. “Plus interest.”

“Ten—“ I can’t even finish the sentence. Ten thousand dollars? It might as well be ten million. “Jesus, Dad. How? Why?”

“It was a sure thing,” he mumbles.

“No, dad. No.” I cover my face with my hands. This is the same song and dance. It’s always a sure thing. A once in a lifetime opportunity. The same bullshit he’s been feeding me since I was old enough to understand that my dad has a gambling problem.

“They’re gonna kill me, Dem.” His good eye widens with panic, his hand suddenly gripping my wrist too tight. “They said they’d be back. Said this was just a warning.”

A chill runs through me when I realize who he’s talking about. The SUV, the men in the stairwell—they’re Frankie’s guys.

“We need to call the police,” I say, reaching for my phone.

“No!” His grip tightens painfully. “No cops. Frankie’s got people in the department. They’ll know. They’ll come for both of us.”

I don’t know if that’s true or just another of his paranoid delusions, but I can’t take the risk.

“Then what are you going to do?” I ask, frustration bleeding into my voice. “You can’t just magic up ten thousand dollars!”

“The money you’ve been saving,” he says, his voice dropping to a whisper. “We could use that to pay them off.”

For a moment, I can’t speak. He wants me to give him all the money I have. The money that I’ve been saving for school, for my future. “No,” I say firmly. “That’s not an option.”

“Please, Demi.” Tears well in his good eye. “I’m begging you. They’re going to kill me.”

“There has to be another way.” I stand up, needing distance. “We can... I don’t know, work something out with Frankie. A payment plan or something.”

He laughs, a bitter, broken sound that dissolves into another coughing fit. “You think these men work like a fucking credit card company? These people don’t do payment plans.”

“Then what do you expect me to do?” I shout, tears stinging my eyes. “I have two thousand dollars saved. That’s it. That’s all I have in the world.”

“It’s a start,” he says, desperation making his voice crack. “Maybe if we give them that, they’ll give me more time to get the rest.”

I stare at him, this broken man who is supposed to protect me, not the other way around. All my life, I’ve been picking up his pieces, cleaning up his messes, sacrificing my own needs to meet his. And now he wants the one thing I’ve managed to keep for myself.

“I can’t,” I whisper, shaking my head. “Dad, I can’t.”

His face crumples. “Then I’m dead. My own daughter would rather see me dead than help me.”

The unfairness of it hits me like a physical blow. “That’s not?—“

“Just go,” he interrupts, rolling away from me. “Forget about your old man. I’ll figure it out myself.”

I stand there, torn between mad as hell that he's gotten himself in another situation that he can't get out of and guilt that I don't have a way to get him out.

I watch as he pulls the bottle of whiskey that is laying on the floor to him.

With shaking hands, he unscrews the cap and takes a long swallow.

My hands ball into fists. "Seriously? That's where you think the answer is?"

He doesn't bother to reply.

Not that I expect him to. This is his MO. When the going gets tough, Bobby Cross gives up.

"I'll figure something out." Though I have no idea what the hell I can do.

I walk to my bedroom, closing the door behind me.

Sinking onto my bed, I bury my face in my hands and allow myself thirty seconds of pure panic. Ten thousand dollars. It feels like an impossible task.

But I can't let him die. For all his faults, all his failures, he's still my dad. Still the man who taught me to ride a bicycle, who held me when mom died, and in his rare sober moments can make me laugh like no one else can.

I pull out my phone and open my banking app.

\$2,126.47.

It's every cent I have to my name. But it isn't enough. I need more money, fast.

The tips I make at Mel's Diner aren't going to cut it. Even if I work double shifts every day, I'll never make enough in time.

I run through all the things I own that might be worth some money. There's my laptop. It's the one I'd gotten in the ninth grade but it still works. I could try to sell my phone and the gold locket that had been my mother's.

"Shit." Even if I sell everything I own it won't come close to ten grand.

Dad has really screwed the pooch this time.

As I flop back on my bed and stare up at the ceiling, Kenny's words from earlier run through my mind.

I have to find a way to make some quick cash that doesn't involve robbing a bank.

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Demi

I pound on McKenna's door for the third time. "Kenny!" I call, leaning closer. "Come on, I know you're in there!"

I glance over my shoulder as the lock finally clicks. I swing my head back around as the door swings open to reveal my best friend looking like she's been hit by a truck.

My brows shoot at. "Uhh, rough night?" Her usually perfect pitch black hair is standing up all over the place and under her eyes is smudged with a ring of dark mascara, making her look like a raccoon.

She squints as she flips me the bird.

"Do you have any idea what time it is?" she croaks.

I do, but I'm pretty sure her question is rhetorical.

"I need your help," I say instead.

With those four words, Kenny blinks rapidly, her focus instantly sharpening as she peeks around the door frame like she's expecting trouble to be standing right behind me.

"Get in here." She motions for me to come inside.

I do and wait for her to throw the deadbolt.

The lock clicks in place and she attempts to run a hand through her hair. “Shit,” she mutters when her hand gets stuck. “You’re gonna have to give me a minute to get my life together,” she says as she turns for the kitchen. “I can tell I’m going to need coffee for this.”

More like a bottle of Jack.

I leave that part unsaid as I follow her through the cramped living room and into the kitchen.

“So,” I start dropping into one of the mismatched chairs at her secondhand table.

“Aht—” McKenna holds up a hand silencing me as she pops a K-cup into the coffee maker and pushes the button.

I roll my eyes, although I should know better than to attempt a conversation with my bestie before she’s had her coffee.

In seconds, the kitchen fills with the rich aroma of coffee.

“Here.” She hands me the first cup.

I doctor it with two spoonfuls of sugar and a splash of milk then take a sip. My eyes close. God that’s really good. So maybe she wasn’t wrong about us needing coffee for this.

Kenny moves back to the Keurig, pops in another K-cup and hits the button again. Once the cup is filled, she grabs it and moves back over to the table and drops into the chair across from me.

“Okay.” She wraps her hands around her mug, takes a long sip, then her eyes lock

onto mine. “Whose body are we hiding?”

Despite everything, my lips turn up into a big smile.

Kenny has been my ride-or-die since the fifth grade when she punched Tiffany Hawkins for calling me trash after finding out where I lived. We’ve been inseparable ever since.

“It’s my dad,” I say, the smile on my face fading. “I found him on the floor yesterday when I got home. He was beaten to a pulp.”

Her brows shoot up. “Holy shit, Dems. Is he okay?”

I laugh bitterly thinking about the guilt he laid on me last night. What kind of father puts his screw ups on his daughter’s shoulders? “Define ‘okay.’ He’s alive, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“What happened?”

I blow out a breath. “He owes Frankie Fish ten G’s.”

“Ten thousand dollars?” McKenna’s voice rises. “What the actual fuck?”

“Yep.” I stare into my coffee. “Apparently he borrowed it to make a bet on ‘a sure thing.’”

“Nooooo,” she groans. “He can’t seriously be that stupid. Can he?”

I nod. “Those suits we saw in the stairwell yesterday? I’m pretty sure that was them. According to my dad, they said they’d be back in two weeks for the money. If he doesn’t have it...” I can’t finish the sentence.

“So what’s the plan? Because I’m guessing he doesn’t have ten grand lying around.”

I scoff. “Bobby Cross have money? Now that would be funny if the shit hadn’t just hit the fan.” Sighing heavily, I continue, “I worked a double at Mel’s last night. All I made was forty bucks.”

“Ouch.” Kenny winces.

I laugh, but there’s not a trace of humor in it. “Right? At this rate, it’ll take me six months to come up with the money.”

“By which time your dad will be somewhere at the bottom of the Mississippi,” Kenny says absentmindedly.

I jerk back in my chair.

“Shit, I’m sorry, Dems. I wasn’t thinking.” She reaches across the table and places her hand over mine. “You’re my best friend in the whole world and you know I love you.”

“But...?” I can hear it in her tone that one is on the tip of her tongue.

Her face softens. “But, Bobby is a grown ass man. His problems are his own. It’s bullshit how he always expects you to come in and clean them up.”

“It’s not like that?—”

“Yes. It is, sweetie. When are you going to stop setting yourself on fire to keep him warm?”

I turn my head and stare at the alphabet magnets on the fridge. “I know, but he’s my

dad.” Before I can stop it, a tear slips down my cheek. “He’s the only family I have left.”

Kenny squeezes my hand.

When I turn back to look at her, I can see the wheels in her head are spinning. Suddenly her eyes pop open. “I think I might have an idea.”

Hope fills my chest. “Okay.”

“I may know of a place,” she drags out the words before adding, “but you’re not going to like it.”

My brows jump. “At this point, beggars can’t exactly be choosers.”

“You say that now,” she mumbles, head cocked to the side.

“McKenna!” I insist, waving my hands for her to get on with it. “Spit it out. Please!”

She holds up her hands for me to chill. “Okay, okay. So you know I went to that party last night.”

I nod, wondering what that has to do with me needing to rob, but I stay quiet. “I overheard some girls talking about how they used to be ring girls at this underground fight club.”

My nose wrinkles before I can stop it. “A ring girl? Like a boxing ring?”

“MMA, I think. But yeah, same idea. They said they made bank, Dems. All they had to do was parade around in a bikini holding up round cards.” Kenny shrugs like walking around in a bikini, in an underground fight club is not a big deal. My gaze

drops to my barely-there B cups and I frown.

“Oh stop it!” she scolds. “Money—your dad, remember?”

“You’re right.” I wave my hand at her to go on. “Keep going.”

“So,” she leans forward again. “They said she made like five hundred bucks a night, sometimes more.”

Okay. Now she has my full attention. “Did you say five hundred dollars a night? That’s...” I do some quick math in my head. “I could have the money in less than a month.”

“Right?” Kenny pauses, biting her lip. “But there’s a little catch.”

I groan. I knew there had to be more to it. “Of course there is.” I sigh. “Hit me with it.”

“The Underground Arena is run by bikers.”

My heart drops into the pit of my stomach. “Bikers? I don’t know, Kenny...”

“I get it,” she says quickly. “It’s sketchy as hell. But they’re looking for waitresses too, not just ring girls. And from what those girls said, the tips are insane.”

I chew my bottom lip, weighing my options. Which, if I’m being honest, are nonexistent. I either find a way to get the money fast, or my dad is dead. It’s as simple and as terrible as that.

“Where is this place?” I ask finally.

Kenny forces a smile. "It's in the warehouse district."

"What is this place?" I raise my eyebrow at McKenna. We're standing in front of what looks like an abandoned warehouse.

McKenna grins. "This is The Underground Arena."

I look from one end of the building to the other, taking in the boarded-up windows and brick walls sprayed over with graffiti. According to the sign half-hanging off the building, this place was once Thurman's bottling factory. "This is it?"

"It's in the basement," McKenna clarifies, noticing my confusion.

"Of course it is," I mutter. "Because that's not creepy as hell at all."

She laughs, linking her arm through mine and pulling me toward a side entrance. "Come on, scaredy-cat. Fortune favors the brave."

"I'm pretty sure fortune favors those who don't get murdered in abandoned warehouses," I counter, but I let her lead me inside anyway.

The interior is dimly lit, with exposed pipes running along the ceiling and concrete floors that echo with our footsteps. Despite its rundown appearance from the outside, someone has clearly been maintaining the inside. There's no dust, no debris, just the faint smell of cleaning products.

We move down a narrow hallway until we reach a large freight elevator guarded by a man in a leather vest. The patch on his chest declares him PROSPECT . He looks awfully young to be part of a biker gang, but what do I know?

“You girls lost?” he asks, eyeing us up and down like we’re something he wants to eat.

I cringe as McKenna's eyes narrow to slits.

Oh boy. Here we go.

“Girls? Girls?” McKenna growls, her hands curling into fists at her sides.

This guy has no idea the can of worms he just opened. Fortunately for him, I can’t let my friend blow a gasket right now.

“Uh, we need to talk to whoever’s in charge,” I say quickly, hoping to prevent his murder.

The man looks us over again, his gaze lingering a beat too long on Kenny’s chest before he pulls out his phone. He presses a few buttons, then holds it to his ear.

“Yeah, boss. Got two girls here that say they need to talk to you.”

Kenny narrows her eyes at him, but he seems completely unfazed by her death glare. Then again, he’s part of an outlaw biker gang. He’s probably stared down worse than a hundred-pound brunette with a blazing temper.

He nods as if getting instructions from whoever is on the other end of the call. “Yeah. Yeah. Got it.”

The prospect then tucks his phone back in his pocket. “Go on down. Pee Wee’s sitting at the bar.”

He grabs the rolling metal door of the elevator and pushes it up with a loud, grating

sound that makes me wince.

“Thanks,” I mumble as I usher McKenna inside.

The prospect pulls the door back down, and we’re locked in. I press the down arrow, and the elevator lurches into motion with a concerning creak.

“Pee Wee?” McKenna giggles, her anger at the Prospect apparently forgotten. “What kind of badass biker is named Pee Wee?”

I turn to her with wide eyes. “I don’t know but you can’t make fun of this man to his face. I need this job.”

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McKenna holds up her hands in surrender. “Okay, okay. Scouts’ honor. I’ll be a good girl . I promise”

I snort. “You don’t know the first thing about Scouts and you just called yourself a girl.”

She rolls her eyes. “Yeah, yeah.”

The elevator comes to a jerky stop, and the rolling door is yanked open from the other side. Standing there is another huge biker with a PROSPECT patch on his vest. This one is older, with a thick beard and tattoos covering every visible inch of skin.

“Uhm, we’re looking for Pee Wee?”

The guy eyes us up and down, then points to his left without a word.

We step off the elevator, and my eyebrows shoot up in surprise. “Holy shit.” I expected this place to have a makeshift ring in a dank basement, but we’ve stepped into what looks like a high-end nightclub with a big shiny cage in the center of the room.

Tiered seating that probably holds a few hundred people surrounds the metal octagon.

To the left, a long bar runs the length of the wall, backlit with blue and purple neons.

The rest of the space is filled with tables and private booths upholstered in dark leather.

Everything screams money—from the polished floors to the multiple flat-screen TVs mounted around the room.

A huge man sitting on a stool at the bar waves us over without even looking up. His massive shoulders strain against the leather of his vest, and even sitting down, I can tell he's well over six feet tall.

"Holy shit, he's huge," McKenna whispers as we approach. "He doesn't look like a Pee Wee to me."

I shoot her a wide-eyed look, silently begging her to keep her mouth shut.

"Right. Sorry," she whispers, but I can see the mischief dancing in her eyes.

As we come to stand beside him, I take in the amber liquid in the glass in front of him, the cigarette burning in an ashtray, and the papers scattered across the bar top.

"What can I do for you?" he asks, his voice raspy like he smokes two packs a day. He still hasn't bothered to look at us.

"We're looking for a job, Pee Wee."

My eyes close slowly as I fight not to laugh. My best friend just can't help herself.

Pee Wee starts to turn around on his stool, and his eyes shoot open wide when they lock onto McKenna. I'm not surprised. My best friend is gorgeous with her perfect bone structure and flowing dark hair.

"A job, huh?" His gaze sweeps over Kenny appreciatively before turning to me.

I step forward. "Please."

He looks me over with zero interest, his expression neutral. “I could use another waitress,” he says, pointing at me. “And an assistant.” He points at McKenna.

“Great! When do we start?” Kenny asks quickly, before the big guy can change his mind.

“You,” he points to me, “be back here tomorrow night at eight.” He turns to McKenna. “And you, be here tomorrow morning. Nine AM sharp.”

“See ya then, big guy.” To what I know will be her later horror, Kenny lifts both hands and makes finger guns at him. I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

Pee Wee lips turn up, and I have to admit, the man is sexy as hell when he smiles. His entire face transforms, the hardness giving way to something almost boyish.

I glance over at Kenny who has a dreamy look on her face.

Oh good lord.

“We’ll be here,” I say quickly, linking my arm through Kenny’s and dragging her towards the exit. Lord knows I need to get us out of here before she does something crazy, like take off her clothes and jump on the man’s lap.

“What are you doing?” I whisper-hiss once we’re out of earshot.

“I don’t know!” she whispers back frantically. “Did I seriously do finger guns?”

I giggle despite myself. “You totally did.”

We reach the elevator, and the prospect presses the button to call it down. Kenny and

I wait as the car descends, listening to the cables groan and metal scrape against metal.

“This thing does not sound safe,” I say more to myself than to her.

“I’m sure it’s fine.”

The rolling door begins to lift, slowly revealing a pair of scuffed black boots, then dark jeans, then a leather vest over a tight black t-shirt that’s stretched over a broad chest.

Nice.

And then I see his face.

My whole world stops spinning when my eyes lock onto his caramel-colored ones that seem to burn right through me.

He’s tall—at least six-foot-two—with broad shoulders and arms covered in intricate tattoos that disappear beneath his shirt.

His black hair is cut short on the sides but longer on top, and dark scruff frames full lips that are set in a hard line.

His eyes sweep down my body slowly before returning to meet mine, narrowing slightly as if he’s trying to place me. I take a tiny step back, my heart hammering in my chest.

What the hell is that?

He walks past us, getting off the elevator, and McKenna drags me inside. When I turn

around he's still staring at me with an intensity that makes the hair on my arms stand up. And just as quickly, our connection is broken when the rolling door is pulled down between us.

“What the fuck was that?” McKenna asks, her eyes wide.

I swallow hard, my pulse still racing. “I have no idea.”

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Klutch

“Jesus,” Beast grumbles as his arms strain against the weight of the freight elevator’s door. For over a year the damn thing has been a pain in the ass to lift. “We really need to get this piece of shit fixed.”

I grunt in agreement as he shoves the door upward.

When it finally rolls all the way up the track, my entire world shifts off its axis.

There, standing not two feet away, is the sexiest woman I’ve ever laid eyes on.

My mouth goes bone dry as I take her in.

She’s tall, maybe five-ten, with long dark hair, and her face— Jesus Christ .

Cornflower blue eyes. I’ve never seen anything like them.

My eyes continue to rake across her gorgeous face.

She’s got high cheekbones, and plump pink lips that make her look like a fucking movie star.

I swallow the lump in my throat. This woman is the kind of beauty that doesn’t need to do a single thing to be noticed.

And I fucking notice.

Every inch of her.

From the thick mane of dark hair on her head to the worn pink Converse on her dainty feet. She's dressed simply in jeans that hug her hips and a plain white V-neck tee that is showcasing her perfect tits. They're on the smaller side, but I have no doubt they'd fit perfectly in my hands.

The thought makes my cock twitch.

Beast clears his throat loudly, pulling me from my thoughts.

I step off the elevator, but no matter how hard I try, I can't tear my eyes away from her.

I watch as she and her friend, a hot little number in her own right, but not holding a candle to the blue-eyed goddess, squeeze past us onto the elevator.

My eyes narrow and my fist clench at my sides as they step onto the car. It's irrational and crazy but every muscle in my body is screaming for me to reach out and grab her. To stop her from leaving. To keep her close.

Jesus Christ. I don't even know this woman, but the thought of her walking out of my life makes me want to kill a motherfucker.

Before I can say a word to keep her from leaving, the rolling door is pulled down between us and the connection is lost.

Just like that, she's gone.

"Fuck me," Beast exhales beside me. "Did you see those hot little bitches? Goddamn." He bites his fist.

An actual fucking growl rumbles from my chest that surprises even me.

Beast's eyebrows shoot up to his hairline as my own eyes widen.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

We stare at each other for a long minute before finally Beast throws his head back and bellows out a laugh. "Holy shit! You look like you want to take my fucking head off."

"Fuck, dude." I sigh, dragging a hand along the scruff on my jaw.

"What's so funny?" Pee Wee's gravelly voice carries from the bar.

We make our way over to where our VP is camped out on a barstool with a couple stacks of papers scattered across the bar top in front of him. He raises a questioning eyebrow at Beast, who's still grinning like an idiot.

"Two fine-ass women just got on the elevator," Beast explains, jerking a thumb over his shoulder. "And my boy here damn near took my head off for looking at the one that looked like Megan Fox."

"Fuck off," I mutter, dropping onto an empty stool.

Pee Wee's eyes narrow. "The tall one with the black hair and attitude?"

Beast shrugs. "Don't know about the attitude but yeah."

"She's off limits," Pee Wee growls, suddenly looking very much like the deadly enforcer he used to be before becoming VP.

Beast laughs even harder, slapping the bar top. “You too? Jesus. Both of you are pussy struck.”

“Watch your mouth,” Pee Wee warns.

I flip Beast off then turn to Pee Wee and ask, “What were they doing here?”

“Looking for jobs,” Pee Wee replies, taking a sip of his whiskey. “I hired them both.”

My heart kicks against my ribs. She’ll be working here. I’ll see her again. The thought excites me for all of 2.5 seconds before suddenly pissing me off.

I don’t do this kind of shit. I don’t get hung up on women. They’re a distraction, a temporary release, and nothing more.

“Who are they?” I press, keeping my voice neutral.

Pee Wee freezes, glass halfway to his lips. “Fuck. I didn’t even ask.” He starts laughing, a deep rumbling sound that shakes his massive frame.

Despite my flip-flopping mood, my lips turn up and I chuckle. “You hired two random women without getting their names?”

“What can I say?” Pee Wee shrugs, still chuckling. “I was...distracted.”

“Pussy struck,” Beast coughs into his fist, earning another glare from our VP.

“Fuck off,” I snap at Beast. “I just thought the bitch who looked like Megan Fox was hot. I ain’t pussy struck.”

“Sure, brother,” Beast smirks. “Whatever you say.”

“Knock it off, Beast,” Pee Wee interjects, mercifully changing the subject as he trains his eyes on me. “Your fight’s tomorrow night. Are you ready?”

I nod, grateful for the shift in focus. “I’m solid. Been training my ass off.”

“He has,” Beast confirms, all business now. “We’ve been putting in extra hours. His cardio is better than it’s ever been.”

“Good,” Pee Wee nods. “The purse for this one is big. Denali’s got a lot riding on it, especially with the new clubhouse expenses.”

“I won’t let the club down,” I promise, already feeling the surge of anticipation that comes before a fight.

“Never thought you would,” Pee Wee replies, clapping me on the shoulder. “You two better get to it, then.”

I slide off the stool, Beast following as we head toward the locker room. My mind drifts back to the woman on the elevator. I wonder when she starts, what her name is, how old she is?—

Fuck. This is exactly what I don’t need right now. A distraction.

The locker room is empty when we walk in, the smell of bleach and sweat hanging in the air. I strip off my cut and shirt, hanging them carefully in one of the lockers. My boots and jeans follow, and I pull on a pair of loose black shorts.

Beast grabs the athletic tape from his gym bag and motions for me to sit down.

“You seemed off back there,” he comments as he starts wrapping my hands, the tape pulled tight around my wrists and knuckles.

“I’m fine,” I reply, flexing my fingers as he works.

“If you say so.” He doesn’t sound convinced. “Just remember, no pussy is worth losing focus over. Not with this fight coming up.”

“Says the man who can’t keep his dick in his pants for more than a few hours,” I snort.

Beast grins, unashamed. “I fuck ‘em and forget ‘em. You looked like you wanted to put a leash on that bitch and take her home.”

“I just thought she was hot,” I insist, eyes narrowing. Jesus, fuck. He’s like a dog with a goddamn bone sometimes.

“Sure,” he nods, finishing up the tape job. “Ready?”

I flex my hands, testing the tape’s give. “Let’s do it.”

We exit the locker room, making our way through the hallway that leads back to the front of the arena. As we round the corner, I nearly collide with Smoke.

“Shit,” he mutters before quickly ending his phone call. “Didn’t see you there.”

My eyes narrow. This motherfucker is always lurking in the shadows and it’s starting to piss me off.

Call me paranoid, but there’s something about him that just isn’t fucking right.

I’ve brought it up to Diablo and Pee Wee on a couple of occasions and they tell me I’m being paranoid.

That it's all in my head. Maybe they're right, but I just don't trust him.

"Everything good?" I ask, noting the way he tucks his phone away.

"Yeah, yeah," Smoke nods, forcing a grin. "Just handling some personal shit."

Beast watches us closely. He hasn't said shit, but I think he's noticed Smoke's odd behavior lately too.

I give Smoke a chin lift, deciding to file this away for later. "We're about to spar. You want in?"

"Nah, I'm good," he replies, already edging past us. "Got some errands to run for Denali."

"Suit yourself," Beast shrugs as Smoke disappears down the hallway.

"That dude's always been sketchy," Beast mutters once Smoke is out of earshot.

"Yeah," I agree, still staring after him. "It's weird right?"

Beast nods, and we continue toward the octagon.

The cage looms in the center of the room. It's empty now, but come fight night, it'll be surrounded by hundreds of bloodthirsty spectators.

I duck through the gate, rolling my shoulders as I step onto the canvas. My body automatically falls into a fighting stance—weight balanced, hands up, chin tucked. This cage is my domain. I run shit in here.

Beast circles around me, his own hands raised. "Ready to get your ass handed to

you?”

“In your dreams, fat boy,” I taunt, bouncing lightly on the balls of my feet.

We start slow, feeling each other out with jabs and light kicks. Beast has the weight advantage, but I’m faster. It’s a dance we’ve done hundreds of times.

“So,” Beast says, throwing a lazy hook that I easily slip under, “she starts tomorrow, huh?”

“Who?” I play dumb, even as an image of her vivid blue eyes flashes through my mind.

“Don’t bullshit me,” Beast laughs, blocking my counter jab. “The hottie who had you drooling all over the floor.”

“I wasn’t drooling,” I grunt, landing a solid body shot that makes him wince.

“Whatever you say, Casanova.” Beast raises an eyebrow, circling left. “We both know you want her.”

I feint a right cross and come in with a left hook that grazes his chin. “You’re seeing things.”

“Oh?” Beast questions, launching into a combination that forces me back against the cage. “So I can make a move?”

“Fuck off,” I growl, ducking under his arm and spinning away from the fence.

“That’s what I thought,” he taunts, grinning as he follows.

I answer with a quick one-two that catches him clean, snapping his head back.
“Happy now?”

“There he is,” Beast laughs, wiping at his mouth. “Was wondering where killer Klutch went.”

We continue trading shots, neither of us going full force but pushing each other enough to get a good sweat going. My mind keeps drifting back to those blue eyes, wondering what her name is, what her story is. Is she from around here? Does she have a boyfriend?

“You’re dropping your right again,” Beast points out, landing a light jab to my cheek to prove his point.

“Fuck,” I mutter, resetting my stance.

“Get your head in the game,” Beast warns. “You fight like this in tomorrow night, and you’ll get your ass handed to you.”

He’s right, and I know it. I can’t afford to be distracted, not with so much riding on this fight. The club needs the money, and I need the win to maintain my reputation. The Underground’s reputation.

I take a deep breath, pushing all thoughts of the mystery woman from my mind.

Focus. That’s what I need right now.

“Again,” I say, hands up, chin tucked.

Beast nods, and we go again.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:58 am

Demi

“Come on, Dad. Pick up the phone.” I pace the length of my bedroom with my phone pressed to my ear, but he doesn’t answer.

This is the sixth time I’ve tried calling him today, and it’s going straight to voicemail again.

He’s been like a ghost in the wind since I found him in a heap on our living room floor two days ago.

When the phone beeps and his voicemail clicks on, I end the call with a frustrated sigh.

This is getting ridiculous.

I toss my iPhone onto the bed and stare into my closet like it’s going to magically spit out something I can wear tonight.

I swipe hangers across the rod but nothing is screaming ‘I’m the one.

” I rub at the side of my cheek. What the heck does one wear to a job at an illegal fight club, anyway?

Is there a dress code? I should have asked when McKenna and I were there yesterday.

Suddenly my ringtone is piercing the room and I whip my head around to my phone

laying on my bed. Dad. I dive across the bed and snatch up the device. When I get a peek at the caller ID my hopes are dashed. It's not him.

"Hey, Kenny," I answer sullenly.

"Well don't sound so excited to talk to me." She laughs.

"No, no. I'm glad to hear from you. I was just sorta hoping to hear from my dad is all," I tell her honestly as I tuck the phone between my ear and shoulder and go back to rifling through my closet.

"Still no word?"

I sigh. "No. But honestly it doesn't even surprise me anymore when he vanishes."

"Well maybe this will make you feel better." I hear the sound of a door closing and then she continues saying, "Girl, you are not going to believe this place."

"Is it bad?" I ask, wondering if I've bitten off more than I can chew.

"Hell no. This place is rad."

I snort. Rad. My bestie has the strangest vocabulary.

"And Pee Wee is even hotter in the daylight. I mean, Holy shit! The man is built like a fucking tank. Like, his biceps are bigger than my head."

I can't help but laugh at the awe in her voice. "Easy there, tiger. Isn't he a little old for you?"

"Age is just a number, Demi," she scoffs. "And all his assets are impressive, if you

catch my drift.”

“Gross.” I cringe, even as I’m still smiling. “Please tell me you haven’t slept with him already.”

“Not yet,” she says with a dramatic sigh. “But a girl can dream. Anyway, I’m taking a quick break because Mr. Hot Sexy Biker VP Bossman is on a call, and I’m bored out of my mind.”

“Bored? What have you been doing all day?”

“That’s the thing. I’ve hardly done anything all day. I’ve basically been his glorified shadow all day. He sat me in a chair next to his desk and had me watch him do paperwork. Oh, and I got him a Coke when he asked. And he did take me to lunch. But that’s literally it.”

I raise an eyebrow even though she can’t see it. “And he’s paying you for this?”

“Two hundred bucks a day to sit and look pretty. Can you believe it? At this rate, I’ll have my tuition in no time.”

“That’s awesome, Kenny,” I admit, pulling a faded pair of jeans from my closet and tossing them onto the bed.

“Right? I’ll fetch Coca-Cola for the sexiest man alive. Sign me up for that gig all day long.”

I snort, surveying the sad collection of tops I’ve laid out. Nothing seems right. “Speaking of the gigs, I have no idea what to wear tonight.”

“Oh! Wear that black dress I got you last year. You know the one. It’s still got the

tags on it.”

I groan, knowing exactly which dress she’s talking about. “Kenny, that thing barely covers my ass.”

“That’s the point! Listen, you want tips, right? Well, all these horny bikers aren’t going to be tipping you for your sparkling personality.”

“Thanks,” I mutter dryly.

“You know what I mean. Just wear the dress. Trust me.”

I walk to the far corner of my closet and pull out the LBD—little black dress. I wasn’t really into dresses but my amiga had put her foot down last year, declaring every girl needed a black dress in her arsenal. Looking at the strapless, form-fitting black mini-dress, I frown.

“I don’t know, Kenny. It’s really short. Don’t you think it might be a bit much for serving drinks?”

“Demi,” she says, her voice suddenly serious. “You need to make ten grand in two weeks. I don’t even know if that’s possible but what I do know is you gotta pull out the big guns.”

“But—”

“Dems! Wear the damn dress.”

I stare at the tiny scrap of black fabric and sigh. She’s right. This isn’t the time for modesty. My dad needs me.

A deep, gruff voice booms in the background. “Yo! Bring your little ass back inside.”

“Oops, the boss beckons,” Kenny giggles. “I’ve got to go. See you tonight!”

She hangs up before I can respond, and I toss my phone back on the bed.

With a resigned sigh, I tear open the clear plastic and hold the dress up against me, frowning at my reflection in the mirror. It’s everything I hate—too short, too tight, too... everything. But Kenny’s right. I need the money, and if this helps, so be it.

I slip the dress over my head and shimmy it down over my hips. The fabric clings to my body like a glove.

Glancing down I groan at the hem. It barely reaches the middle of my thighs. I turn sideways and grimace at my reflection. This is so not me. I don’t wear skimpy dresses.

Then again, I’m not the girl who takes a job at an underground fight club either, yet here I am.

I blow out a heavy breath. “Fake it until you make it.”

It’s two hours later when I finally step off the city bus and wonder, not for the first time, if I’ve bitten off more than I can chew.

I tug on the hem of my dress for the hundredth time as I survey the area.

Why in the hell did I listen to McKenna?

This dress is way too short for me. My eyes fall to the purple Converse on my feet and I almost laugh.

Not only do I hate wearing dresses, I'm not a girl who can walk in heels either.

I start down the block when the sound of motorcycles coming my way has me glancing over my shoulder. Two bikes are roaring up the road behind me, their headlights glowing in the dusk.

My heart picks up speed when one of the riders slows as the other accelerates past me. Suddenly the rider pulls onto the sidewalk right in front of me, blocking my path.

"What the—" the words die on my lips when the rider lifts his head. Intense caramel eyes lock onto mine and my breath catches.

He drags his gaze slowly down my body, taking in every inch of the dress Kenny convinced me to wear. A muscle in his jaw ticks, and his eyes narrow.

"What's your name?" he growls, his voice deep and smokey.

I blink slow, thrown by his hostile tone. "D-Demi," I stutter, immediately hating myself for sounding like a chump. I clear my throat and try again. "Demi Cross."

His eyes continue to bore into mine, and I notice the patch on his cut. SAA. I'm just about to ask what it means when he speaks again.

"You can't fucking wear that in there, Demi." He nods toward the direction of The Underground.

I glance down at my dress and purple Converse, a knot forming in my stomach. He's not telling me something I haven't been telling myself, but for some reason him saying it stings.

Before I can brush it off, the temper I inherited from my mother makes an

appearance. “You know what? Fuck you.”

His eyes widen, clearly not expecting that response.

“So what if my boobs are too small and my ass is too big. And... and this stupid dress is too short.” I plant my hands on my hips and lean forward. “This was all I had to wear.” I catch his lips twitching and narrow my eyes. “You insult me and now you want to laugh?” I can hear the fury in my voice.

His mouth curves into a full-on megawatt smile that transforms his entire face. “Wow,” I breathe, then quickly shake my head. The man insults me and smiles about it and I start to swoon like a schoolgirl. Pathetic.

“Your tits are perfect and so is your ass,” he says, his voice much less judgmental now. “But that—“ he points at my dress “—is going to get you a lot of unwanted attention, Demi. You’re a sexy little thing about to walk into the lions’ den.”

I open my mouth then close it. Did he just say my boobs were perfect? I shake my head, trying to clear it. “I don’t have time for this.”

He sobers immediately, muttering something about crazy women trying to get him locked up, but I have no idea what he’s talking about.

I move around him and his bike, and continue walking. A second later I hear his bike start and then he’s zooming past me.

This is already shaping up to be a weird freaking night. In for a penny, in for a pound, or however the saying goes.

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Demi

When I finally reach The Underground, I'm surprised to see the biker standing by the freight elevator. As I approach, I hear the man he's talking to call him Klutch.

So that's his name.

"Demi." His eyes stalk me as I approach the entrance.

I lift my chin, refusing to be intimidated. "Klutch."

His lips twitch again, that almost-smile threatening to break through his stoic expression.

Klutch says something else to what I now realize is the prospect from yesterday before stepping up beside me as I wait for the elevator and placing his hand at the small of my back.

The touch sends a jolt of electricity up my spine and I bite back the moan that's threatening to spill from my lips.

It's then I notice the group of men who'd been openly staring at me quickly avert their eyes when they notice Klutch's hand on me.

Did he just... oh no he didn't just try and mark me like I'm some kind of territory he owns.

I'm about to tell him off for pulling some caveman BS when a thought stops me in my tracks. Maybe having his protection in a place like this might not be such a bad thing, especially given the short dress I stupidly wore tonight. I mentally weigh the options and decide to let it slide. For now.

The elevator door is yanked open, and we step inside with a crowd of other people. The space is cramped, forcing me closer to Klutch and his scent wraps around me. I breathe it in and hum.

Damn he smells good. Like Giovanni Armani and a hint of Irish Spring. It's clean, rich, intoxicating. And I find myself leaning deeper into him before I can stop myself.

When the doors open again, I'm momentarily stunned by the transformation of The Underground Arena.

What was a relatively empty space yesterday is now packed with people.

Music pounds through massive speakers, the bass so heavy I can feel it in my chest. The cage in the center is now lit with bright spotlights, and nearly every seat around it is filled.

Klutch gives my hip a squeeze. I glance up at him and he nods for me to step out.

Oh. Right. Stepping out of the elevator, I feel his hand go back to the small of my back and he guides me through the crowd toward the bar.

I spot McKenna perched on a barstool next to the mountain of a man I now know as Pee Wee.

She's laughing at something he's said, looking completely in her element.

“Kenny!” I call out, relieved to see a familiar face and if I’m being honest, desperate to put distance between me and Klutch.

She turns, her face lighting up when she spots me. I rush over and we hug tightly.

“Damn, girl!” she exclaims, pulling back to look at me. “You look hot as hell in that dress!”

A low growl emanates from behind me, and I don’t need to turn around to know it’s Klutch. McKenna’s eyes flick over my shoulder, her grin widening.

“And I see you’ve already made a friend,” she adds with a wink.

Before I can respond, Pee Wee clears his throat. “Klutch, your fight’s in an hour. Better start warming up.”

Wait, what? I glance over my shoulder at him and frown. He’s a fighter?

Pee Wee turns his attention to me. “And you must be Demi. I’m Pee Wee, VP of the Bastard Saints MC.”

“Nice to officially meet you,” I reply, offering him my hand.

His eyes drop to my palm then lift looking over my shoulder like he’s asking for... permission? Bikers are so dang weird. Finally he takes my hand in his massive mitt and gives it a surprisingly gentle pump.

“You too, darlin’. And I see you’ve already met Klutch, our Sergeant-at-Arms.”

So that’s what SAA stands for.

“Yes,” I answer simply, although ‘met’ isn’t exactly accurate.

“This is Hawk,” Pee Wee continues, gesturing to the bartender.

“He’ll show you the ropes. It’s cash only, drinks are fifteen bucks.

If anyone gives you trouble, find someone wearing a Bastard Saints cut.

” He turns, pointing to the back of his vest where a logo of a skull wearing a crown is prominently displayed.

I nod, taking it all in. Klutch hasn’t moved from his spot behind me, and I can feel his eyes boring into the back of my head. It’s unsettling, but not entirely unpleasant.

“I should get to work,” I say, looking at McKenna.

She gives me a thumbs up. “Kill it, girl.”

I turn around, finally facing Klutch. His expression is dark, clearly unhappy about me being here. Well, he can get over it. I need the money far more than I need his approval.

“Excuse me,” I say politely, waiting for him to move.

He stares at me for a beat longer before finally stepping aside. “Stay out of trouble,” he mutters before turning and striding away toward what I assume are the locker rooms.

Hawk, the bartender, gives me a quick rundown of the drink menu and shows me how to work the POS system. It’s all pretty straightforward—take orders, bring drinks, collect cash, don’t mess with the bikers.

The next two hours fly by in a blur of serving drinks and navigating through the increasingly rowdy crowd.

Despite the leers and occasional wandering hand (quickly withdrawn when I give them my death glare), most of the people here tonight are surprisingly respectful.

I even manage to collect a decent amount in tips, stuffing the bills into my crossbody bag that's stowed behind the bar whenever I get a chance.

I'm delivering a tray of drinks to a booth full of men in suits when the music suddenly cuts out. The crowd's chatter dies down as a man with a microphone steps into the center of the cage.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announces, his voice booming through the speakers, "it's time for tonight's main event!"

The crowd erupts in cheers and whistles as I hurry to hand out the last of the drinks on my tray.

"In the red corner, standing at six-foot-three and weighing in at two hundred and twenty-five pounds—The Dominatorrrr!"

A massive man enters the cage to a mix of cheers and boos.

He's easily the most intimidating human being I've ever seen, with muscles bulging from places I didn't know muscles could bulge from.

His entire body is covered in tattoos, and his head is completely shaved.

He paces the cage like a wild animal, eyes cold and calculating.

“And in the blue corner, your reigning champion, standing at six-foot-two and weighing in at two hundred and ten pounds—The Killerrrrr... Klutch!”

My head whips around so fast I nearly drop my tray.

Klutch strides toward the cage with the confidence of a man who fears nothing.

He’s wearing nothing but a pair of black fight shorts, revealing a body that’s all bulging muscles covered in intricate tattoos.

A large piece covers his entire chest and I suddenly want to trace every inch with my tongue.

Shaking off the thought, I hug the empty tray to my chest, suddenly unable to tear my eyes away.

Klutch hops onto the step and glides into the cage, his eyes never leaving his opponent.

The hair on my arms stand on end. There’s something different about him now—something lethal and frightening I hadn’t noticed before.

The referee calls both fighters to the center, gives them instructions I can’t hear, and then steps back. The bell rings.

What happens next is something I’ll never forget.

Dominator charges forward like a bull, clearly intending to use his size advantage to overwhelm Klutch. But Klutch is ready. He sidesteps with surprising speed, landing hard punches that snaps the bigger man’s bald head back. The crowd roars its approval.

I watch, entranced, as Klutch systematically obliterates his opponent. Every move is calculated and brutal. He doesn't waste energy on flashy moves or unnecessary aggression. It's like he's watching and waiting, picking his shots with precision, targeting the same spots over and over.

"Get him!" I shout, unable to stop myself. I feel my cheeks warm when his eyes find me in the crowd before landing back on his opponent.

Real smooth, Demi.

The bell rings, ending the first round. Klutch prowls over to his corner where Beast, the enforcer I'd met briefly earlier, gives him water and wipes his face. I glance over to the other corner where Dominator is gulping air.

"He's incredible, isn't he?" McKenna appears beside me, her eyes also fixed on the cage.

"Yeah," I breathe, unable to come up with something nonchalant to say. "I didn't know he was a fighter."

"Pee Wee says he's one of the best. Undefeated in thirty-seven fights."

I shake my head in disbelief. "How is that even possible? That other guy is huge."

"Size isn't everything," she says with a smirk. "It's how you use it."

I elbow her in the ribs, but my retort is cut short by the bell signaling the start of round two.

This time, Dominator is more cautious, circling Klutch instead of charging in.

They exchange hits, neither landing cleanly, until Klutch suddenly lunges forward.

He drives his shoulder into Dominator's middle, lifting the bigger man off his feet before slamming him to the canvas with a thunderous BAM that echoes through the arena.

"Holy shit," I whisper as the crowd goes wild.

Klutch quickly takes the dominant position, raining down punches on his stunned opponent. Dominator tries to buck him off, but Klutch is like a man on a mission as he continues his assault.

And then just as suddenly as it all started, it's over. Dominator stops moving, his arms falling limp at his sides. The referee jumps in, pulling Klutch off and waving his arms to signal the end of the fight.

Klutch stands, chest heaving, blood splattered across his torso. His eyes scan the crowd until they find mine, locking on with an intensity that makes my knees feel weak. Something possessive flashes in his gaze. A rush of wet floods between my thighs.

Holy shit.

"I need a beer."

I spin around and smile at the man waving around a twenty dollar bill. "Coming right up."

I make my way back to the bar and spot McKenna, apparently in the middle of an argument with Pee Wee.

“I’m not a child,” she’s saying, hands on her hips.

“Never said you were, baby,” Pee Wee replies, his voice calm but firm. “But it’s late, and the crowd gets rowdier after the main event. Time for you to head home.”

“But—“

“No buts. I’ve called you a car. It’s waiting outside.”

McKenna huffs but doesn’t argue further which surprises the hell out of me. She’s not one to back down from a fight. Especially with someone from the opposite sex.

She turns to me, rolling her eyes dramatically. “Apparently, I have a curfew now. Text me when you get home?”

“I will,” I promise, giving her a quick hug. “Be safe.”

“You too,” she whispers, squeezing me tight before releasing me. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

I laugh. “That leaves the field wide open.”

She grins, blowing me a kiss before allowing Pee Wee to escort her to the elevator.

The next two hours pass in a blur of drink orders and increasing chaos. Two more fights take place, though neither generates the same electricity as Klutch’s bout. By the time last call is announced, I’m exhausted but jazzed at the same time.

As the crowd begins to thin, I help Hawk clean up behind the bar, while the other waitresses wipe down tables and chairs. When most of the patrons have left, I finally have a chance to count my tips.

“Holy shit,” I mutter, thumbing through the stack of bills. I’ve made almost five hundred dollars tonight.

“Good haul?”

I nearly jump out of my skin at the deep voice directly behind me. Klutch is standing there, freshly showered and changed back into his jeans and t-shirt, his leather vest back in place. I scan his face and frown at the Steri-Strip over his eyebrow.

“Yeah,” I nod, quickly tucking the money back into my bag. “Not bad.”

He leans against the bar, his eyes raking over me. “How are you getting home?”

“I’m walking,” I shrug.

His eyes jump to mine. “At this time of night? In that dress?” He shakes his head. “That’s not fucking happening.”

I put my hands on my hips, ready to tell him exactly where he can stick his bossy attitude, when he crowds my space. He plants his tattooed hands on the bar on either side of me, caging me in.

“What are you—” My mouth snaps closed when he leans in, his face inches from mine.

“It’s not up for discussion, Demi,” he growls.

“You don’t?—”

“You want to keep this job?”

I narrow my eyes, annoyed that he's using this job against me. "Fine," I snap.

I want to scream that he's a freaking asshole but my dad's face flashes through my mind. He needs me.

"How am I getting home, then?" I ask, barely holding onto my temper.

A ghost of a smile plays at the corners of his mouth. "I'm taking you."

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Klutch

“I’m taking you.”

I smirk, watching as her blue eyes widen with surprise before narrowing in defiance. It’s fucking adorable how she thinks she has a choice in the matter.

“That’s really not necessary,” she protests, crossing her arms over her chest. The movement pushes her little tits up, drawing my attention to the perfect swell visible above the neckline of that sinful dress.

I’m still riding the high from my fight. The adrenaline pumping through my veins, the taste of victory sharp on my tongue. Nothing compares to winning in the cage. I lift my eyes to hers. Except maybe the thought of getting this woman underneath me.

“It wasn’t an offer,” I tell her, refusing to take no for an answer. “It’s happening.”

She rolls those stunning eyes and huffs out a breath that makes her chest rise and fall. Christ, I haven’t been able to think straight since I first saw her stepping off that elevator yesterday afternoon. Even in the middle of my fight, I found myself searching for her in the crowd.

“Fine,” she finally relents, grabbing her bag from behind the bar. “Let me just say goodbye to Hawk.”

I watch her walk away, that tiny black dress hugging every curve of her body.

My mouth goes dry at the sight of her long legs and that ass I want to bite.

She has no fucking idea what she's doing to me.

Or maybe she does, and that's her game. Either way, I'm not complaining 'cause goddamn she's one fine bitch.

She returns a moment later, and I place my hand on the small of her back, guiding her toward the elevator. I can feel her tense under my touch, but she doesn't pull away. Good girl.

"Are you always this pushy?" she asks as I yank the gate up on the elevator car and motion her to get in.

I step in behind her, pull down the gate and tag the button to take us up. Once we're in motion, I lean in close, my lips nearly brushing her ear. "You have no idea, Blue."

A slight shiver runs through her, and I fight back a smirk. Yeah, she's affected by me too. The electricity between us is undeniable, like a live wire just waiting to spark.

When we reach the ground floor, I lead her outside where my Harley is parked.

"This one yours?" she asks, eyeing my bike.

"Yep." I grab my helmet and hold it out to her. "Put this on."

"What about you?"

"I'll be fine," I assure her, pleased by her concern even if it's unnecessary. "You ever ridden before?"

She shakes her head, eyes widening slightly.

“It’s easy,” I tell her, helping her put the helmet on. “Just hold onto me and lean when I lean. Nothing to it.”

I swing my leg over the bike and pat the seat behind me. She hesitates for a moment, then carefully climbs on, that dress riding up dangerously high on her thighs. Christ, I’m getting hard just thinking about those legs wrapped around me in a very different way.

“Ready?” I call over my shoulder.

“I guess,” she answers, her voice muffled by the helmet.

“You’re gonna need to hold on tighter than that, Blue.”

She cautiously wraps her arms around my waist, and I have to bite back a groan at the feeling of her pressed against my back, her tits flattened against me. I’m playing with fire here, but I crave the burn. Fuck me.

I kick the bike to life, and the beast rumbles between my legs. Blue startles and tightens her grip.

“Where do you live?” I shout over the engine.

She leans forward, her helmet knocking against my shoulder as she calls out an address in one of the shittiest neighborhoods in St. Louis.

For reasons I can’t explain, knowing that’s where she stays pisses me off.

I pull away from the curb, deliberately taking the turns a little sharper than necessary

just to feel her cling to me.

All I can focus on is the heat of her body pressed against mine.

I'm planning exactly how I'm going to get her out of that dress when her stomach growls loud enough for me to feel it.

I let off the throttle and call back to her, "You hungry?"

There's a pause before she answers. "No."

Liar. I roll my eyes. Women and their shit about not wanting to admit when they need to eat. I make a quick decision and change course, heading toward the 24-hour diner at the edge of our territory.

When I pull into the parking lot of Rachel's Diner, she lifts the visor of the helmet. "What are we doing here?"

"Feeding you," I say simply, cutting the engine and waiting for her to dismount.

She climbs off the bike and sways. Shit. I reach out to steady her and her cheeks turn an adorable shade of pink.

"My legs felt like Jello for a second there."

"It'll get easier the more you ride."

She tugs at the hem of her dress and I shake my head. It's pretty obvious she's not someone who's used to showing off her body. I mean, those damn purple sneakers she's wearing is a dead giveaway.

“Here.” She holds out the helmet.

I take it from her and hang it on the handlebar, then lead her inside with my hand on the small of her back again. Touching her is becoming a habit I have no intention of breaking.

The diner is nearly empty at this hour, just a couple of truckers at the counter and a group of night shift workers in a corner booth.

“Klutch!” Rachel calls from behind the counter. The sixty-something woman with bottle-red hair has been feeding bikers for decades. “The usual?”

“Make it two,” I tell her, guiding Demi to a booth in the back where I can keep an eye on the door.

We slide in, and I deliberately take the bench that puts my back to the wall. This gives me the best view of the entire place. Old habits die hard.

“You didn’t have to do this,” Demi says, eyeing the menu like it’s a ticking time bomb.

“I know I didn’t have to.” I shrug, leaning back and stretching my arm across the back of the booth. “I wanted to.”

Her eyes flick up to meet mine, those blue depths filled with suspicion. “Why?”

I shrug, not ready to admit that I can’t get her out of my head. “You’re too skinny.”

She barks out a laugh and rolls her eyes. “Wow. You’re a real charmer”

“It’s the truth,” I counter, my lips twitching. She could use a few more pounds on her.

She's sexy as fuck no matter how tiny she is, but I like my women with a little more meat on the bone.

Rachel swoops in with two coffees, setting them down in front of us. "Who's your friend, Klutch?"

"Demi," I answer before she can. "She just started working at The Underground."

Rachel's penciled on eyebrows shoot up as she gives Demi a once-over. "Honey, you don't look like the usual type that gets sucked in there."

"I'm not," Demi says quickly. "I'm just waitressing for a few weeks and then I'm out."

"Mmhmm," Rachel hums, clearly not convinced. "Well, food will be out in a few. Holler if you need anything else."

As she walks away, the barbs on the back of my neck press in.

I look around the room and instantly spot the fucker at the counter that can't stop glancing over his shoulder at my girl.

His eyes finally lift to meet mine and I level him with a cold stare.

His face pales and he quickly turns away. Disrespectful, prick.

"So," I turn my attention back to Demi, "you said you're only going to be at The Underground for a few weeks. Why there?"

She looks everywhere but at me as she shrugs her shoulders and says, "Trying to make rent. Same as everyone else."

I raise a challenging brow. “Bullshit,” I call her out immediately.

She shifts uncomfortably, her fingers playing with the edge of a paper napkin. “I was supposed to start at Meramec Community College this fall.”

“Was?”

She sighs, her shoulders slumping slightly. “Let’s just say things didn’t work out the way I planned.”

I study her face, the resignation in her eyes telling me there’s more to the story. “What aren’t you saying?”

Her head snaps up, eyes narrowing. “Look. I appreciate you bringing me here and giving me a ride, but I don’t know you.”

I hold up my hands. “Alright, Blue. Simmer, babe. I’m just trying to figure you out.”

“Well don’t,” she snaps back.

My dick twitches behind my zipper at the fire in her eyes. I’m so fucking fucked. Her bitchy attitude only makes me want to fuck her more.

My lips turn up, “Now you’ve got me interested.” It’s as close to the truth as I’m willing to admit right now.

Before she can respond, Rachel returns with two massive plates of steak and eggs with hash browns and toast. Demi’s eyes widen at the sheer amount of food.

“I can’t eat all this,” she protests.

“Try,” I encourage, already cutting into my steak. “Food this good shouldn’t go to waste.”

She hesitates for just a moment, then digs in with surprising enthusiasm. I find myself watching the way her lips close around her fork, how her throat moves when she swallows.

Christ, I need to get a grip.

“So what exactly does a Sergeant-at-Arms do?” she nods toward the patch on my chest.

I take a sip of my coffee, deciding how much to tell her. “I enforce club rules. Handle security. Make sure everyone stays in line.”

“Sounds... intense.”

I shrug. “It can be.”

“Like fighting?” She tilts her head, studying me. “You’re really good at that, by the way.”

“Thanks,” I say, oddly pleased by her compliment. “Been doing it a long time.”

“How long?”

“Since I was eighteen,” I tell her, surprised I’m sharing even that much. “My old man was a fighter too. It’s in the blood.”

She nods, seeming genuinely interested. “What does he think about you being in a biker gang?”

“Club,” I correct her quickly. “We’re a club. Not a gang. And my pop is a member of the club. He’s the Chaplain now.”

Her eyes widen. “You’re dad is a biker too? Wow.” She shakes her head and her brows dip. “Wait. Chaplain? Like... a religious thing?”

I laugh, almost choking on my coffee. “Shit. You’re killing me, Blue.

” How do I explain that my pop is a bad motherfucker who’d slit a man’s throat without blinking?

I shake my head and chuckle. Fuck it. “Not exactly. He keeps the peace in a way. Makes sure brothers aren’t getting too far out of line. ”

“And your mom?”

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“Still married to my old man. Going on almost thirty years now.”

Something flickers across her face but the shutters come down before I can figure it out. “That’s nice,” she says softly. “That they’re still together.”

I reach across the table without thinking, brushing a strand of hair from her face. She stills at my touch, those bright blue eyes locking onto mine. “What about your folks?”

“My mom died when I was twelve,” she says quietly. “It’s just me and my dad now.”

“I’m sorry,” I tell her, meaning it. I can’t imagine losing my mother. It would destroy me.

She shrugs, trying to look nonchalant but not quite pulling it off. “It was a long time ago.”

“Doesn’t mean it doesn’t still hurt.”

She looks surprised by my honesty, I’m a little surprised myself. I don’t usually give a fuck how women feel. I’ve always been a hit-it and quit-it kind of man, but something about Blue feels different. Shaking off the thought, I dig into my food.

We finish our meal in silence, and when Rachel brings the check, I snatch it up before Demi can even reach for it.

“I can pay for my own food,” she protests.

“I know you can,” I tell her, sliding a fifty into the leather folder without even looking at the total. “But you’re not going to.”

She looks like she’s gearing up to throw some more sass my way, but seems to think better of it. “Thank you,” she says softly instead.

“Don’t mention it.” I stand up, holding out my hand to help her out of the booth. To my surprise, she takes it, her small hand fitting perfectly in mine. I don’t let go as I lead her back outside to my bike.

The ride to her place is even better than the one to the diner.

She’s more relaxed now, her body molded against mine, her thighs pressing into the backs of mine.

I take a longer route than necessary, enjoying the feeling of her arms wrapped tightly around my waist, her chest pressed against my back.

My mind races with images of all the things I want to do to her.

Bend her over my bike, her dress hiked up around her waist; push her up against a wall, her legs wrapped around me; spread her out on my bed, taking my time to taste every inch of her.

My cock throbs painfully in my jeans at the thought.

When we finally reach her building, I park and kill the engine. The neighborhood is even worse than I imagined. No way in hell is this a safe place for her.

“Thanks for the ride,” she says, sliding off my bike and handing me back my helmet. “And for dinner.”

“I’m walking you to your door,” I insist.

She sighs but thankfully doesn’t argue as she leads the way up to the fourth floor.

The first thing I notice is the shitty lighting in the hallway, something that’s not safe.

Anyone could be waiting to jump her and she’d never see them coming.

My fists clench. That’s going to change very fucking soon.

I make a mental note to have Yukon come by this week and wire this place up.

Overkill? Yeah, probably, but I justify it in my head by the fact that she works for us and we take care of our own.

When we reach 4C, I freeze. The door is hanging off its hinges and there’s a boot print in the middle.

“What the—“ Demi gasps, but I quickly pull her behind me.

“Stay here,” I order, pulling my Glock from the holster at my lower back.

I move into the apartment cautiously, pushing the damaged door open with my foot. The place is trashed—furniture overturned, drawers emptied onto the floor, glass shattered across the linoleum. Someone has torn through her place looking for something.

“Dad?” Demi calls out, suddenly appearing beside me.

“Goddammit, I told you to stay in the hall,” I growl, scanning the apartment for threats.

She ignores me, moving further into the wreckage. “Dad!” she calls again, her voice high with panic.

Clearing each room quickly. No one’s here, but someone definitely wanted to send a message.

“He’s not here,” she says, her face pale as she pulls out her phone and dials a number. After a moment, she makes a frustrated sound. “Voicemail again.”

“Who would do this?” I ask, holstering my weapon.

She shakes her head, looking lost amid the destruction. “I don’t know. Maybe...” Her mouth snaps shut and she looks away.

I narrow my eyes. “Maybe what, Blue? I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what the fuck is going on.”

“Nothing,” she says too quickly. “Sometimes drug addicts break in looking for stuff to steal.”

I scan the apartment again. This wasn’t a random break-in. Someone was looking for something—or someone.

“That’s the second time you’ve lied to me, Blue.

It’s going to be the fucking last, you hear me?

” She looks away, but I can tell by her body language I’ve hit a nerve.

Good. She’s hit one too and it’s pissing me off.

I shouldn't give a fuck about this girl.

Should leave her here to figure out her own shit, but I can't.

"Pack a bag," I snap. "You're not staying here."

Her head shoots up. "What? No, I can't leave?—"

I crowd her space. "This isn't up for discussion, Demi. This place isn't safe."

"But my dad?—"

I growl in frustration. Why does she have to fight me at every fucking turn? Doesn't she realize this place isn't safe. "Will have to find another place to crash tonight too," I cut her off. "Unless you want to stick around and meet whoever did this when they come back."

That gets through to her. Thank fuck.

She bites her lip, then nods reluctantly. "Fine. Give me five minutes."

As she disappears into her bedroom, I pull out my phone and text Titan.

Klutch: Need everything you can find on Demi Cross. Lives at 4327 Dover Street, Apartment 4C. Someone trashed her place tonight. I want to know who and why.

His response comes almost immediately.

Titan: On it.

I slide my phone back in my pocket and watch as Demi emerges with a small duffel

bag. Her face is a mask of forced composure, but I can see the fear in her eyes.

“Ready?” I ask, softer than before.

She nods, casting one more glance around the destroyed apartment.

“I guess so.”

Demi

The ride to wherever Klutch is taking me passes in a blur. I cling to his back with my bag wedged awkwardly between us, and my mind racing with images of my destroyed apartment. Who would do that? I mean, I know who; Frankie's men—but why trash the place? What were they looking for?

My stomach twists as the obvious answer hits me. They were looking for my dad. Or maybe for me. The thought sends a chill down my spine.

When Klutch finally slows the bike, I lift my head to see a large brick building surrounded by a tall fence topped with what looks like razor wire. Several motorcycles are parked in a row near the entrance.

“Where are we?” I ask as he cuts the engine.

“Clubhouse,” he says simply, waiting for me to climb off before dismounting himself.

My heart rate picks up. “Your clubhouse? I can't stay here.”

Klutch's eyebrows shoot up. “And why's that?”

“Because...” I wave my hand vaguely at the building. “It's a biker clubhouse. I don't belong here.”

He snorts. “Baby, you're place was fucking trashed. The goddamn door hanging off

the hinges. You think you were safer there?”

Put like that, I don't have much of an argument. Still, the thought of walking into a building full of bikers makes my palms sweat.

“It'll be fine,” Klutch says, his voice gentle. “Nobody's gonna mess with you.”

“How can you be sure?”

His lips quirk into that almost-smile that does funny things to my insides. “Because you're mine.”

Before I can process what that means, he takes my bag from my shoulder and motions for me to follow him.

The weight of his words settles over me as I trail behind him toward the entrance.

Because you're mine. Like I belong to him or something.

Warmth spreads through my belly. It's scary how not-scary that thought is.

As soon as Klutch pushes open the heavy steel door, my senses are assaulted by pounding music, raucous laughter, and the smell of cigarettes.

The place is packed with men in leather vests like Klutch's, women in various states of undress, and others who look like regular Joe's who are just here for the party.

I freeze in the doorway, overwhelmed by the chaos. Klutch seems to sense my hesitation because his hand falls to the small of my back, and smoothes around the side of my waist.

“Stay close,” he says into my ear, his breath sending shivers down my neck.

I nod, allowing him to usher me through the crowd.

As we make our way deeper into the room, I catch sight of a woman walking around completely topless, her breasts on full display as she serves drinks to a group of bikers.

Another woman in nothing but a thong and pasties is dancing on a pool table while men throw bills at her.

My cheeks burn hot, and I drop my gaze to the floor.

Sweet baby Jesus. What the heck have I gotten myself into?

Klutch’s grip on my waist tightens as he steers me toward the bar where a man with dark hair is nursing a beer. The man looks up as we approach, his intense blue eyes sliding over me with mild curiosity before returning to Klutch.

“Denali,” Klutch nods in greeting. “This is Demi. She works at The Underground.”

I recognize the name immediately. Denali—the President of the Bastard Saints MC.

I can tell just by looking at him that he’s not someone to be messed with. There’s a hardness in his eyes that speaks of someone who’s seen and done things I can’t even imagine.

“Sir,” I manage, not sure of the proper protocol for addressing the president of a motorcycle club.

His lips twitch as a flicker of amusement crosses his face. “Just Denali is fine,

darlin’.”

Klutch shifts beside me. “Her place got broken into tonight. She needs somewhere to crash for the night.”

Denali’s eyes narrow slightly, but he doesn’t ask questions. Instead, he just waves a hand dismissively. “That’s fine.”

And that’s it. No further explanation needed. I’m struck by the implicit trust between them—Klutch vouching for me, and Denali accepting it without question.

“Thanks,” Klutch says, already turning to lead me away.

We weave through the crowd toward a staircase. As we climb the steps, the noise from the party begins to fade, and by the time we reach the second floor, it’s muffled enough that I don’t feel like I have to yell for him to hear me.

Klutch leads me down a hallway lined with doors on either side. He stops at the last door and pulls a key from his pocket.

“Home sweet home,” he says, pushing the door open and ushering me inside.

I step into what looks like a small apartment. There’s a living area with a couch and TV, a tiny kitchenette in the corner, and two doors that I assume lead to a bedroom and bathroom. Everything is surprisingly neat and organized—not at all what I expected in a biker’s bachelor pad.

“This is your room?” I ask, setting my bag down on the floor.

“It’s a suite,” he corrects, closing the door behind us. “All the officers have one.”

I walk further into the space, taking it all in. The furniture looks new and the walls are freshly painted. “It’s really nice.”

“Clubhouse is new. Well, new to us anyway,” he explains as he watches me explore. “We just moved in a couple weeks ago.”

“Oh?” I prompt, curious about the story there.

“Long story. Maybe another time.”

I nod, not wanting to push. My eye catches on a framed photo sitting on the entertainment center. I walk over and pick it up, studying the image. It shows a younger Klutch standing between a handsome older man with the same dark features and a beautiful woman with kind eyes.

“My parents,” Klutch says, coming to stand behind me.

“You look happy,” I observe, smiling at the genuine joy on all three faces. They look like a real family—something I haven’t had in a long time.

“We are,” he says simply, taking the frame from my hands and setting it back down. “Most of the time, anyway.”

When I turn around, Klutch is kicking off his boots. He straightens up and pulls his t-shirt over his head in one smooth motion, revealing washboard abs and a happy trail I’d admired during his fight.

Realizing I’m staring, I quickly avert my gaze, my cheeks warming. “Um...”

“Bathroom’s through there if you want to shower or whatever,” he says, nodding toward one of the doors, completely oblivious to my discomfort. “Towels are in the

cabinet under the sink.”

“Thanks,” I mumble, grabbing my bag and practically running to the bathroom.

Once inside, I lean against the door and take a deep breath.

It’s fine. Everything is fine. I’m just staying the night in a strange biker’s room after watching him beat a man unconscious. “Oh God” I cover my face with my hands. What the hell am I doing?

Groaning, I drop my hands and look around the bathroom. Like the rest of the suite, it’s surprisingly nice. Clean white tiles, a large walk-in shower, and a vanity with a sink. It’s nicer than any bathroom I’ve ever had.

I set my bag on the counter and unzip it, pulling out my sleep shorts and tank top. After a moment’s hesitation, I decide a shower would be nice. Maybe it will help clear my head.

Stripping off the dress I now regret wearing, I turn on the shower and wait for the water to heat up. Steam begins to fill the room, and I step under the spray, sighing as the hot water hits my skin.

As I stand there letting the water cascade over me, the events of the day come crashing down. My dad vanishing. The apartment destroyed. The fear that Frankie’s men might have done something. And now I’m in a biker clubhouse with a man I barely know.

What am I going to do? I need to find my dad, but where do I even start looking? And how am I supposed to come up with ten thousand dollars in less than two weeks? Even with the tips from The Underground, I don’t know if it’s going to be enough.

The pressure that's been building in my chest since finding my dad bloodied on our floor suddenly becomes too much.

A sob escapes my lips. I slap a hand over my mouth trying to hold it in, but the dam has broken and it all comes pouring out.

Leaning against the tile, I slide down the shower wall until I'm sitting on the floor and pull my knees up to my chest. I silently cry for my father, for the mother I lost, for the little girl I never got to be.

I don't know how long I sit there with the water pouring over me as I sob into my hands, but suddenly I'm aware of the shower door sliding open. Before I can react, a strong arm slips around my back and another under my knees and I'm lifted from the floor.

"It's going to be okay, Blue. I've got you," Klutch whispers into my wet hair as he carries me out of the shower, not seeming to care that he's getting soaked or that I'm completely naked.

I shake my head against his chest, crying harder. "No, it's not. Nothing's okay." The words are muffled against his chest, but I think he understands because his arms tighten around me.

"Shh," he soothes, carrying me through to what must be his bedroom. "I got you, baby."

Something about the gentleness in his voice, the solid strength of his arms around me, breaks the last of my control.

I clutch at his wet shirt, burying my face against his chest and just let go.

All the fear, all the worry, all the exhaustion of being the responsible one for so long—it all comes pouring out in heaving sobs.

It's been so long since I felt safe in someone's arms. Since I let myself fall apart and someone else be strong for me.

Eventually, the storm subsides, and I become very aware of my surroundings again.

I'm sitting in Klutch's lap on his bed, naked and wrapped in his arms. His shirt is soaked through, clinging to his chest, and when I lift my head, I realize he's just been holding me, letting me cry, without saying a word.

“You put on a shirt,” I whisper dumbly.

Klutch's caramel-colored eyes drop to my lips and my body goes still.

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“I’m going to kiss you,” he rasps as he ever so slowly dips his head.

I should turn away from him. He’s still a stranger I barely know, but something about the way he’s looking at me like I’m the last breath of air has my heart pounding in my chest. I tilt my head up, a signal that I want what he’s offering even if I don’t know what I’m doing.

With a deep growl, his soft lips connect with mine and I melt.

His tongue swipes against the seam of my lips and without protest I open for him.

His tongue sweeps inside and he devours my mouth.

I don’t know how long we make out but when he finally pulls back, I become acutely aware of two things: one, I’m still completely naked, and two, there’s something hard poking against my bottom and I’m certain it’s not his keys.

My cheeks flood with heat, and I shift slightly, uncomfortable with my nakedness now that I’m not lost in my meltdown.

Klutch seems to sense my discomfort because he reaches over to the foot of the bed and grabs a blanket and wraps it around my shoulders. I pull it tighter, attempting to cover myself more fully.

“Thanks.”

“Are you ready to tell me the truth now?” he asks, his voice soft but firm.

I nod, knowing I can't hide it anymore. Not after everything.

"My dad..." I shake my head just thinking about the mess that is my father.

"He gets into these situations. I mean, he's always doing something stupid.

Convinced it's his ticket to easy street.

But it never is." Dropping my gaze to my lap, I think of all the scams he's pulled over the years.

Betting on the ponies, A GoFundMe scam where he lied to be on the internet, exotic lizard breeding, signing up to participate in medical studies.

Always something crazier than the last stunt he pulled.

"He owes some bad people a lot of money."

Klutch's body tenses beneath me. "How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars. Plus interest."

He whistles low and I lift my head. "That's a lot of cash."

"He has a gambling problem and he thought getting involved with Frankie Fish was a good idea! How could he be so stupid?" I ask, my voice getting louder, the shame coloring my voice even though it's not my fault.

"He's always done stupid stuff, ya know?"

But this time," I laugh humorlessly. "This time it's much worse.

Frankie's guys already beat him up once as a warning.

They said they'd be back in two weeks and he better have the money or else ...

"I cover my face with my hands, unable to finish the sentence.

"Or they'll kill him," Klutch says that quiet part out loud.

I lower my hands and nod miserably. "That's why I took the job at The Underground. I thought maybe I could make enough to at least pay off part of it, maybe buy us some time."

Klutch is quiet for a moment, his brows dipping as he processes the load of shit I just dropped on him. "And you have no idea where your dad is now?"

"No. He hasn't answered his phone since the day after they beat him up."

Klutch opens his mouth to respond when a knock sounds at the door. He gently lifts me off his lap, setting me carefully on the edge of his bed. "Stay here. I'll be right back."

I nod, clutching the blanket around me as he leaves the room. As soon as the door closes behind him, I hop up and head back into the bathroom. I grab my bag from the floor and quickly pull out the shorts and tank I brought to sleep in.

After dressing in my pajamas, I brush my teeth and run a brush through my tangled hair. Feeling somewhat better, I head back into Klutch's bedroom and climb into the middle of his bed. Criss-crossing my legs, I listen as Klutch talks in a low voice with someone in the other room.

A few minutes pass until Klutch comes back into the bedroom.

He's changed out of his wet clothes and is wearing only a pair of black basketball shorts that hang low on his hips.

My eyes are drawn to his bare chest again, all hard muscles and colorful tattoos.

The man is seriously built, with abs you could grate cheese on and arms thicker than my thighs.

"Feel better?" he asks, his eyes taking in my change of clothes.

"A little," I admit. "Who was at the door?"

"Titan. Our tech guy. He's looking into some stuff for me." Klutch moves closer, and I force myself not to move back. "He's also trying to locate your dad."

Hope flares in my chest. "You think he can find him?"

"If anyone can, it's Titan." Klutch drops onto the bed and stretches out with his head on the only pillow.

He pats the space beside him. I stare at it for a moment then climb over and lay down next to him.

"We'll figure this out, Blue. But right now, you need to get some rest. It's been a long day. "

I nod, suddenly aware of just how exhausted I am. The emotional release in the shower has left me drained.

"Tomorrow, after we've had some sleep, we'll talk more about Frankie Fish and your dad's debt," Klutch promises. "I've got some ideas, but they can wait till morning."

“Okay,” I agree, too tired to argue. “Thank you. For everything. I don’t know what I would have done if?—”

“Hey,” he cuts me off, placing his hand on my hip. “You don’t have to thank me. Just try to get some sleep, alright?”

I nod again, a strange warmth spreading through me at his touch. It’s been so long since someone took care of me, since I didn’t have to be the strong one. I’ve been handling everything on my own for so long that I’d forgotten what it feels like to have someone in my corner.

“I will,” I promise, snuggling into his side as the exhaustion of the last few days pulls me under.

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Klutch

Something warm and soft is draped across my chest when I wake up.

I crack one eye open and look down, finding Demi still sound asleep, her cheek pressed against my pec, her dark hair spilling across my skin like ink.

Sunlight filters through the blinds, casting gold streaks across her face, highlighting the soft curve of her cheek.

My chest tightens at the sight of her. I've had plenty of women in my bed over the years, but none have ever looked like this—like they fucking belong here.

I can't stop myself from reaching out, brushing a strand of hair from her face. My rough fingers look almost obscene against her smooth skin. She's too good for me. Too pure. But that doesn't stop the primal part of me from wanting to claim her, mark her, make her mine in every possible way.

Her eyelashes flutter, and then those cornflower blue eyes are staring up at me, sleepy and soft.

"Hi," she whispers, a blush creeping across her cheeks when she realizes she's sprawled across me.

"Morning, Blue," I rasp, my voice still thick with sleep.

She starts to pull away, but my hand at the small of her back keeps her in place.

“Where are you going?”

“I just thought—” she begins, but I’m already pulling her higher up my body, unable to fight the need to taste her lips.

“Don’t think,” I murmur before capturing her mouth with mine.

Her lips are soft and pliant, opening for me without hesitation. I slide my tongue against hers, groaning at the sweet taste of her. I knew the moment I clapped eyes on her she’d be my kryptonite.

Her tongue dances with mine and my cock hardens instantly, straining against my basketball shorts. Shit. I need to be inside her, and soon.

Demi shifts against me, her center pressing right against my length, and I nearly lose my fucking mind.

“Klutch,” she breathes against my lips, rolling her hips experimentally.

I growl, flipping us so she’s beneath me, her dark hair fanned out across my pillow. “You feel what you do to me?” I ask, pressing my hardness against her core.

She nods, eyes wide, pupils blown with desire. I dip my head to kiss her again, slower this time, savoring the little sounds she makes in the back of her throat. My hand slides under her tank top, finding the warm skin of her stomach. She jumps slightly at my touch but doesn’t pull away.

Fuck yes.

I break the kiss long enough to tug her tank up, exposing her perfect tits to my hungry gaze. They’re small but perfect, with dusky pink nipples already hard and begging for

my mouth.

“Fucking beautiful,” I groan, lowering my head to take one peaked nipple between my lips.

Her back arches off the bed as I suck and lick, one hand kneading her other breast. I can’t get enough of her taste, her scent, the softness of her skin. I switch to her other nipple, giving it the same attention while my hand slides down her stomach to the waistband of her shorts.

“Can I touch you, Blue?” I ask, my fingers hovering at the edge of her shorts.

“Yes,” she breathes, her hips lifting slightly off the bed.

I slip my hand inside her shorts and between her thighs, finding her already wet and ready for me. “Fuck,” I hiss, sliding a finger through her slick folds. “Soaked.”

Her eyes flutter closed as I circle her clit, her teeth digging into her bottom lip to hold back a moan. I press a finger against her entrance, slowly pushing inside. She’s so goddamn tight it makes my dick throb painfully.

“Jesus,” I groan, imagining how that tight heat will feel wrapped around my cock. “You gonna give it to me, baby?”

I work my finger in and out, feeling her walls clench around me. When I add a second finger, she gasps, her hips bucking against my hand. I curl my fingers, searching for that spot that will make her see stars, and I know I’ve found it when her whole body jerks and a cry escapes her lips.

“That’s it,” I murmur, my thumb finding her clit as I continue to pump my fingers into her. “Let go for me, Blue.”

Her breathing becomes erratic, her hands fisting in the sheets as I work her toward release. I can feel her tightening around my fingers, getting closer and closer to the edge.

“Klutch!” she cries out, her back arching as her orgasm hits her. Violently, her walls clamp down on my fingers, and I keep working her through it, prolonging her pleasure until she collapses back onto the bed.

Slipping my fingers free, I bring them to my mouth and lick them clean. “Sweet as honey,” I growl, my eyes locked on hers.

Her cheeks flush even brighter, but she doesn’t look away.

I hook my fingers in the waistband of her shorts and slowly pull them down her legs, leaving her completely naked beneath me.

The sight of her hair wild around her face, lips swollen from my kisses, body flushed with pleasure, nearly undoes me.

“Spread your legs for me,” I command, my voice rough with need.

Her teeth sink into her plump bottom lip. She hesitates for just a moment before letting her thighs fall open. My eyes drop to her center and I groan. Her little pussy is pink and perfect and I can’t wait to sink inside her.

I settle between her legs and press a kiss to the inside of her thigh.

“What are you—” she starts, but her words turn into a moan as I lick a slow swipe up her center.

Her tasty cunt is sweet and tangy and so fucking addictive. I devour her like a

starving man before focusing on her clit. Breaths coming faster, her hands find my hair and her fingers tangle in the strands as she holds me against her.

“Oh God,” she pants, moving her hips in rhythm with my tongue. “Klutch, I can’t—I’m going to?”

I slip two fingers back inside her, curling them to hit that spot that makes her tremble. My mouth latches onto her clit, sucking gently, and she shatters, crying out my name as she comes against my tongue. I lap up every drop of her release, groaning at the taste of her honey coating my face.

When I finally pull back, she’s looking at me with dazed eyes, her chest rising and falling rapidly. Seeing her like this, something inside me shifts, and I know I’m not worthy of this girl but it doesn’t fucking matter. I’m keeping her.

Shoving my shorts down, I free my aching cock. Her eyes widen as she takes in the size of me, and I see a flicker of apprehension cross her face.

“We don’t have to do this,” I tell her, even as my body screams at me to shut the fuck up. “We can stop right now.”

She shakes her head, reaching for me. “No, I want to. I want you.”

Thank fuck, cause even though I said we could stop it’s the last thing I want to do.

Climbing up her body, I position myself at her entrance and drag the head of my cock through her wetness.

The sight of my dick glistening with her juices has me freezing on the spot.

Fuck. I forgot to put on a rubber. My eyes jump to hers.

She's watching every move I make. I glance back at my dick and know I'm a bad man for what I'm about to do.

Living up to the Bastard name, I shift my hips and slowly start to push inside her ungloved.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I grit my teeth, struggling to hold onto my control.

Her eyes squeeze shut and her body tenses as the head of my cock bumps against resistance. I freeze on the spot.

"Blue," I rasp, my voice tight with the effort of holding still. "Are you a virgin?"

She opens her eyes, vulnerable and uncertain. "Yes," she whispers.

My brows snap together as a sense of fierce possession slams into me. How the fuck has she managed to stay a virgin? She's fucking gorgeous and her body is bangin'.

"How old are you?" I ask carefully, praying to fucking God she's legal. Pee Wee said himself he was so pussy struck he didn't even ask their goddamn names.

"Nineteen." Thank fuck.

I shift my hips and she whimpers in pain.

"You should have told me," I growl, leaning down to kiss her softly. Not that it'll stop me now. I've made up my mind. She's mine. I'm going to be her first and her only. "This is going to hurt, baby."

She nods, wrapping her arms around my shoulders. "Do it."

I thrust forward, breaking through her barrier in one hard stroke. She cries out, her nails digging into my shoulders, and I go completely still, giving her time to adjust.

“I’m sorry, baby,” I coo, doing everything I can not to move.

“It’s okay,” she says through pained breaths.

I squeeze my eyes shut. Fuck. Her pussy is squeezing my cock like a vice and I’m fighting not to come like some goddamn teenager.

“You okay?” I ask, brushing my lips across her forehead.

She takes a deep breath and nods. “Yes. You can move now.”

I start slow, moving my hips in shallow thrusts as I watch her face. Slowly the pain gives way to pleasure. When her hips begin to rise to meet mine, I know she’s ready for more. I withdraw almost completely before driving back in, setting a steady rhythm that has us both panting.

“Fuck, Blue,” I groan, my control slipping with each thrust. “Your pussy feels so good.”

Her legs wrap around my waist, and I slide in deeper. I nearly lose my mind at the sensation. The sight of her beneath me, taking my cock that’s smeared with her virgin blood, her tits bouncing every time I bottom out. It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.

“Faster,” she pleads, her hands sliding down to grip my ass. “Please, Klutch.”

I pick up the pace, driving into her harder, deeper, claiming her completely. The sound of skin slapping against skin fills the room, mixed with my groans and her

gasps.

“This pussy’s mine now,” I growl into her ear, my hips snapping against hers. “You understand me? Mine .”

“Yes,” she moans, her walls tightening around me. “Yours. Only yours.”

I reach between us and find her clit with my thumb, rubbing tight circles as I continue to pound into her. “Come for me again, Blue. Let me feel you come all over my cock.”

Her back arches off the bed as her orgasm hits her. The sight of her coming undone beneath me, the feel of her pulsing wrapped around me, sends me over the edge. I thrust deep one last time and groan as my cum spills inside her.

“Fuck, Demi,” I groan, collapsing on top of her, careful not to crush her with my weight.

For a long moment, we lay there, our bodies still joined, heartbeats gradually slowing. When I finally pull out, I watch as my cum tinted pink with her blood trickles out of her.

“Mine,” I growl, unable to stop myself from pressing a kiss to her inner thigh.

Her eyes widen slightly, and I can’t help but smirk at her reaction.

“You’re like a goddamn drug, Demi,” I confess. “And I’m a fucking addict.”

She rolls her eyes. “That’s a little dramatic.”

I thread my fingers through her hair, pulling her up for another kiss.

She gave herself to me and I'm never letting her go.

Demi

“I’m not a whore,” I blurt out, suddenly feeling exposed as Klutch’s eyes roam over my naked body. Heat rushes to my cheeks as the reality of what we just did crashes over me.

Klutch laughs, the sound rumbling deep in his chest. I narrow my eyes at him, mortified that he finds my embarrassment amusing.

“Think I know that, baby. I popped your cherry,” he says with a smirk.

I gasp, my mouth falling open. I know he did not just say that. “You can’t just?—”

My protest dies as his lips crash against mine, swallowing my words. His tongue sweeps into my mouth, and just like that, I’m melting again. God, how does he do this to me? One minute I’m ready to tell him off, and the next I’m putty in his hands.

Before I can gather my scattered thoughts, he scoops me up like I weigh nothing. I squeak in surprise, my arms looping around his neck as he carries me into his bathroom.

“What are you doing?” I squeak again when my ass hits the cold granite countertop.

He doesn’t answer, just reaches into the shower and turns on the water. Steam starts to fill the small bathroom as he adjusts the temperature, his muscled back flexing with every move he makes. The sight of all those tattoos covering his skin makes my mouth go dry.

When he turns back to me, his eyes are dark and hungry. “Ready for round two?”

“I don’t think I can—” I start, but he’s already lifting me again. He steps into the shower with me in his arms, then slowly lets my body slide down his. I feel every hard inch of him against me, including his already hardening length pressing against my belly.

“Klutch,” I breathe as the warm water cascades over us.

“Let me take care of you, Blue,” he murmurs, reaching for his body wash on the shower rail.

I watch as he squeezes some into his palm, then begins to lather it across my shoulders, my chest, my breasts. His touch is gentle, almost reverent as his soapy hands glide over my skin. I close my eyes and lean into him, savoring the sensation of his hands on my body.

“Turn around,” he croaks, just as affected by what he’s doing as I am.

I obey, and his hands move to my back, my shoulders, down to my waist and the curve of my bottom. He kneels behind me, washing my legs, my calves, my feet. There’s something intensely intimate about being washed like this, almost more intimate than the sex we just had.

When he stands again, I take the body wash from him. “My turn.”

A smile plays at the corners of his mouth as he watches me pour the soap into my hands. I start at his chest, my fingers tracing the designs inked into his skin. A crown over his heart. The Grim Reaper on his ribs. Words in what looks like Spanish curling around his shoulder.

“What does this say?” I ask, tracing the lettering.

“Family above all,” he translates. “Got it with my dad when I turned eighteen.”

I nod, continuing my exploration of his body. My hands move lower, over the ridges of his abs, the sharp cut of his hip bones. When my soapy hands smooth over his now fully erect cock, he hisses through his teeth.

An idea forms in my mind. I’ve never done this before, but I’ve heard enough from McKenna to know the basics. Before I can talk myself out of it, I drop to my knees in front of him.

“Oh fuck,” he groans, his voice strained.

I look up at him through the spray of the shower. “Show me how.”

His eyes darken at my words. He wraps his hand around himself, guiding the tip to my lips. “Open,” he commands.

I part my lips, and he slides just the head of his cock into my mouth. It feels strange at first, the weight of him on my tongue, but it’s not unpleasant.

“That’s it,” he encourages, his free hand tangling in my wet hair. “Now take a little more.”

I do as he says, letting him slide deeper into my mouth. His groans spur me on, and I begin to move, bobbing my head as I take him in and out.

“Use your hand,” he instructs, guiding my fingers to wrap around the base of his shaft where my mouth can’t reach.

I follow his lead, stroking and sucking in tandem, learning what he likes. It's empowering, seeing this strong, intimidating man at my mercy.

"Fuck, Blue," he groans, his grip in my hair tightening. "I'm gonna come."

I expect him to pull away, but instead, he holds me in place. "Swallow it," he commands, his voice ragged.

Before I can process his words, hot spurts of his release flood my mouth. I swallow reflexively, the taste salty and bitter but it's not the worst thing I've ever swallowed.

Just as I think we're finished, Klutch yanks me up from the shower floor. In one quick motion, he leans me against the tile wall and surges inside me. I cry out at the sudden intrusion, still sensitive from earlier.

"Mine," he growls, fucking me hard against the cold wall. The water continues to pour over us as he pounds into me, each thrust sending waves of pleasure through my body.

It doesn't take long before I'm clinging to him, my nails digging into his shoulders as another orgasm builds. When it hits, I throw my head back against the tile, his name spilling from my lips.

He follows me into bliss a moment later, his hips jerking erratically as he groans and comes inside me.

As the fog of pleasure clears, realization dawns. "Wait," I gasp, shoving at his chest. "We didn't use protection. I'm not on the pill!"

Klutch shrugs his shoulders like it's no big deal. "If you get pregnant, we'll deal with it."

Anger flashes through me. How can he be so cavalier about this? “Deal with it? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Blue—”

“I wouldn’t get rid of my baby if I was pregnant,” I snap, suddenly defensive of a child that doesn’t even exist.

He silences me with a hard kiss, then drops his forehead to mine. “That’s not what I meant, baby. But I’m glad to hear you confirm that you wouldn’t want to kill our kid. I mean, if there was one.”

I relax slightly, the fight draining out of me. “Oh.”

“I promise I’ll put on a wrap from now on,” he says, his thumbs gently stroking my cheeks, my lips. “It’s just that one taste of this sexy mouth and I lose all fucking rational thought.”

My cheeks warm at his declaration. He’s so open, holding nothing back. It’s not something I’m used to; not something I do.

“We should finish up,” I tell him.

He shakes his head and steps back, letting me off the hook for changing the subject. After finishing up and we get dried off and dressed in silence, the weight of what just happened, what could happen, hangs between us.

I’m just slipping on my purple Converse when a sharp knock sounds at the door.

Klutch frowns, moving to answer it while I finish tying my laces. I hear McKenna’s voice before I see her, high-pitched and worried.

“Where is she? Is she okay?”

Before Klutch can answer, Kenny barrels past him and spots me sitting on the edge of the bed. She rushes over, pulling me into a tight hug.

“Thank God! I was so worried when I went downstairs this morning and saw your door boarded up. I had to hear from Pee Wee about your apartment.” I can hear the disapproval in her voice. Guilt hits me hard. I should have called her last night, told her what happened.

Wait. Did she say my door was boarded up? I blink in confusion. “The door was boarded up?”

McKenna pulls back, her eyes wide. “You don’t know? The front door looks like Not-Handy Manny tried to fix it.” I almost laugh at her reference of the cartoon show but am still too confused to find the humor in it.

I turn to Klutch, who’s leaning against the doorframe with Pee Wee looming behind him. “Someone boarded up my place?”

He nods, running a hand through his still-damp hair. “Sent a prospect over last night to secure it. Didn’t want anyone else getting in.”

A wave of gratitude washes over me. I don’t know what I would have done without him these past twenty-four hours. He’s been my rock in the middle of this storm, and I barely know him.

“Thank you,” I say softly.

He gives me a slight nod, his eyes conveying it’s not a big deal. But it is. To me.

Pee Wee clears his throat. “Hate to break up the moment, but we need to get to church, brother.”

Klutch straightens up and the shutters come down. He’s no longer the sweet guy who has been taking care of me. He’s Klutch. SAA of the Bastard Saints MC. A chill rushes down my spine. One that he notices instantly.

“Give me a minute.”

He crosses the room to where McKenna and I are sitting. Leaning down, he presses a kiss to my lips, soft but possessive. “I won’t be long.”

As soon as the door closes behind them, McKenna turns to me with wide eyes. “Oh. My. God. Spill. Now.”

My cheeks go hot. Shoot. I turn my head away from her, but it doesn’t make the lie any easier. “There’s nothing to spill.”

“Bullshit,” my best friend scoffs. “He just kissed you in front of Pee Wee like it was the most natural thing in the world. And your hair is wet and so was his, which means you showered together, which means...” She wiggles her eyebrows suggestively.

“Fine,” I sigh, unable to keep the smile from my face. “We slept together.”

She squeals, bouncing on the bed. “I knew it! Was it good? He looks like he’d know what he’s doing. He has that whole ‘I’ll ruin you for other men’ vibe going on.”

I laugh, shaking my head at her insanity. “It was...” I pause, searching for the right word. “Perfect.”

“Details, bitch! I need details!”

For the next hour, I give her a heavily edited version of last night and this morning. I tell her about finding my apartment trashed and Klutch bringing me here.

“What about you?” I ask, eager to get the attention off of me. “Did you stay here last night too?”

A smile spreads across her face. “I stayed at Pee Wee’s place.”

My eyes widen. “You slept with Pee Wee?”

“Not in the biblical sense,” she clarifies, rolling her eyes. “He was a perfect gentleman, if you can believe it. Slept beside me all night and never made a move.” She pushes out her bottom lip in a pout.

I raise an eyebrow, surprised. “Really?”

“Really,” she confirms.

Before I ask what was the point in taking her home with him if he wasn’t going to make a move, the door swings open, and Klutch and Pee Wee step inside. The meeting must have gone well because both men look relaxed, though Klutch’s eyes immediately seek me out as if making sure I’m still here.

Pee Wee walks over to McKenna. “Ready to go, darlin’? I’ve got errands to run.”

McKenna hops up, grabbing her purse. “See you later, Dems. Call me if you need anything.”

After they leave, Klutch sits beside me on the bed. “You okay?”

I nod, leaning into his solid warmth. “Just thinking about work tonight. I should go.”

He stiffens beside me. “You’re still planning to work?”

“I need the money, Klutch,” I remind him. “Now more than ever.”

He’s quiet for a long moment, his jaw working as if he’s grinding his teeth. “Fine,” he finally says. “But only if you let me put a prospect on you for protection.”

I pull back to look at him. “I don’t need a babysitter.”

“It’s not up for negotiation, Blue,” he says firmly. “You either let me put a man on you, or you don’t work at all.”

I want to argue, to tell him he has no right to dictate my life, but the truth is, after what happened to my apartment, I’m scared. Having someone watching my back might not be such a bad idea.

“Fine,” I concede. “But he stays out of my way.”

Klutch relaxes slightly. “Deal.”

The Underground is packed when I arrive. The prospect Klutch assigned to me, a young guy everyone calls Rookie with shaggy blonde hair and too many tattoos, shadows my every move, staying just far enough away to not be obvious but close enough to step in if needed.

I’ve been slinging drinks for about three hours when I spot a familiar figure hunched at the end of the bar. My heart does a flip.

Dad.

I make my way over to him, ignoring a customer trying to get my attention. “Dad!”

He looks up, his face breaking into a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. "Dems?" His brow furrows as he glances around the arena. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm working here." Looking him over, he looks terrible. Worse than how I found him a few days ago. The bruising has turned a sickly yellowy-green, and there are dark circles under his bloodshot eyes. He reeks of cheap whiskey.

"Where have you been?" I demand, keeping my voice low. "I've been worried sick."

His body deflates. "Around. Laying low. Trying to figure things out."

"Figure out what?" I growl. "You get yourself into all this shit with Frankie. You put it on me to bail you out and you just go and disappear?" The au-fucking-dacity. I shake my head in disbelief. "What's really going on, Bobby ? The apartment was trashed."

He has the decency to look ashamed now. "I know. I'm sorry. But I promise I'm going to fix things."

A chill runs down my spine at his words. "What does that mean? What are you planning?"

"Nothing for you to worry about," he says, patting my hand. "I've got it all under control."

That's the last thing I want to hear from him. My father having "things under control" usually means disaster is right around the corner. As pissed off as I am at him, he's still my dad and I don't want anything to happen to him.

"Dad, please," I beg, leaning closer. "Don't do anything stupid. Let me help. I'm making good money here. Maybe we can work something out with Frankie?"

“It’s too late for that,” he cuts me off, his eyes darting around nervously.

“You don’t know that!”

“I’ve got to go,” he says suddenly, sliding off the barstool.

“Dad, wait?—”

Before I can beg him not to leave, he’s gone, disappearing into the crowd. I move to follow him, but a hand on my arm stops me.

“Everything okay?” Rookie asks, his eyes trained on my father’s retreating back.

“No,” I admit, my stomach knotting with worry. “Things couldn’t be worse.”

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:59 am

Klutch

I never take women to meet my parents. Ever.

It's a rule I've lived by since I started fucking around at sixteen.

Why get their hopes up? Why make Ma think some chick is special when she's just a warm body to get my rocks off with?

But as I guide my bike onto the tree-lined street where I grew up, Blue's arms wrapped tight around my waist, I'm breaking that rule for the first time in my life.

And it scares the living shit out of me.

Not that I'd ever admit it. But this thing with Demi is moving fast. Five days ago, she was just a sexy waitress at The Underground. Now she's practically living in my suite at the clubhouse, wearing my shirts to bed, and leaving her girly shit all over my bathroom counter.

I should hate it; should be running for the fucking hills. Instead, I'm taking her to Sunday dinner at my parents' house like she's my old lady or something.

"This is where you grew up?" Demi shouts over the rumble of my bike as we pull into the driveway of my childhood home.

I cut the engine and put down the kickstand. "It is."

She climbs off the bike, removes my helmet, and shakes out her long dark hair. I can't help but watch the way it falls around her shoulders. She's fucking beautiful.

"It's nice," she says, smoothing down her sundress. "It's... normal."

I snort. "What were you expecting?"

She rolls her eyes, but her smile is nervous. "I don't know, but it wasn't this." She waves her hand out indicating the two-story with white vinyl siding, navy shutters, and a bright red door isn't what she pictured.

I chuckle. "Fair enough." Even I can see my parents' house is very cookie cutter.

"Do I look okay?" Demi bends at the knees and uses the mirror on my bike to check her hair.

"You look sexy as fuck."

"I can't believe I let you talk me into this. We're not even dating." She huffs.

"If you want hearts and flowers, baby, I'll give you hearts and flowers. But know this." I step into her space and pull her body flush with mine. "You're mine. I know it. You know it. And they'll know it the second they clap eyes on you." I smirk. This shit is moving fast, but fuck it.

The front door swings open and my mother rushes out, her face split with a grin that makes her eyes crinkle at the corners.

"Mijo!" she calls, arms already open.

I let go of Demi and bend down to hug my mother's tiny frame. "Hey, Ma."

She pulls back, her dark eyes immediately shifting to Demi. “And you must be Demi.” Without waiting for a response, she pulls Blue into a hug that seems to catch her off guard. “I’m Melina. I’ve heard so much about you.”

“You have?” Demi asks, shooting me a look over my mother’s shoulder.

I shrug. Can’t help that my Ma has ways of getting information out of me. The CIA don’t have shit on her. One phone call asking why I haven’t been by for dinner, and suddenly I’m telling her about the blue-eyed girl who’s been sleeping in my bed.

“Come in, come in,” Ma ushers us inside. “David! They’re here!”

My father appears from the kitchen, wiping his hands on a dish towel. Unlike my mother’s warm welcome, he stands back, assessing Demi with narrowed eyes before they flick to me.

“Pop,” I nod in greeting.

“Son.” He extends his hand to Demi. “So you’re the girl.”

“Dad,” I warn, but Demi just smiles and takes his hand.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Sánchez.”

“Call me Swift,” he tells her. “Everyone does.”

I watch the exchange with a tightness in my chest. My father is a tough nut to crack. As the former SAA of our club, he’s seen the worst of humanity and trusts almost no one outside the brotherhood. The fact that he’s even attempting to be civil is a miracle.

“Dinner’s almost ready,” Ma announces. “Demi, why don’t you come help me in the kitchen while the men have a drink?”

Before I can protest, my mother has linked her arm through Demi’s and is guiding her away. I move to follow, but my father’s hand on my shoulder stops me.

“Let them be,” he says. “Your mother’s been dying to get that girl alone since you mentioned her name.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” I mutter.

Pop laughs, shaking his head. “Come on. I’ve got some good whiskey hiding from your mother in my office.”

I follow him down the hall to the small room that serves as his sanctuary. He opens a drawer in his desk and pulls out a bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue Label and two glasses.

“So,” he says as he pours, “this one’s different.”

She is, but he already knows that. “Yeah.”

He hands me a glass. “How different?”

I take a sip, the expensive whiskey burning as it slides down my throat. “I don’t know, Pop.”

“Bullshit,” he calls me out on my bullshit. “You’ve never brought a woman home before. Not once in twelve years. Now suddenly you’re showing up with this girl on your arm like she’s your fucking salvation.”

I stare into my glass, unable to meet his eyes. “Can’t explain it.” I shrug. “I just know that she’s mine.”

“She has trouble written all over her.” He leans against his desk, fixing me with a hard stare. “Titan’s been digging. Her old man’s mixed up with some dangerous people.”

I knock back the rest of my whiskey and set the glass down. “What do you want me to say, Pop? That I’ll walk away? Leave her to deal with this shit on her own?”

He studies me for a long moment. “Would you? Could you walk away from her if I told you it was for the good of the club?”

The question hits me like a sucker punch. A month ago, the answer would have been simple. The club comes first. Always. It’s what I was raised to believe, what I’ve always lived by.

But now? The thought of walking away from Demi makes me feel homicidal.

“I can protect her and serve the club,” I finally say. “Those things aren’t mutually exclusive.”

My father’s expression softens. “You love her.”

I open my mouth to deny it, but the words stick in my throat. Am I in love with Demi? I don’t know. I’ve never been in love before. “I don’t know what I am,” I admit. “But I know I’m not walking away.”

Pop nods slowly. “Then you better be prepared for what’s coming.”

Before I can ask what he means, we hear laughter from the kitchen. My mother’s

musical chuckle mixed with Demi's softer one.

"We should rescue your girl before your mother starts planning your wedding," Pop says, clapping me on the shoulder.

We find them in the kitchen, Demi chopping vegetables while my mother stirs something on the stove. They're talking animatedly, and I catch the tail end of a story about me as a kid.

"—covered head to toe in mud, crying because he couldn't find his toy car!" Ma finishes, sending Demi into another fit of giggles.

"Ma," I groan. "Seriously?"

She turns, a mischievous glint in her eye. "What? Demi wants to know all about little David."

I roll my eyes. No one calls me David except my mother and the government.

"You two look cozy," I observe, moving to stand behind Demi. I can't help but place my hand on the small of her back, a possessive gesture that doesn't go unnoticed by my mother.

Her eyes twinkle with approval. "Demi's a natural in the kitchen. Unlike someone I know who can barely boil water."

"I can cook," I protest.

Demi turns to look at me, eyebrow raised. "You've never cooked for me."

"That's because we always get takeout."

“Hmm,” my mother hums disapprovingly. “A girl needs a home-cooked meal now and then, mijo.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I promise, my eyes still on Demi.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:59 am

Demi

“Nine thousand, five hundred and seventy-two dollars,” I whisper, counting the bills for the third time before tucking them into the envelope.

My fingers shake as I seal it. Almost ten thousand dollars.

I’ve been working my ass off for the past week and a half, morning and afternoon shifts at Mel’s Diner, then nights at The Underground serving drinks.

The tips at the fight club have been insane.

A couple of nights I’ve made as much as seven hundred dollars.

The idiots get wasted while watching the fights and don’t pay a lick of attention to how much cash they’re tossing around. Not that I’m complaining.

I slip the envelope into my purse and pull out my phone. Dad’s been avoiding my calls since I saw him at The Underground, but I try again anyway. It rings a few times before going to voicemail.

“Dad, it’s me. I have the money. Almost all of it. Please call me back.” I pause, tempted to add “I love you” but the words stick in my throat. Instead, I say, “Be safe,” and hang up.

There’s only four days left until Frankie’s deadline, and my father is still in the wind. I don’t know what I’m going to do if he doesn’t call me back. It’s not like I know

how to get in touch with the gangster myself. The thought alone is terrifying.

My phone in my pocket starts vibrating.

McKenna: Lunch? I'm dying for tacos. Meet at Loco's in 20?

I smile despite my worry over my dad. Kenny always knows when I need a distraction.

Me: On my way

I type out before grabbing my keys.

The second I step outside the clubhouse, I spot Rookie, my assigned babysitter for the day, crouched down beside his bike. He straightens when he sees me heading towards Klutch's truck.

"Morning, sunshine," he calls, flashing a grin that probably gets him laid on the regular.

I lift a hand and wave. "I'm meeting a friend for lunch.

" I hate having a shadow but I know it's not his fault.

He's doing what he was told. Klutch explained how the prospects have to put in their time if they want to become a fully patched member.

I get it, earning trust from the club and showing that you're dependable, but some of the stuff Klutch said the sponsors make the prospects do is kind of crazy.

Poor Rookie had to sleep in a coffin next to a dead body once.

Something about proving he could do what needed to be done. I cringe at the thought.

“Cool. I’ll follow you.”

I force a smile. Having him shadow my every move has gotten really old. Klutch insists it’s necessary, but it’s starting to make me feel like a prisoner.

“Thanks,” I reply dryly, climbing into Klutch’s truck.

With my shadow in tow, I pull out of the clubhouse gates.

Twenty minutes later, I’m sliding into the cracked leather booth across from McKenna at Loco’s Tacos.

We stumbled upon this place a few years back and now it’s our favorite hole-in-the-wall Mexican joint.

Their enchiladas are divine which is what I order when our waitress comes over. “And a Sprite to drink, please.”

“I see you still have a babysitter,” McKenna notes when the waitress leaves. I glance over my shoulder at Rookie who is seated at the bar. He insists on being close enough to watch me, but we both know it’s only an illusion of privacy.

“Yeah,” I sigh.

“So, what’s new?” Kenny asks, diving straight in like she always does.

“Nothing much,” I reply, shrugging my shoulders. “I’ve got almost all the money now for my dad.”

Her eyes widen. “Seriously? That’s amazing!”

“Yeah,” I frown, “but I can’t find him anywhere. I’m starting to really worry, Kenny.”

Her face softens as she reaches across the table to squeeze my hand. “He’ll turn up, babe. He always does.”

I nod, not convinced but grateful for her optimism. “What about you? How’s work?”

McKenna’s face darkens, her lips pressing into a thin line. “I quit.”

My brows shoot up. I wasn’t expecting that at all. “You quit? Why? I thought you and Pee Wee were really hitting it off.”

“Fuck him,” she snaps, then immediately softens. “Sorry. I’m just... pissed.”

“What happened?”

She stabs at her water with her straw. “He’s married.”

I sputter and cough, choking on the sip of Sprite I just took. No way I heard her right. “I’m sorry, what? Did you just say he’s married? How do you know?”

“I found a fucking wedding ring in his desk drawer yesterday,” she says, her voice tight with anger. “When I asked him about it, he didn’t even have the decency to lie. Just said his wife’s back in Rochester and they have an ‘understanding.’” She makes air quotes around the last word.

“Oh, Kenny.” My heart aches for her. I know how much she liked him. “I’m so sorry.”

She waves a hand dismissively. “Whatever. It’s not like we were a thing anyway. I just thought he was hot.”

She can say that all she wants but I know her better than that.

“Still,” I say gently. “It sucks.”

“Yeah, well, men are trash. What else is new?” She forces a laugh. “Enough about me. What’s up with you and your sexy biker? Please tell me something good is happening in one of our love lives.”

Guilt twists in my stomach. I feel bad admitting that things with Klutch are amazing while she’s masking a broken heart. “We’re... good.”

Her eyes narrow. “That’s it? ‘Good’? Come on, Dems. I need details to live vicariously through.”

I can’t help but smile. “Fine. He took me to meet his parents on Sunday.”

Kenny’s jaw drops. “Shut. Up. Meeting the parents already? That’s like... serious.”

“I know,” I admit, feeling my cheeks warm. “It was actually really nice. His mom is this tiny force of nature who works as a charge nurse at Saint Luke’s. She said she’d vouch for me once I get my nursing license.”

“Wait,” Kenny interrupts. “You told her about nursing school?”

I nod. “It just came up while we were cooking. She was so excited, started telling me all about the hospital and offered to help me get a job there after graduation.”

“So you’re still planning on going to school?”

“Of course,” I say firmly. “As soon as this mess with my dad is sorted.” No way in hell am I going to let my father’s screw-up derail me again. This is the last time.

Kenny studies me for a moment. “You really like him, don’t you?”

I bite my lip, trying to suppress the smile that forms whenever I think about Klutch. “Yeah. I do.”

“God, you’re glowing. It’s gross.” She laughs, shooting me a wink. “What’s he like when you’re alone? Is he still all broody and intense?”

“Sometimes,” I admit. “But he can be sweet too. He brings me coffee in bed.”

“Coffee in bed?” she waggles her brows. “Is that what the kids are calling it these days?”

I flip her off and laugh. “It’s not a euphemism for sex, shit head.”

“Hmm.” She takes a sip of her water. “Well since you brought up the sex. Still mind-blowing?”

“Kenny!” I hiss, glancing around to make sure no one heard her.

She grins. “What? You walked right into it.”

I roll my eyes but can’t stop the blush creeping up my neck. The sex with Klutch is beyond anything I could have imagined. Every night, sometimes twice, he blows my mind. He takes me apart and puts me back together again. I’ve lost count of how many times he’s made me come undone.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Kenny says smugly.

The waitress arrives with our food, momentarily saving me from Kenny's interrogation. As we dig into our plates, I catch her watching Rookie at the counter.

"What?" I ask.

A mischievous glint appears in her eye, one I've seen many times before. Usually right before we do something stupid. "You said you're sick of being followed around?"

I lower my voice. "God, yes. It's like having a puppy that never leaves your side."

"So let's ditch him."

I nearly choke on my rice. "What?"

"Come on," she urges, leaning in. "For old times' sake. Don't you want a few hours of freedom?"

I glance at Rookie, who's now fully engrossed in conversation with the busty blonde who's ignoring her tables. The thought of a few hours without being watched is tempting.

"Klutch would kill me."

"Only if he finds out," Kenny counters. "I seriously doubt your shadow's going to rat himself out."

I hesitate. Kenny senses my wavering resolve and presses on.

"We can go check your apartment. See if your dad's been there."

That gets me. I've been desperate to go back to my place, but Klutch has been adamant that it's not safe. But if my dad's there...

"Okay," I whisper. "But we have to be quick."

Kenny's face splits into a triumphant grin. "Leave it to me."

She pulls out her phone and starts texting. Twenty minutes later, there's a commotion at the front of the restaurant. A woman in a tight dress walks in and makes a beeline for Rookie, slapping him hard across the face.

"You bastard!" she shrieks, causing every head in the place to turn. "You said you'd call me!"

As Rookie stammers, confused and red-faced, Kenny grabs my hand. "Come on. Let's go!"

We slip out through the kitchen, ignoring the cook's protests. Once outside, we break into a run, laughing like idiots as we dart down the alley and around the corner.

"Who was that woman?" I gasp as we slow to a walk, a couple blocks away.

"My cousin Tara," Kenny replies, still giggling. "She works at the bodega around the corner, and she owed me fifty bucks. Now we're even."

"You're terrible," I say, but I'm laughing too.

"I'm a genius," she corrects. "Now come on, there's a bus stop two blocks over."

As we hurry toward the bus stop, I feel a lightness I haven't felt in weeks. For a moment, I'm not the daughter of a gambling addict or the girlfriend of a protective

biker who thinks I need a babysitter. I'm just Demi, having an adventure with her best friend.

The number 42 bus arrives just as we reach the stop. We climb aboard, drop our fare in the box, and find seats near the back.

"I can't believe we just did that," I say again. Klutch really isn't going to be happy if he finds out.

"Like old times," Kenny grins, bumping my shoulder with hers.

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And it is. In high school, we frequently slipped away from school without ever getting caught. As the bus lurches into motion, taking us toward the south side, I realize how much I've missed hanging out with McKenna.

"I'm sorry about Pee Wee," I say, suddenly serious.

Kenny's smile falters. "Yeah, well. Better to find out now, right?"

I nod, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. "His loss."

"Damn straight," she agrees, leaning her head against mine. "There's plenty of fish in the sea, right?"

"Right."

The bus winds through the city, passing from the nicer neighborhoods into the more run-down areas. As we get closer to our old building, anxiety starts to creep back in. What if my dad's not there?

"Maybe this isn't such a good idea," I murmur as we step off the bus.

"It's fine," Kenny assures me. "We'll pop our head in and if he's not there, we'll go."

I nod when she links her arm through mine. She's right. I'm sure it's fine.

When we reach my apartment, I'm surprised to see the makeshift repair job on the door. Boards have been nailed across the damaged area. It's secure but it looks even

shittier than it did before.

Pulling out my key, I shove it in the lock and turn. I sigh in relief when the bolt clicks, signaling it still works. I shove the door open and McKenna follows me inside.

“It’s not as bad as I thought it’d be,” McKenna says, taking in the damage.

The apartment is still a mess, though someone, probably the prospects Klutch sent over here to fix the door, made an attempt to clean it up.

“It was worse,” I admit, suddenly feeling guilty for ditching Rookie.

“Dad?” I call out, shoving the thoughts aside, and moving further into the apartment.

“Dad, are you here?”

Silence answers me.

I walk past Kenny and head down the hall. I check his bedroom, the bathroom, and the kitchen. There’s no sign of him, but his clothes are still in the closet, and there are dirty dishes in the sink. He’s at least been here recently.

“Look at this,” Kenny says, pointing to a calendar hanging on the wall.

I move closer. There’s a circle around tomorrow’s date with the word “MEET” scrawled in my father’s messy handwriting.

“Meet who?” I wonder aloud.

Kenny shrugs. “Frankie, maybe?”

I swallow the lump that forms in my throat. If my dad is planning to meet Frankie

without the money...

“I need to find him,” I say urgently.

“We will,” Kenny promises. “But first, let’s grab you some more clothes while we’re here.”

I nod, heading to my room. As I stuff clothes into a duffel bag, I can’t shake the feeling that something terrible is about to happen. The circle on the calendar, my dad’s disappearance, the trashed apartment—it all adds up to trouble.

“Ready?” Kenny asks from the doorway.

“Yeah,” I sigh, zipping up the bag. “Let’s go.”

As we’re about to head out, my phone vibrates in my pocket. It’s a text from Klutch.

Klutch: Where the fuck are you?

I wince. Rookie must have ratted us out.

“Busted?” Kenny asks, peering over my shoulder.

“Big time,” I confirm, showing her the text.

She grimaces. “Oops.”

Another text comes through.

Klutch: Answer me right fucking now.

I quickly type out a reply.

Demi: I'm fine. With Kenny. Be back soon.

His response is immediate.

Klutch: That's not what I fucking asked. WHERE. ARE. YOU?

I look at Kenny, who shrugs helplessly.

"Might as well tell him the truth," she suggests. "He's going to find out anyway."

I groan. She's right. I type out my reply and hit send.

Demi: At my apartment. Looking for my dad. We're leaving now.

Klutch: Don't fucking move

Flashing the screen at McKenna I worry my lip. He's never spoken to me like this before.

"Shit, Dems. I think he's really mad."

I'm just about to agree with her when the front door opens and in steps none other than Frankie Fish himself followed closely by one of his goons.

I grab Kenny's hand and pull her with me as I step back.

Frankie eyes the both of us up and down. "Well, well, well. If it isn't Bobby's little whore daughter and oh looky. A bonus treat." He licks his lips suggestively and my stomach turns.

“If you’re looking for my dad, he’s not here. But I—”

“Shut the fuck up, bitch,” he snarls, cutting me off before I can tell him that I have most of the money my dad owes him.

My mouth snaps shut as fear courses through my veins.

Frankie Fish is exactly as terrifying as one would imagine. Slicked-back hair, expensive suit that can’t quite hide his heavysset frame, and cold, dead eyes that remind me of a shark.

His goon, a tall man with a scar running down his cheek, closes the door behind them. I grip Kenny’s hand tighter as we take another step back.

“You know, your daddy made a lot of promises,” Frankie says, moving further into the apartment. “Always ‘next week, Frankie’ or ‘I just need a little more time.’ My patience has run out.”

“I have the money,” I blurt out, desperation making my voice crack. “Almost all of it. Nine and a half thousand. It’s in my purse.” I point to my bag on the floor.

Frankie pauses, tilting his head as if considering my offer. Then his lips spread into a sinister smile that sends ice through my veins.

“That’s cute, sweetheart. But your daddy’s deadline was yesterday. And now...” He looks me up and down again in a way that makes me feel physically ill. “Now I’m thinking there are other ways to satisfy his debt.”

Kenny steps forward, placing herself in front of me. “Back off, asshole. She said she has your money.”

“Johnny,” Frankie nods at his goon. “Shut that one up.”

It happens so fast. Johnny lunges, grabbing for Kenny while I’m shoved backward, stumbling over the coffee table. Fight or flight kicks in and Kenny reacts violently, her nails raking across Johnny’s face as she screams.

“Get your hands off her!” I yell, scrambling to my feet and launching myself at Johnny’s back.

He grunts when my body slams into him. I tighten my arms around his neck and squeeze. He grunts, throwing an elbow back and catching me in the ribs.

“Ah!” I cry out, dropping to the floor as pain explodes in my side.

Kenny keeps fighting like a wildcat, kicking and scratching at Johnny who’s trying to restrain her. “Let me go, you piece of?—”

Suddenly McKenna goes quiet and her body drops to the floor.

“No!” I scream, eyes stuck on Frankie standing over her with a pistol in his hand.

I get to my feet and stagger towards her. Johnny’s hand shoots out, latching onto my arm before I can get to her.

“He’ll kill you!,” I yell, twisting and kicking, my foot connecting with something hard. “He’ll kill you both!”

Johnny swears when my foot lands a solid kick against his shin. “You bitch.” His meaty hand is coming at my face before I can dodge it.

BAM.

Fire licks across my cheek and stars explode in my vision. I swipe my tongue over my lip, tasting blood.

“I was hoping you’d be more cooperative,” Frankie sighs, stepping over Kenny’s motionless form. “But this works too.”

Johnny yanks me against his chest, his breath hot and rancid. I struggle harder. “No!”

“I love when they scream.” Johnny’s eyes are void of any emotion as he grabs hold of the collar of my shirt and yanks. The fabric rips, exposing my shoulder and part of my bra.

“No,” I beg. “Don’t do this.” Tears spill down my cheeks. This can’t be happening. Klutch tried to warn me it wasn’t safe and I didn’t listen.

Frankie laughs. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. It won’t hurt... Much.”

Johnny’s hand starts to move up my stomach toward my chest, and I feel bile rise in my throat. I kick back wildly, somehow connecting with his groin. His grip loosens enough for me to wrench away.

I crash to the floor, scrambling backward on my hands and knees.

“You’ll pay for that.” Johnny’s face is twisted with rage. He moves lighting fast and grabs me by my shirt, lifts his fist, and lets it fly.

Pain like I’ve never felt before explodes in my head.

I’m so stunned by the strike to my temple that I don’t notice the sound of the front door opening or the energy in the room shifting to something dark and murderous.

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Klutch

An Hour Earlier

The smell of motor oil hangs in the air as I slide underneath the Camaro I'm tuning up.

My hands work on autopilot, loosening the bolts on the oil pan while my mind wanders to Demi.

Last night she fell asleep curled against my chest. This thing between us isn't something I've had before and I'm not sure what to do with it if I'm being honest. I never expected to feel this way about any woman, yet here I am.

All I know is she's mine and it's going to stay that way.

I grab hold of the socket wrench on the ground beside me and pass it over to him. "Here."

"Thanks, brother."

I finish draining the oil and roll out from under the car, wiping my hands on a shop rag.

Sanchez Auto Repair is busy today, which is good for business but means I haven't had a chance to check in with Demi.

My dad's usually the one running this place, but he's at some meeting with Denali.

He took off out of here this morning, leaving me and Yukon to handle things.

"How's that Mustang coming?" I ask, nodding toward the car Yukon's been working on.

He grins, his white teeth flashing against his dark skin. "Just finishing up. Lady who owns it is fine as fuck, too. Came in wearing a skirt that barely covers her ass."

I roll my eyes. "Focus on the car, not the bitch driving it."

"I'm a multitasker," he quips, turning as the bell over the door chimes.

The woman who walks in must be the one Yukon was talking about. She's hot, no doubt about it, but my dick's not interested in anyone but my Blue.

"Is my car ready?" the tall blonde asks as she blatantly undresses Yukon with her eyes.

He straightens up, a smirk taking over his face. Jesus fuck. Here we go. "Just finishing up, ma'am. Oil's changed, tires rotated, and I topped off all your fluids."

The double entendre isn't lost on her, and she giggles. "Well, aren't you thorough?"

"I aim to please," Yukon says, leaning against the car. "Though I noticed your brake pads are getting a little worn. Might want to think about replacing those soon."

"Oh?" She steps closer to him, twirling a strand of hair around her finger. "Is that something you could help me with?"

I snort, rolling my eyes at their flirting. “I’m gonna get back to work,” I mutter, getting back to work on the Camaro.

I focus on replacing the oil filter, tuning out Yukon trying to smooth talk our customer out of her panties. It’s nothing new. By the time I’ve refilled the oil and am tightening the cap, their voices have disappeared.

The garage is quiet. I glance around, spotting neither Yukon nor the blonde. Then I hear a muffled giggle from the direction of the bathroom.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” I mutter, shaking my head.

I grab a clean rag and wipe the oil from my hands while I wait. Sure enough, about ten minutes later, the bathroom door opens. Yukon emerges with a shit-eating grin, followed by the blonde who’s tugging at the hem of her skirt. Her lipstick is smudged and her hair has that just got fucked look.

She gives Yukon one last flirtatious smile before sashaying past me toward the front desk. I wait until she’s paid and gone before turning to Yukon with a raised eyebrow.

“The bathroom? Really?”

He shrugs, looking way too damn pleased with himself. “What? It was clean.”

“It’s a fucking bathroom,” I point out. “And it’s the middle of the day.”

“She wasn’t complaining.” He adjusts his crotch with a smirk. “Said it was the best oil change she’d ever had.”

I can’t help but laugh. “One of these days, fucking bitches in the bathroom is gonna come back to haunt you.”

Yukon grabs his dick through his coveralls. “Can’t help it if all the bitches want this.”

“Jesus Christ,” I snort, tossing the dirty rag at him. “You’re a fucking animal.”

“Just living the dream, brother.” He catches the rag and wipes his hands. “What’s up with you and the hot bitch you’ve been bangin’?”

My lips twitch at the mention of Demi. “Good.”

“Good?” Yukon repeats with a skeptical look. “Brother, you’ve been playing house with this chick for two weeks. That’s a record for you.”

I shrug. “She’s mine.”

He studies me for a moment, then shakes his head. “Pussy struck. Ain’t ever happening to me.”

Before I can tell him to get fucked, my phone starts ringing. I fish it out of my pocket, frowning when I see Rookie’s name on the screen.

“What?” I answer.

“Fuck, Klutch, I’m sorry,” Rookie’s voice comes through, panicked. “She fucking took off. Her and her friend. Some crazy bitch showed up at the restaurant and caused a scene, and by the time I handled it, they were gone.”

My blood runs cold. “What do you mean she took off?”

“They ditched me, man. I’ve been driving around for twenty minutes looking for them.”

“You had one fucking job,” I growl, my grip tightening on the phone. “One. Fucking. Job.”

“I know, I’m sorry?—“

“Shut up.” I cut him off, already moving toward the door. “If anything happens to her, you’re a fucking dead man. You hear me, prospect?”

“Fuck.” He groans.

I hang up and immediately text Demi.

Klutch: Where the fuck are you?

I watch the screen, seeing the message marked as read, but no reply comes. My jaw clenches as I type again.

Klutch: Answer me right fucking now.

After what feels like an eternity, her reply comes through.

Blue: I’m fine. With Kenny. Be back soon.

Oh, she thinks she’s fucking cute. “I’m going to spank her ass for this shit,” I growl, thumbs flying across the screen of my phone.

Klutch That’s not what I fucking asked. WHERE. ARE. YOU?

Dots dance across the screen then disappear. Then dance again before her reply comes through.

Blue: At my apartment. Checking on my dad. We're leaving now.

Fuck. She went back to her apartment? After everything I've done to keep her away from there? I tap out another message, my anger growing.

Klutch: Don't fucking move.

I shove my phone back in my pocket and turn to Yukon. "I gotta go. Demi ditched Rookie and went back to her apartment."

Yukon's brow shoots up. "Shit. Need backup?"

"No, I got this. Just tell my dad I'll be back when I can."

I don't wait for his response, just storm out of the garage and jump on my bike. The engine roars to life, and I tear out of the parking lot, pushing the speed limit to get to her.

My mind races with all the shit that could have happened to her.

What the fuck was she thinking? That apartment isn't safe.

I told her point blank this morning that whoever broke into her place could come back.

That Twenty G's is a whole lot of fucking incentive to use her to get to him.

But does she fucking listen? Hell no. And ditching Rookie?

After I explained why I wanted a man on her?

My temper flares to new heights and rage burns in my chest, making it hard to breathe.

When I finally reach her building, I'm ready to tear her a new asshole. My first thought is how fucking childish can she be, but I quickly remember how young she actually is. Eighteen to my twenty-eight.

I kick down my kickstand, kill the motor, and suck in a deep breath to calm down. Or at least I try to. Unfortunately for my girl, it's not fucking helping.

Jumping off my bike, I haul ass up the stairs, taking them two at a time. When I find her door unlocked I feel like I'm about to go nuclear. Stupid. Anyone could walk in while she's here alone. Shaking my head, I shove it open, ready to chew her ass out only to freeze in my tracks at what I see.

My vision narrows to a pinpoint at the sight of a man with his fist raised, Demi on the floor beneath him, her lip bleeding and terror in her eyes.

Time slows down. Blood roars in my ears.

Without thought, I'm across the room. My hand closes around his raised fist before it can descend. With a brutal twist, I snap this fucker's wrist like a twig.

His scream pierces the air as I pivot, using the momentum to slam him face-first into the yellowed wall. The drywall cracks from the impact, blood spraying from his shattered nose as he crumbles to the floor.

"Klutch!" Demi's voice sounds far away.

The suited man is reaching for something inside his jacket. I don't give him time to grab whatever it is. My boot connects with his knee, and the sickening crunch of

ligaments tearing is followed by his howl of pain.

“You fucked up,” I growl. “Nobody touches my woman!”

In haze of rage I grab hold of the fat fucker’s hair and slam my knee into his face.

He falls lifeless to the floor. Turning my attention back to his partner on the ground, I kick him in the ribs— once, twice, and again.

Every strike is calculated for maximum pain.

These men hurt my woman. I have no doubt they had plans to do worse.

There’s only one appropriate response in my world. They have to fucking die.

I barely register Demi scrambling to check on McKenna. All I can see is red as I systematically work to break these motherfuckers who put their hands on my girl.

“Klutch, stop!” Demi’s voice finally cuts through the haze. “You’re going to kill them!”

I pause, my fist midair, and look up at her. Her face is tear-streaked, a bruise forming on her cheek, but her eyes are clear and locked on mine.

“Please,” she whispers. “Don’t.”

The fear in her voice pulls me back from the edge. I look down at the men beneath me, barely recognizable now. The suited one, who I realize only now is Frankie Fish, is gurgling. His enforcer isn’t moving at all.

Before I can decide what to do next, the door flies open again. Beast and Yukon burst

in, weapons drawn, followed closely by Pee Wee.

“Jesus fuck,” Beast mutters, taking in the scene.

“Check on the girls,” I order, my voice eerily calm considering what I’ve just done.

Pee Wee immediately goes to McKenna, who’s starting to stir. Yukon secures the apartment while Beast comes to stand beside me, looking down at the bloodied men.

“This Frankie?” he asks, nudging the fat fucker with his boot.

I nod. “And his muscle.”

“Alive?”

“For now.”

Beast’s expression darkens as he looks over at Demi, noting her injuries. “Want me to finish it?”

Part of me wants to say yes. These men were going to hurt Demi in ways I don’t even want to think about. They deserve to die for that alone.

But then I look over at her again. She’s watching me, those blue eyes wide with fear.

“Not yet,” I finally say. “Need to take them to Denali.”

Frankie’s eyes widen at the mention of Prez’s name.

Good. He should be fucking scared.

“Blue,” my voice is void of emotion. “Go with Pee Wee. He’ll take you and McKenna to the clubhouse.”

She hesitates. “What about you?”

“I’ll be right behind you. Need to clean up this mess first.”

Tears spill down her cheeks. “Klutch, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have?—”

“Later,” I cut her off harshly.

She flinches and I feel like an asshole. After what she’s just been through she needs to be handled with care.

Fuck.

I suck in a slow deep breath and try again, more carefully this time, “We’ll talk about it later, baby. Right now, I need you to go with Pee Wee, okay?”

She nods, tears dripping down her cheeks, but thankfully allows Pee Wee to help her up. McKenna is fully conscious now, holding a hand to her head and looking dazed.

“Take my truck,” I tell my VP, tossing him the keys from my pocket. “It’s parked out front.”

As they head for the door, Demi suddenly stops. “Wait,” she starts, her voice shaky. “I need to know.” She looks directly at Frankie. “My dad. Where is he?”

Frankie spits blood onto the dirty carpet, a twisted smile forming on his battered face. “Dead.”

Demi's face crumples, a wail of pure anguish tearing from her throat. Pee Wee catches her as her knees buckle, scooping her up into his arms.

"Get her out of here," I growl, fighting the urge to put a bullet in Frankie's head right here and now.

Once they're gone, I turn back to the men on the floor. The rage I felt earlier is gone, replaced by the cold blooded killer I am.

"Bag 'em," I order Beast and Yukon. "We're taking them to the crematory."

"Denali okay that?" Yukon asks.

"He will."

The enforcers move quickly, binding Johnny and Frankie with zip ties and hauling them to their feet.

"You're dead," Frankie manages to get out around his broken jaw. "All of you. You have no idea who I am... who I'm connected to."

I step close to him, gripping his jaw hard enough to make him whimper. "No, motherfucker. You don't know who we are. But you're about to find out."

I let go of him and watch as Beast and Yukon drag them out to the van parked in the alley behind the building.

Once they're gone, I take a moment to survey the apartment. There's blood on the walls, the furniture is overturned, Demi's bag is spilled across the floor. The memory of her torn shirt makes my fists clench again.

My phone buzzes in my pocket. It's Denali.

"Yeah," I answer.

"Pee Wee just called. The girls okay?"

"Shaken up. Demi took a few hits. McKenna might have a concussion. They'll be alright." Physically anyway. Emotionally? I'm not sure my baby will ever be the same.

"And Frankie?"

"Beast and Yukon are bringing him and his partner to the crematory now."

There's a pause. "You can't kill him, Klutch. He works for the Valenciaga family. He's their right hand man."

"Valenciaga can fuck off," I snap. "They put their hands on my girl, D. They were going to rape them—both of them." I pause, breathing heavily.

"Klutch—"

"He killed her father! I know you're trying to keep the peace, D, but I'm about to send a real clear fucking message about what happens when you mess Bastard Saints property."

The only sound is Denali breathing. "Yeah. Just know this is going to cause blowback."

I've already weighed the consequences and I don't give a flying fuck. Nobody touches my girl and lives to tell the tale. No. Fucking. Body.

“Can’t let this slide, Prez. Not this time.” I’m not willing to let this go.

“I know.” He hangs up.

I take one last look around the apartment just as Diablo and his crew come in. “You got this?” I ask the cleaner unnecessarily.

“Yep. You can take off. We’ll get this all cleaned up.”

“Thanks, brother.” I’m about to head for the door when something catches my eye. On the floor is Demi’s envelope she’s been stuffing with bills. I pick it up and count out nearly ten grand.

Fuck me.

My girl’s pop is dead.

After all her hard work, Frankie killed him anyway.

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Demi

Every bump in the road sends a sharp pain radiating through my ribs, but it's nothing compared to the ache in my chest. I feel like my heart has been sliced open and I'm bleeding out. It hurts. God does it hurt.

Dad is dead.

The words echo in my head, but they don't feel real.

"We're here," Pee Wee announces, his voice uncharacteristically gentle as he pulls through the clubhouse gates.

Kenny shifts beside me in the backseat, her hand still pressed to her temple where Frankie struck her. "Thank God," she mutters. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

Pee Wee parks in front of the door, kills the engine, and jumps out. He rushes around to our side and opens the door "Let me help you, Princess," he says, reaching for McKenna first with surprising care.

"Get your hands off me!" she snaps, then immediately winces and grabs her head. "Shit."

Pee Wee holds his hands up in surrender. "Fine. Have it your way." But when she sways on her feet after climbing out, he steadies her anyway, earning himself another death glare.

I don't have the energy to fight when he turns to help me. My entire body feels like I've gone ten rounds in the ring. "Thanks." I swipe my tongue across my split lip and wince.

"Welcome, darlin'. Let's get you both checked out," he says, and the unexpected gentleness in his voice nearly breaks me.

Hold it together, Demi. You can fall apart later.

Pee Wee holds the clubhouse door open. It's surprisingly quiet.

I don't know why I was expecting the usual chaos—music blaring, half-naked women, bikers drinking and shouting.

I should have known better. I mean, it's the middle of the day and everyone is at work.

Contrary to popular belief most of these guys work a day job just like everyone else.

"This way," Pee Wee motions for us to head down a hallway I've never been down before. He pushes open a door, revealing what looks like a small medical room. There's a gurney, glass front cabinets full of supplies, and other medical equipment.

"What is this place?"

"Infirmary," Pee Wee answers, helping me onto one of the gurneys. "Sometimes we have to take care of shit ourselves. Hospitals ask too many questions."

Kenny climbs onto the other gurney, her face pale. "I think I'm gonna throw up."

"Bucket's right there if you need it," Pee Wee says, pointing to a metal basin.

The door opens and a man I've never seen before walks in.

He's tall with broad shoulders that strain against his black t-shirt.

His brown hair is cut short, and he has the most striking jade green eyes I've ever seen.

There's something steady about him, controlled, like he's seen the worst the world has to offer and isn't easily rattled.

"This is Bravo," Pee Wee introduces. "Club's medic."

Bravo nods, immediately moving to Kenny. "What happened?" he asks, his voice deep and calm.

"Got pistol-whipped," she mumbles.

He tips her head to the side and probes the wound with his fingers.

"Ow!" She winces.

"Easy!" Pee Wee growls.

"Sorry, Veep. Gotta see how deep it is."

He takes a penlight from his pocket and shines it in her eyes. "Follow the light," he instructs.

"How bad is it?" Pee Wee asks, moving closer.

He moves the light left then right, watching Kenny's eyes. After a moment, he

frowns. “She’s got a concussion.”

“No shit,” Kenny mutters.

“She’ll be fine. Just keep an eye on her for the next seventy-two hours.” Bravo tucks the light back into his pocket and turns to me. His eyes catalog my injuries. “And you?”

“I’m fine,” I lie.

His mouth quirks in what might be amusement. “Sure you are.” He steps closer, gently tilting my chin to examine my split lip. “This needs some glue.”

“Is that necessary?”

“I can put a stitch in if you’d rather,” he arches a brow.

Yeah, no. I don’t think so .

I shake my head. I hate needles. “Glue is fine.”

Bravo works quickly, cleaning the gash first. When he applies the medical adhesive, it burns like fire.

“Shit!” I hiss, recoiling.

“Sorry,” he says, but the twinkle in his eyes says he’s not really. “But it’s better than stitches. Will heal faster too.”

I nod, trying not to cry. It’s not the pain— I’ve had worse.

It's everything else. My dad is dead. I was nearly raped.

And Klutch... I've never seen him like that before.

Even when he's in that cage fighting. He attacked them both, and there's not a doubt in my mind he wanted to do worse— that he would have done worse if I hadn't stopped him.

And now... he's god knows where doing god knows what to those men because of me.

"Where's Klutch?" I ask, finally voicing the question that's been burning in my mind. "Is he... is he going to kill Frankie?"

Pee Wee and Bravo exchange a look that sends chills down my spine.

"No darlin'," he says, unable to meet my eyes. He's lying. "Don't you worry 'bout that."

"But—"

"Club business isn't for you to worry about, Sweetheart," Bravo says just as cool as if he were telling me the weather. "Now," he continues, lifting the edge of my torn shirt. "I need to check your ribs."

He pushes on the purple coloring already formed on my side.

"Ow!" I squeeze my eyes shut. Son-of-a... That freaking hurts.

"The good news is that nothing is broken," he pronounces after a thorough examination. "They are badly bruised though. You're gonna be sore as hell for a

while.”

I nod, tears welling in my eyes. That I believe.

“Do you want something for the pain?” Bravo asks, his voice softening as he notices my tears.

I shake my head. “I’m okay.”

It’s a lie, and we all know it, but he doesn’t call me on it.

“Alright. Rest up. Don’t move around too much.” He turns to Pee Wee. “I need to talk to you.”

The two men step just outside the door, speaking in hushed tones. I can’t make out what they’re saying, but Pee Wee’s posture is tense, his shoulders rigid.

With them out of the room, Kenny slides off her gurney and makes her way to mine. Without a word, she climbs up beside me and wraps her arms around me, careful to avoid my bruised ribs.

“I’m so sorry, Dems,” she whispers.

Something breaks inside me at her words. The dam I’ve been desperately trying to hold together crumbles, and all the emotions I’ve been suppressing come flooding out.

“He’s dead, Kenny. My dad is dead,” I choke out, burying my face in her shoulder. “Frankie killed him. He’s gone.”

“Shh, it’s okay, Dems. It’s okay. I’ve got you,” she murmurs, stroking my hair as I

fall apart in her arms.

But it's not okay. It will never be okay again. My dad, for all his faults, was the only family I had left. And now he's gone, just like my mom. I'm completely alone now.

"What am I going to do?" I sob. "I don't have anyone left."

"That's not true," Kenny insists, pulling back to look me in the eyes. "You have me. You've always had me."

I nod, trying to draw comfort from her words, but the hole in my heart feels bottomless. "I keep thinking about the last time I saw him at The Underground. He said he was going to fix things." My voice breaks. "I should have stopped him. Made him tell me what he was planning."

"This isn't your fault," my best friend says firmly. "None of this is your fault."

I wipe at my tears, wincing when my hand brushes my injured lip. "I should have listened to Klutch. He told me to stay away from the apartment, but I went anyway. And look what happened to us."

Kenny pulls me closer. "We'll get through this, Dems. We always do."

But as I cling to my best friend, I'm not so sure. There's no fixing this. He's gone forever.

The door opens, and Bravo steps back in. His expression softens when he sees me crying in Kenny's arms.

"I'm sorry about your father," he says quietly.

I look up, surprised. “How did you?—”

“News travels fast in the clubhouse,” he explains. “You should try to rest. It’s going to be a long night.”

As he leaves, Kenny adjusts her position to make us both more comfortable. “Try to sleep, Dems. I’ll wake you when Klutch comes back.”

I close my eyes, exhaustion dragging me down.

But even as I drift off, one thought keeps circling in my mind.

What happens now?

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:59 am

Klutch

The world is a goddamn filthy place and I'm the bastard about to make it even dirtier.

That's the thought in my head as I pull up to Eternal Peace, the funeral home the club owns.

The building is unassuming—beige siding, tasteful sign, even some fucking flowers planted out front.

No one would ever guess the torture and murder that happens in the basement when someone fucks with us.

Cutting the motor, I sit on my bike for a minute, trying to calm the monster inside me begging to unleash payback on those who hurt my woman. "Motherfuckers."

I can still see Demi's battered face staring up at me full of fear, her busted lip that will no doubt leave a scar, and the desperation in those blue eyes I've grown to need more than my next breath.

I know what pieces of shit like Frankie and his sidekick do to women.

I've seen the aftermath. If I hadn't shown up when I did. ..

My hands clench around the handlebars, knuckles going white. The rage inside me feels like a living thing, clawing at my insides, demanding blood.

I dismount and head around the building to the back entrance. Undertaker's standing there waiting, his usually relaxed expression is gone, and in its place is a look of fury.

"They're downstairs," he says, holding the door open. "Yukon and Beast started without you."

I nod, too furious to speak.

The hallway leading to the basement is lit by a single bulb in the ceiling, the walls are painted a soothing sage green. Calming colors for grieving families who have no fucking clue of the depravity that goes on below their feet.

As I make my way down the stairs, each step starts to feel lighter than the last. These fuckers wanted blood. A flash of Demi on the floor in her apartment with her shirt torn flashes in my mind. Instinctively I ball my fists. I'm about to make these motherfuckers pay.

The basement door is solid steel, reinforced and soundproofed. I punch in the code and the lock disengages. When I push it open, the smell of bleach and copper hits me first.

Beast looks up when I enter, his face like stone.

Yukon's leaning against the wall, arms crossed over his chest. And there, in the center of the room, are Frankie and fuckboy Johnny, tied to metal chairs that are bolted to the concrete floor.

A drain sits in the middle of the room, right between them. Convenient? Sure as fuck is.

That's the thing about funeral homes—blood and DNA are expected. Add the

industrial-sized incinerator in the next room, and you've got the perfect place to make all your problems disappear.

"Well, look who finally decided to join the party," Frankie sneers, his face still swollen and bloody from our earlier meeting. "The attack dog himself."

I don't respond. Don't even look at him as I walk to the steel tool chest in the corner of the room.

"You have any idea who I work for?" he continues, his voice taking on an edge of panic now. "You kill me, and the Valenciana Cartel will rain hell down on you and your little club of losers. They'll burn your clubhouse to the ground with everyone inside!"

I open the top drawer of the chest, still ignoring him.

"That pretty little bitch of yours?" Frankie taunts. "They'll pass her around until there's nothing left but a shell."

My hand closes around a roll of duct tape. I turn, my expression blank as I walk toward him. His eyes widen slightly, finally sensing that his words aren't having the effect he hoped for.

"You should shut your mouth," Yukon warns him, but it's too late for warnings.

I tear off a strip of tape and slap it over Frankie's mouth. Then I methodically secure his hands to the arms of the chair, wrapping the tape tight enough to cut off circulation.

"Get fucked," Johnny spits at Yukon.

Beast's fist connects with Johnny's jaw before the last syllable is out. There's a sickening crunch, and a tooth skitters across the concrete floor.

"Nice hook," I comment, my voice eerily calm even to my own ears.

Beast flexes his hand. "Thanks, brother."

Turning back to the tool chest, I open the third drawer—the one with my specialty tools. My fingers close around a pair of shrub shears and a small blow torch. Gardening tools, technically. But they work just as well for other things.

Frankie's eyes bulge when he sees what I'm carrying. He starts thrashing in his chair, muffled screams trying to force their way past the tape.

Without saying a word, without giving him time to brace himself, I position the shears around his pinky finger and squeeze the handles shut. There's resistance, then a wet snap as the finger drops to the floor.

Frankie's muffled screams break through the tape as blood spurts from the stump where his finger used to be, painting the concrete in crimson splatter.

I flick on the blow torch, the small blue flame dancing in the dim room. His eyes widen in horror as I bring it to the wound, cauterizing it with a sickening sizzle and the smell of burning flesh.

When I rip the tape from his mouth, Frankie's face is ashen, sweat pouring down his forehead as drool drips from his mouth.

"You have no fucking idea the war you've just started," he snarls, spit flying everywhere.

I laugh, but there's not an ounce of humor in it.

Nothing about what happened to my woman today is funny.

"The war I've started? Motherfucker, you shot up our clubhouse.

" I move closer, getting right in his face.

"Yeah, bitch. I saw the black Escalade in the parking lot at my woman's apartment.

Same one that was spotted driving away from our clubhouse after the drive-by three weeks ago. "

Frankie's eyes dart away, and I know I've hit the mark.

"Wait," Johnny pipes up, his voice pitched high. Fucker is scared and for good reason. "I've got information. I'll trade you!" He looks to Frankie then back to me. "Information for my life."

"Johnny, shut the fuck up!" Frankie roars.

Johnny's head whips back toward his boss. "Fuck you! I'm not dying over this shit!"

I tilt my head from side to side as I consider the proposition. Information for his life... Finally I shrug my shoulders. Fuck it. "All right. Talk."

"The Renegades," he blurts out, wasting no time. "They're working with the Valenciana Cartel. Trafficking women."

My blood runs cold. The Renegade Bastards. The club we split from nine months ago when they decided to get into human trafficking. Fuck. This isn't good news.

“Shut your goddamn mouth!” Frankie screams, his face an alarming shade of red.

I ignore him. “How?”

Johnny licks his bloody lips. “They’re snatching up women from all over. Here, Cali, Vegas, Nashville. You name the big city and they are grabbing bitches and sending them down to Jacksonville. From there, they’re auctioned off to the highest bidders. Rich guys mostly. A lot go overseas.”

My stomach turns. There’s dirty business, and then there’s this kind of filth. Even at our worst, the Bastard Saints never went near trafficking. Hurting women and children is a hard line we will never cross.

“And the hit on our clubhouse?” I ask.

“The Renegades ordered it,” Johnny confirms. “They’re pissed you left the club and joined ranks with the Saints. They want blood. Rogue especially. Says you’re all traitors who need to be put down.”

Rogue. My former Prez and the cocksucker who put money over family when he brought it to the table he wanted to get into the skin trade.

“Is that all you know?” I ask, studying Johnny’s face.

He nods frantically. “That’s everything, I swear to God.”

I believe him. Not because I trust him, but because fear has a way of making men honest. And right now, Johnny stinks of fear.

I nod, processing what he’s told me. Then I turn back to Frankie, pull out my Glock, and shoot him point-blank between the eyes.

The report is deafening in the concrete room. Blood and brain matter spray the wall behind him. His body slumps forward, held up only by the restraints.

“Wait!” Johnny screams, thrashing in his chair. “We had a deal! I told you everything!”

I turn to him, a smirk playing on my lips. “You put your hands on my property.” I aim the Glock at his forehead. “This is for Blue.”

The second shot echoes around the room. Johnny’s head snaps back, a perfect round hole appearing in his forehead before his chin drops to his chest.

For a moment, the room is silent except for the ringing in my ears.

“Well, that was fucking messy,” Beast says like he’s talking about the weather.

I shrug, tucking my gun back into the holster. “Needed to be done.”

Yukon pushes off the wall, coming to stand beside me. “Never seen you lose it like that.”

That’s because I’ve never lost my shit before. I’ve always been able to keep my cool. “They put their hands on my woman.”

“Looks like we’ve found your kryptonite.”

I narrow my eyes at him. “I don’t have any fucking kryptonite. You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.” Even as I say the words I know they’re a lie. Demi is under my skin now.

“What he said about the Renegades and the trafficking... That’s fucked up,” Yukon

says, changing the subject.

Turning my attention to him I agree, “Yeah. It is. But it makes sense. It’s why we split in the first place. Rogue wanted to expand into that business, and we wouldn’t stand for it.”

“Denali needs to know,” Beast says. “Pee Wee too.”

“Yeah.” I sigh. What a fucking shit shot. “But first, we need to clean this shit up.”

We work quickly, wrapping the bodies in plastic before dragging them to the next room.

“Hold up,” Undertaker says. He walks over to a long cart and slides what looks like a piece of cardboard the size of a body from the rack.

“What’s that for?” I ask. I usually don’t stick around for this part. My job is to get information by whatever means are necessary. Cleaning up the bodies... not my job.

“To put the bodies on.” He carries the cardboard over to the metal furnace table and lays it down. “There.”

Yukon and Beast waste no time tossing Frankie and Johnny’s body onto the cardboard covered slab.

“Huh. You learn something new every day.”

Yukon nods in agreement. “Knowledge is power.”

Undertaker rolls the slab into the furnace and closes the door. With a flip of a switch the incinerator roars to life, flames licking at the inside walls. It takes hours for a

body to burn completely, but when it's done, there's nothing left but ash.

As we watch the bodies go up in flames, I can't help but think about Demi.

"You good, brother?" Yukon asks.

I nod, my mind is already racing ahead. The club will handle the Renegades, but I've got other priorities now. Demi needs me. She's grieving, hurt, and probably scared out of her mind after what happened today.

And if the Renegades are as pissed as Johnny claimed, she might be a target. I need to keep her safe, no matter what.

"Let's finish up here," I say. "I need to get back to the clubhouse."

Back to my woman.

She's my priority now.

My kryptonite.

Demi

My world feels like it's been shattered into a million pieces. Another sob tears from my chest as I struggle to catch my breath. "H-he-he's gone." The words come out stuttered and broken even to my own ears.

"I know, sweetie." McKenna's arms tighten around me, but her warmth does nothing to chase away the cold reality.

My dad is dead—gone. Frankie killed him.

I press my face harder against her shoulder, fists clenching at the fabric of her shirt. "Oh God, it hurts so bad." Like someone has hollowed out my chest with a rusty spoon.

"Shh, it's okay," Kenny whispers into my hair, but her voice breaks on the last word. "I hope Klutch kills those bastards. I hope he makes them suffer."

The fact that he's probably doing exactly that makes me cry. Guilt crashes over me in waves. "It's my fault. I shouldn't have?—"

"Don't you dare," Kenny cuts me off, pulling back to look me in the eyes. Her face is fierce despite the dark purple bruise at her temple. "Those fuckers are getting what they deserve. They were going to rape us, Demi!"

The raw pain in her voice makes me pause. McKenna's eyes shine with unshed tears, her bottom lip trembling. It hits me then that she's barely holding it together. She

nearly got assaulted too. Because of me. Because I dragged her into this mess.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, wrapping my arms around her this time. “Kenny, I’m so sorry.”

“Stop apologizing,” she snaps, eyes narrowed. “It’s not your fault your dad got mixed up with those pigs.”

It was my fault. I was the one complaining about Rookie following me around everywhere. If we hadn't given him the slip, we would have finished our food under the watchful eye of the man Klutch trusted to protect me. We would have been safe.

Shifting on the gurney, I try to find a more comfortable position, and wince as pain shoots through my ribs. Every breath hurts, but it’s nothing compared to the ache in my heart.

My mind is racing with a million questions that need answers.

Why did Frankie kill my dad? What was he doing back at the apartment if my dad was already dead?

Where is Klutch? What is he doing right now?

Klutch... The look on his face when he saw me on the floor flashes through my mind.

His eyes were cold—detached. And the way he brutally attacked Frankie and Johnny.

It was like watching a stranger take over, someone dangerous and lethal.

As if my thoughts could summon the man himself, the infirmary door slowly swings open. I lift up on my elbow and look over my shoulder. Standing there like a fallen

angel is the man who has consumed me body and soul. Klutch eyes lock onto mine before methodically scanning over my injuries.

“Blue,” he says, his voice completely devoid of emotion.

The hair on the back of my neck stands on end at the haunted look on his face. My eyes track over him, taking in the evidence of what he’s done—blood splattered across his shirt, his bruised and split knuckles, a smear of something dark across his neck.

McKenna slides off the gurney, giving my hand a gentle squeeze. “I’m gonna go,” she mumbles, pointing to the door.

Klutch steps aside to let her pass, then approaches the bed, sitting down carefully on the edge.

The mattress creaks under his weight, and I find myself shrinking back instinctively.

I’ve never been scared of him before, but this feels different.

Like something dark is lurking under the surface waiting to strike.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, the words tumbling out. “I should have listened to you. You were trying to keep me?—”

“They could have hurt you,” he snaps, cutting me off. His jaw clenching so tight I can see the muscle jumping beneath his skin.

I’ve never seen him like this—so tightly wound, so close to the edge. I scoot back a little further, suddenly unsure.

His expression softens just a fraction when he notices my retreat. With a gentleness that contrasts the fury radiating from him, he reaches out and grasps my chin, tilting my face up to examine my split lip and bruised cheek.

“I’d kill them all over again if I could,” he says quietly, his thumb brushing just below the cut on my lip.

Something breaks inside me at his words. All the fear, all the grief, all the guilt comes rushing out in a flood of tears.

“I don’t want this,” I sob, my whole body shaking. “I don’t want to be the reason you hurt people. I don’t want to be the cause of more violence. My dad is dead because of me. Because I couldn’t stop him, couldn’t save him, and now you’re—you’re?—”

“Stop!” Klutch commands, his hands moving to frame my face. “Listen to me, Blue. This isn’t on you. None of it. Your dad made his choices. Frankie made his. And I made mine.”

“But if I hadn’t gone to the apartment?—”

“Then they would have found you somewhere else,” he cuts in, his eyes burning into mine. “Men like that don’t stop. They don’t give up. They would have hunted you down eventually.”

I shake my head, unable to accept his logic through the thick fog of grief and guilt. “I’m afraid of what killing them will do to you.” That it will change him.

“Don’t you get it?” he asks, his voice dropping to a rough whisper. “You’re mine, Blue. I’d kill for you. Die for you! That’s what you mean to me.”

I hold his stare and can see the truth in his eyes. This man who is capable of such

violence would give his life for mine. That's not what I want. If anything happened to him...

I open my mouth to say as much when the infirmary door opens again.

Bravo steps back in, medical bag in hand.

"Sorry to interrupt," he says, though he doesn't sound particularly sorry. "I'm about to head back to work and wanted to see if you'd changed your mind about some pain meds." He quirks a brow.

My brows pinch. Work? I thought everyone worked for the club. "Work?" I ask, voicing my thoughts.

"I'm a doctor over at Memorial. I work swing shift in the Emergency Room." Memorial Hospital is where Klutch's mom works. Small world.

Bravo moves to my side, his clinical gaze assessing. "So? Pain meds?" he asks again, checking his watch. He must be in a hurry.

I open my mouth to decline again, but my bossy boyfriend decides to answer for me. "Yes. She needs something."

I want to argue that I can decide for myself, but the look in Klutch's eyes stops me dead in my tracks. He needs this. He needs to take care of me right now. After what I've been through—what he's done for me—I surrender and give him that.

"Okay," I agree softly.

Bravo nods, pulling a small bottle from his bag and shaking two tablets into his palm. "These will help with the pain and help you sleep."

Klutch reaches for the water pitcher on the side table and fills a glass half full. “Here, baby.”

“Thanks,” I take the glass then grab the pills out of Bravo’s hand. I toss the little white capsules into my mouth and chase them down with the water.

As I hand the glass back to Klutch, the door opens yet again.

Denali steps into the room first, followed closely by Pee Wee who has McKenna curled into his side.

It’s a shame he’s married. The giant of a man and she would have made a cute couple.

Although, judging by the sight of them now, maybe that isn’t entirely out of the question.

“How are you feeling, darlin’?” Denali asks, coming to stand at the foot of my bed.

“Like I got hit by a Mack truck,” I admit, wincing as I shift again.

His mouth turns down in a frown as he looks to Klutch for an answer. “Is it done?”

“They won’t be a problem anymore.

Denali nods his head then turns his full attention on me. “Sorry to hear about your pop, sweetheart.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry about your dad,” Pee Wee adds, his voice a deep baritone. “We’ll find him. Give him a proper burial.”

Fresh tears spring to my eyes at his words. “Thank you. All of you,” I whisper.

Klutch stands suddenly, his posture rigid. “She needs rest,” he announces, the statement brooking no room for any arguments.

Denali nods, seeming to understand something in Klutch’s tone that I don’t. “Of course. We’ll talk later.”

As everyone heads out, McKenna gives me one last look over her shoulder. “I’ll check on you in the morning,” she promises.

Once everyone vacates the room, Klutch scoops me up into his arms, cradling me against his chest like I weigh nothing. “Hold onto me, Blue.”

I loop my arms around his neck and rest my head against his shoulder.

“Good girl.”

He carries me out of the infirmary and up the stairs to his room. The clubhouse is quiet, much quieter than usual. I wonder if everyone knows what happened, if they’re giving us space or if they’ve been warned to stay away. Either way I’m grateful.

I expect him to set me down when we get inside the suite, but he doesn’t. He bypasses everything, going straight to his room. As if I’m made of glass, he gently sets me on the end of his bed.

“Klutch?” I eye him carefully.

“Quiet, baby.”

I watch silently as he drops to his knees in front of me. “Lift your arms.”

My arms go up and he carefully lifts my shirt up and over my head. Next to go is my bra and then my shoes, socks and shorts. Every move he makes is clinical.

“I wish I could bring them back and kill them again,” he growls as his eyes rake over the bruises already formed on my skin.

“I’m okay.” We both know it’s a lie, but I can’t bear to hear him talk about killing anyone else. Even if it’s them again.

“Put this on.” He reaches for one of his folded t-shirts on the dresser. Before he can slip it over my head, I grab his wrist.

“Make me forget,” I whisper, my voice cracking. “Please. Just for a little while. Make me forget everything but us.”

Klutch freezes, his eyes darkening as they roam over my nearly naked body. “Blue,” he says, his voice strained. “I don’t think that’s a good idea right now.”

“Please,” I beg, desperate to feel something other than this overwhelming grief and guilt. “I need you.”

“I’m not in a state of mind to be gentle,” he warns, his hands clenching at his sides.

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I meet his gaze unflinchingly. “Then fuck me hard.”

A growl rumbles deep in his chest, and something wild flashes in his eyes.

Grabbing the collar of his shirt he yanks off his shirt. I eat up the sight of his muscular chest and abs decorated in colorful ink. He’s beautiful. The most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.

“Like what you see?” He smirks.

My eyes lift to his. “Yes.”

His eyes darken as he pulls off his jeans and boxers.

I scooch up the bed as my eyes take in every naked inch of him. Saliva pools in my mouth at the sight.

Putting a knee to the mattress, he climbs up until he’s looming over me, all raw power and barely leashed control. “You sure about this?”

“Yes,” I breathe, reaching for him, needing to feel him inside me.

Klutch catches my wrists in one of his large hands and pins them above my head as he settles between my thighs. Pain shoots through my ribs but I grit my teeth and ignore it. I need this—need him.

With a growl his other hand grabs onto my panties and tears them away.

“Look at me,” he demands as he positions himself at my entrance. “I want to see your eyes when I take what’s mine.”

I hold his stare as he surges inside me in one powerful thrust.

“Yes!” The burn, the feel of him filling me—it pushes everything else away. There’s only this moment, only the two of us joined together as one.

“This pussy is mine,” he growls, pulling out only to slam back in. “Your body is mine. Your heart is mine. You belong to me, Blue, and the devil himself couldn’t take you from me.”

His possessive words wash over me, and instead of feeling afraid, I feel cherished. Protected. Loved.

“I love you,” the confession falls from my lips before I can stop it.

Klutch stills, his eyes widening at my declaration. Then something shifts and his expression softens. He releases my hands and cups my face, his movements becoming slower, more deliberate.

“Say it again,” he demands, but there’s a vulnerability in his voice now.

“I love you,” I repeat, threading my fingers through his hair.

“Christ, Blue,” he groans, pressing his forehead to mine. “I love you too. So fucking much it should scare me.”

His hips move in a gentler rhythm now, making love to me rather than fucking me. Every thrust, every touch feels like a promise.

“You’re everything,” he murmurs against my lips. “Everything I never knew I needed.”

The tension builds low in my belly, coiling tighter with each stroke. When his hand slips between us to circle my clit, I shatter, crying out his name as flashes of light dance behind my eyelids.

Klutch’s hips pick up speed as he chases his own release. He slams inside me once, twice, and again, until finally he’s groaning out my name as he comes inside me.

“You forgot again,” I say, struggling to catch my breath as his body hovers on top of mine. This isn’t the first time he’s forgotten to wear a condom.

I feel his lips press against my neck a second before he pulls out and rolls us both over until I’m draped across his chest. “I told you.” His head dips so he’s looking into my eyes. “If you get pregnant. We’ll deal with it.”

I trace the tattoo over his peck. “We’re too young for a kid.”

His body shakes as he chuckles. “I’m twenty-eight, baby. I’m not too young for a kid.”

Lifting my face to meet his stare, I ask, “Is that something you want? Kids, I mean?”

His honey brown eyes search mine. “With you? Yeah.”

My brows go up. We’re so new, this isn’t the kind of stuff we’ve been talking about. Favorite color? Band? Yeah. But kids and the future? Not so much. “You want them now?”

“I mean, if you want to give me babies soon, then fuck yes. But if you want to wait, I

can live with that too. I just want you, Blue. And anything else you give me is icing on the cake.” His face turns thoughtful before he speaks again.

“We should probably start looking for a place of our own before we decide on kids, yeah?”

I lift my head to look at him. “What?”

“A house. Somewhere we can make a home.”

Somewhere we can make a home.

He keeps talking, not realizing that he’s just rocked my entire world. “Can’t exactly raise kids in the clubhouse.. It’s a little too wild for babies. Don’t you think?”

Babies. As in more than one. “You love me.”

His head jerks back. “You serious?”

I shake my head. “I mean. You show me every day and you said it. But now... knowing you see a future with us, a home, babies... I believe it.”

He pops a brow. “Killing two men for you didn’t say it loud enough?”

I mean. When he puts it like that. I guess I should have believed it sooner. This isn’t just a fling for him. This is the real deal.

“I love you.” I settle back against his chest, too emotionally drained to argue now that the pain medication is starting to kick in, making my limbs feel heavy and my thoughts fuzzy.

“What happens now?” I ask, my voice small in the darkness.

Klutch’s arms tighten around me. “Now you heal and we find a spot of our own”

“And my dad?”

His chest rises and falls with a deep breath. “We’ll find him. Give him a proper burial. I promise.”

I nod against his skin as sleep and the painkillers start to pull me under. “Thank you.”

“Anything for you, Blue. Anything.”

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:59 am

Klutch

Even with bruises on her face, my girl is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

That's the first thought that crosses my mind as I stare down at Demi sleeping in my arms. Every time my eyes land on the dark purple bruise on her cheek and the gash in her lip, rage bubbles up inside me like lava threatening to spill over.

And the wheezing when she breathes. I close my eyes and slowly inhale.

I know how much it fucking hurts when your ribs are bruised.

It being her who's in pain will never sit right with me.

Moving carefully I adjust her against my chest, trying to make her more comfortable without waking her.

She sighs and nestles closer, her dark hair spilling down her back.

Fuck.

If I could rewind the clock, I'd go back and torture those fuckers before ending their miserable lives. They got off too fucking easy for what they did to my baby.

My phone chirps on the nightstand, and I carefully stretch out my arm to grab it without disturbing Blue. The screen lights up with a message.

Denali: Church in 30

I sigh and set the phone back down. With everything that happened today, I completely forgot about our weekly meet.

Looking down at Demi again, I memorize the peaceful expression on her face, the way her long lashes rest against her cheeks, and the soft part of her lips as she breathes. The pain meds Bravo gave her have knocked her out cold, which is for the best. She needs to heal—body and soul.

As carefully as I can, I slide out from under her, replacing my body with a pillow that she immediately curls around. I stand there, frozen to the spot, hoping she stays asleep. She makes a small sound of protest then relaxes.

Thank the Gods.

Turning, I grab my jeans from the floor and pull them on, followed by my t-shirt. After putting on some clean socks, I step into my boots and lace them up, then move over to the dresser. Grabbing a piece of paper, I scribble out a quick note.

Blue

Church.

K

It's short and to the point, but she'll understand.

After placing the note on the pillow next to her, I quietly slip out of the room, careful not to pull the door closed too hard behind me.

In the hallway, Pee Wee is just coming out of his room, adjusting his cut over his broad shoulders.

“You take McKenna home?” I ask, falling into step beside him.

He shakes his head, a hint of a smirk playing at the corners of his lips. “Nope.”

Well, okay then. I don’t ask for details. What he does in his private life is none of my business.

We make our way down to the chapel in silence. Outside the door, Kodiak, one of our prospects, is collecting phones. It’s a security protocol. There are no electronics allowed in church meetings. You never know who might be listening.

“Phones,” he says, holding out a wooden box.

I drop mine in without comment and push through the double doors. The chapel is our sacred space—a large room dominated by a massive wooden table carved with our club’s insignia. I move around to take my usual seat at Denali’s left as Sergeant-at-Arms.

The rest of my brothers file in one by one.

Beast and Yukon come in together, both looking like they’ve showered but the hard set to their jaws tells me they’re still riding the adrenaline high from earlier.

Swift—my father—gives me a nod as he takes his seat, his eyes asking a silent question about Demi that I answer with a slight shake of my head.

Titan and Denali are the last to enter. Titan’s fingers are stained with ink, and there are dark circles under his eyes—he’s been digging, and from the grim expression on

his face, whatever he's found isn't good.

Once everyone is seated, Denali bangs the gavel on the table, calling the meeting to order.

"Brothers," he begins. "We've got a shitload to deal with tonight." His eyes find mine across the table. "Frankie?"

I sit up straighter, my jaw clenching. "Frankie and his enforcer have been disposed of. Their ashes are being scattered as we speak."

Denali nods. "Good. You get anything out of him?"

"No. But Johnny squealed like a little fucking pig," I say, my voice eerily calm despite the storm raging inside me. "The hit on our clubhouse was ordered by the Renegade Bastards. Rogue sees us as competition. He's also joined ranks with the Valenciana Crime Family."

Murmurs break out around the table. I wait for them to die down before continuing.

"There's more. They're trafficking women and children across state lines."

"Motherfuckers," Beast mutters, his fist coming down hard on the table.

Titan clears his throat, drawing all eyes to him. "I'm afraid it's bigger than that. I've been digging, and this isn't just the Valenciana family. The Russians are involved too. This operation stretches across the entire continental US."

"Fuck," Pee Wee says, voicing what we're all thinking.

"They're snatching women from clubs, street corners, even college campuses," Titan

continues, running a hand through his dark hair. “I think that’s why they were at Demi’s apartment.”

My blood runs cold. “What the fuck did you just say?”

Titan meets my eyes, his expression grave. “Since her dad couldn’t pay what he owed, they were planning to take her. Sell her to the highest bidder.”

The chapel falls silent as his words sink in. My vision starts to blur at the edges, rage threatening to consume me. I grip the edge of the table so hard my knuckles turn white.

“Easy, son,” my father says softly from across the table, recognizing the signs of my temper about to blow.

I force myself to take a deep breath, then another. Getting pissed won’t change anything. She’s safe. That’s what matters.

“There’s something else you should know,” Crazy Train speaks up, his usual energetic demeanor subdued. “We found Demi’s father.”

My head snaps up. “Where?”

“Floating in the river,” he says grimly. “Been there a day or two from the looks of it. He’s... It’s not good, brother. They tortured him. Demi shouldn’t see him like that.”

I scrub my hands over my face, letting that sink in. I’d expected Bobby’s body to be found eventually, but I’d hoped for Demi’s sake it wouldn’t be so brutal.

“Undertaker?” I look down the table. “Can you handle the cremation?”

He nods his head. “Yeah, man. Consider it done.”

“Thanks.” I need to protect Demi from this, shield her from as much pain as I can. She’s already been through so much. Seeing what those fuckers did to her dad will destroy her. I can’t let that happen.

Denali clears his throat, a subtle sign he’s moving our meeting forward. “Krypto, financials?”

Our treasurer straightens up, always ready with the numbers. “The run to Rochester was successful. Memo, Zeus, and Rambler brought back fifty K for the club coffers.”

Memo, our club secretary and lawyer, nods in confirmation. Rambler, our nomad who spends most of his time on the road connecting with other chapters, gives a small salute.

“Everyone’s money has already been deposited into your accounts,” Krypto adds.

Good. The extra cash will help with what I’m planning. Demi and I need our own place, somewhere away from the chaos of the clubhouse. Somewhere she can heal in peace.

“Anything else?” Denali asks, looking around the table.

When no one speaks up, he bangs the gavel again. “Meeting adjourned. Keep your eyes open, brothers. This shit with the Renegades isn’t over.”

As everyone starts to file out, I hang back with Denali.

“You good?” he asks, concern evident in his voice.

I nod. “Yeah. Just need to figure out how to tell Demi about her dad.”

He clasps my shoulder. “I don’t envy you, man.”

“Yeah.” She’s been strong for so long, taking care of her fuck-up father, working multiple jobs, never complaining. But everyone has a breaking point.

I give D a fist bump then head back upstairs. When I push open the door to my suite, I’m surprised to find Demi sitting up in bed, her hair a wild mess around her face and her eyes still cloudy from sleep.

She raises her arms above her head in a stretch, and hisses as the sheet falls to her waist, revealing her perfect tits. My cock stirs in my jeans, but I shove those thoughts aside. This isn’t the time for that.

Her eyes find mine, and immediately she knows something’s wrong. “What is it?” she asks, her voice rough with sleep.

I cross the room and sit on the edge of the bed, taking her small hand in mine. “They found your dad, Blue.”

Tears well up in her eyes and my heart cracks. It kills me when she cries.

“I want to see him.”

I shake my head, my thumb brushing away the first tear that falls. “No, baby. You don’t need to see him like that. I told Undertaker to cremate him.”

She crawls into my lap, her naked body pressing against me as sobs wrack her small frame. I hold her close, one hand cradling the back of her head while the other strokes up and down her spine.

“I want to scatter his ashes in the ocean,” she manages to say between sobs. “He always loved the beach.”

“I’ll take you when you’re ready,” I promise, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. When she’s healed, we can go to Jacksonville and give him a proper sendoff.

“Thank you,” she whispers, her tears soaking through my shirt.

We sit like that for a long time, her cries eventually subsiding into hiccups, then quiet sniffles. I don’t rush her, don’t try to tell her it’s going to be okay. Sometimes things aren’t okay, and that’s just life.

“I should have been there for him more,” she finally says, her voice small.

“You were always there for him,” I correct her. “More than he deserved.” I know it’s harsh, especially now that he’s gone, but it’s the truth. Demi did more for that fucker than he deserved.

She pulls back to look at me, her eyes red-rimmed but clear. “Don’t say that.”

“It’s the truth,” I say firmly. “He was your father, but he wasn’t much of a dad, Blue. He let you down over and over.”

“He was still my dad,” she insists, a flash of fire in her eyes that I actually welcome. Anger is better than hollow emptiness.

“I know.” I brush her hair back from her face. “And you loved him. That’s why it hurts so much.”

She bites her lip, then nods. “Yeah.”

“I was thinking,” I say, changing the subject to give her a moment to collect herself. “We should start looking for our own place soon.”

Her eyebrows shoot up. “Already?”

I cup her face in my hands, making sure she’s looking right at me when I answer. “Yeah, Blue. The sooner the better. You’re mine. I’m yours. That’s it. Game over.”

A small smile tugs at the corners of her mouth. “Game over, huh?”

“Completely,” I confirm, leaning in to press a gentle kiss to her lips. “I love you, Demi. More than I ever thought was possible.”

“I love you too,” she whispers against my lips. “Even when you’re being a bossy, overprotective asshole.”

I can’t help but laugh at that. “Which is most of the time.” I should probably be thanking the Gods that my need to control shit hasn’t sent her running for the hills.

“Yeah,” she agrees, but her smile widens. “But you’re my bossy, overprotective asshole.”

“Damn straight.” I pull her closer, careful of her bruised ribs. “And you’re my kryptonite.”

She laughs, her brows going up. “Your what?”

“My weakness,” I explain, pressing my forehead to hers. “The one thing in this world that could bring me to my knees. Yukon called you that after... after what happened with Frankie. Said I’d found my kryptonite.”

Understanding dawns in her eyes. “Is that a bad thing? Being your weakness?”

I think about it for a moment before answering. “I used to think so. Thought love was a liability in my world.” I trace the outline of her face with my fingertips. “But now I don’t care. I’d burn the whole fucking world down to keep you safe, Blue.”

Her lips pull up at the corners. “Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.”

I press my lips to hers then pull back and stare into her gorgeous blue eyes.

“Yeah, baby. Let’s hope.”

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:59 am

Demi

The pounding bass from the arena vibrates through the office walls. “I would have figured these walls would be soundproof,” I say out loud as I shift in Klutch’s lap.

“No need for that when it’s always so fucking loud out there,” my man replies, locking his strong arms around my waist.

“Nobody ever said anything about the screaming,” Pee Wee adds before smirking down at McKenna who is perched like a doll on his massive thighs.

My nose wrinkles. Gross. That’s the last thing I want to hear about.

McKenna catches the look on my face and throws her head back and laughs.

The sight of them together has taken some getting used to. My best friend is sort of with one of the most intimidating members of the Bastard Saints MC. I say sorta because he’s also a married man with a wife and kid at home.

“Nervous about tonight?” I ask, giving my man my full attention.

He snorts, pressing a kiss to my temple. “Baby, I’ve been doing this shit for years. There’s nothing to be nervous about.”

Maybe so, but it’s still new to me. And I hate the thought of anything happening to him. My heart squeezes in my chest at the thought.

“Hey,” his voice is gentle.

I look up at him and admit, “Watching you fight in that cage scares me.”

His caramel eyes, usually so intense, soften when they connect with mine.

“Nothing is going to happen to me, Blue. It’s Benny the Bulldog you should be worrying about,” he says with a wink. “I’m gonna beat the fucking brakes off his ass tonight.”

Pee Wee leans forward in his chair and McKenna’s arms loop around his neck to keep from being dumped onto the floor. “You better kick that fucker’s ass. I’ve got ten G’s riding on you, brother.”

My lips turn down. Here I am worried about him getting hurt, and his VP is worried about losing money. We are not the same. Not. At. All.

All I want is for the people I love most in this world to be safe.

Thinking of the people I love most, my heart does another squeeze.

It’s been two months since my father was murdered.

Two months since I learned what Klutch was capable of when someone threatens those he loves.

Two months of grieving, healing, and slowly finding my way in a world without my dad in it.

It hasn’t been easy but I’m not alone. My man has been a constant, showing me every day that he’s got my back.

In a few weeks we'll be making the trip down south to Jacksonville to spread his ashes.

Klutch promised that just before Thanksgiving when the tourist season dies down we'll go.

"How's the kitchen remodel coming?" Pee Wee asks, breaking into my thoughts. "Got those cabinets installed yet?"

Klutch groans beneath me. "Don't even get me fucking started. The contractor's dragging his feet. Might have to pay him a visit."

"Don't you dare," I warn, giving him a pointed look. "We already had to find a new plumber after you scared the last one."

"He was overcharging us," Klutch defends, but I can see the hint of a smile playing at his lips.

At this rate the house is never going to be finished.

The house—our house—is a cute three-bedroom ranch that Klutch bought outright a month ago.

It's perfect in my eyes, but Klutch is a perfectionist and insists on updating everything from the floors to the fixtures.

It's our first real home together, and despite the chaos of constant renovations, it already feels more like home than any place I've ever lived.

The only downfall is the location—specifically, our next-door neighbor situation. In what has to be the universe's idea of a cosmic joke, we live next door to Diana, Pee Wee's wife. Yes, wife.

Can you say awka-awkward?

The situation of my best friend sleeping with a married man who happens to be our neighbor's husband is something straight out of a dang soap opera.

I had the unfortunate displeasure of meeting Diana while bringing our garbage can up from the street last week.

She's a tall blonde with perfect teeth and a permanent sneer, who made it abundantly clear she knows exactly who I am and who I'm with.

According to Klutch, Pee Wee pays for the house she lives in with their two kids, Brody and Bailey, but he doesn't actually stay there himself.

Apparently their marriage is one of obligation.

Meaning Pee Wee felt obligated to marry Diana when she got pregnant with their son 13 years ago.

That doesn't explain their 11 year old daughter though.

So apparently there wasn't always trouble in paradise.

Rumor has it that Pee Wee only stays married to Diana for the kids' sake and out of obligation. While I initially thought Pee Wee was an asshole for cheating on his wife, after seeing Diana in action and hearing more of their history, I get it.

Not that I approve, but I kind of understand.

As Klutch so bluntly put it. "In this life, a brother's personal business is his own, and you need to stay out of it." Message received, loud and clear.

The announcer's voice in the other room booms through the speakers, calling the next fighters to prepare. Klutch pats my hip, signaling it's time.

"Gotta go get ready, Blue," he says, his voice dropping to that low rumble that still makes my stomach flip. He lifts me effortlessly, setting me on my feet before standing.

"Be careful," I tell him, knowing full well he won't be.

He grins, that sexy, cocky smile that first caught my attention months ago, and leans down to capture my lips in a kiss that's as much a promise as it is a goodbye. When he pulls back, his eyes are dark with intent.

"I'll collect my other prize later," he promises with a smirk that sends heat rushing to my cheeks.

"Kick some ass, brother," Pee Wee calls as Klutch heads for the door.

I watch him go, still amazed sometimes that this beautiful man is mine.

It's hours later when we're finally walking through the side door into our kitchen.

I'm a little jazzed from all the excitement and Klutch is still riding the high of his victory.

He didn't just win, he destroyed Benny the Bulldog in the second round with a knockout that had the entire arena on their feet.

The door barely closes behind us before Klutch has me pinned against it, his lips crashing down on mine with a hunger that steals my breath. His hands are everywhere at once—in my hair, cupping my face, sliding down my sides to grip my hips.

“Told you I’d collect my prize,” he growls against my lips as he tugs at the hem of my top.

I raise my arms, letting him pull the shirt over my head and toss it aside. My bra follows quickly, his calloused fingers making quick work of the clasp. The cool door against my back and his heated skin against my front sends shivers racing up my spine.

“Klutch,” I gasp as his mouth moves to my neck, teeth grazing the sensitive spot just below my ear.

“So fucking sexy,” he murmurs, hands sliding down to unbutton my jeans. “And all fucking mine.”

“Yes,” I moan.

In one quick motion, he grabs the back of my thighs and hoists me up.

My arms and legs snake around him, holding on tight.

He carries me to our kitchen table and sets me down on the wooden surface.

Eyes holding mine, he grabs hold of the waistband of my jeans and tugs.

I lean from side to side, helping him shimmy my panties and jeans off.

His eyes lock with mine as he spreads my thighs, and the intensity in his gaze makes my breath catch. “Beautiful,” he says, his voice reverent as he squats down and licks a slow swipe up my center.

My head falls back, a moan escaping my lips as his talented tongue works me over. He knows exactly how to touch me, where to press, when to suck. It’s maddening and

perfect, and I'm already racing toward the edge.

"That's it, baby," he growls, sliding two fingers inside me as his tongue circles my clit. "Come for me."

The orgasm hits me like a freight train, my back arching off the table as pleasure crashes over me. Before I can even catch my breath, Klutch has his jeans shoved down to his thighs and is stroking his rock hard cock.

I bite my lip. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. My man is so damn hot. How in the hell is he even real?

His body is a masterpiece of sculpted muscle and beautiful ink, and despite seeing it in all its glory every day, the sight of him naked and hard for me still makes my mouth go dry.

"Love when you look at me like that." His voice is rough.

My eyes jump to his. "I need you."

A deep growl rumbles from his chest.

The bruises from tonight's fight are already forming on his ribs, but he doesn't seem to notice or care as he positions himself at my entrance.

"Ready for me?" he asks, though we both know the answer.

"Always," I breathe, reaching for him.

He runs the tip of his cock through my juices and surges forward, filling me in one powerful thrust.

“Klutch!” I cry out his name.

The stretch, the fullness of him inside me. It’s exquisite.

“That’s it, baby. Let the neighbors know who owns this pussy.” My man fucks me hard, setting a punishing pace, his hips snapping against mine, each thrust driving me closer to the edge again.

Just as I reach the edge, about to come, he pulls out suddenly.

“No!” I plead.

Before I can ask him what the hell he thinks he’s doing by stopping when I’m so close, he yanks me off the table onto my feet, spins me around and bends me over the table.

His hands grab onto my hips with a grip I know will leave bruises.

“Who do you belong to?” he snarls, filling me with a brutal force that drives the breath from my lungs. His hips piston harder and faster.

“You! I belong to you.”

The new angle has him hitting that perfect spot inside me, and it’s not long before I’m teetering on the brink again. “Klutch, please,” I beg, not even sure what I’m begging for.

One of his hands slides up my back to tangle in my hair, pulling just enough to arch my spine. “Come on my cock, Blue,” he commands, his thrusts erratic as he nears his own release.

The command in his voice, the feeling of his hand in my hair, and him moving inside

me—it's all too much.

I shatter around him, my walls clenching as pure ecstasy consumes me. He follows a moment later, a guttural groan tearing from his throat as he spills inside me.

For a long moment, we stay like that, both struggling to catch our breath. Finally, he pulls out gently, turning me to face him. The tenderness in his eyes in contrast with the rough way he just took me.

"I love you," he says, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear.

In this moment, with his eyes locked on mine and his body still pressed against me, I know with absolute certainty that I've found where I belong. It's not a place. Not this house we're renovating or this city we live in. It's him. It's us.

"I love you too," I whisper, lifting up on my tippy-toes to kiss him softly.

My life is different now. I'm in love with an outlaw biker who killed my father's murderer. Maybe that makes us monsters, but we fit perfectly together. He's dangerous and protective, bossy and tender. And me? I'm stronger than I ever thought possible, braver than I ever knew I could be.

Life isn't perfect. It's messy and complicated and sometimes painful.

But as Klutch scoops me up in his arms and carries me down the hall to our bedroom, I know down to my soul that I wouldn't change a single thing.

Because he's my beautiful monster.

And I'm his kryptonite.

The End.