



Kodiak (Mayhem Makers – MMM: Deviant Knights MC #1)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: KODIAK

As president of the Deviant Knights MC, my goal is to pull my club from the darker side of this life into a more legit way of living. Our first job is for a local signing event, MMM, which stands for Motorcycles, Mobsters, and Mayhem. While I've never had a problem with women falling all over themselves, there's something a bit... unnerving to have women who thrive on these fictional characters following me around as though I'm one of their book boyfriends or something.

They have no clue the stuff I've done or seen, and I won't enlighten them, but my skills are what the organizers have hired and me and my brothers will do what it takes to make sure the authors and readers will have a great time while staying safe.

I never expected to cross paths with her... the woman who rocks my world with just one look.

LUNA

As a newer author who writes the genre that's so popular at MMM, I'm nervous to be around all my unicorn authors. In fact, my stress level is so high, I manage to dump my bag out in front of the most gorgeous man I've ever laid eyes on... Marcum. I don't realize he's part of a real-life club until later in the day, but I'm more than ready for the wild ride!

Total Pages (Source): 31

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:03 am

PROLOGUE

KODIAK

My body aches as I stand from my recliner, where I passed out last night, and extend my arms above my head before kicking out my feet to wake my legs. All of my ligaments and tendons stretch as my bones creak, making me groan.

I'm getting too old for this shit.

After all the years I spent traveling as a nomad, it feels as if settling down and laying down some roots here in Benbrook, Texas has aged me exponentially. Overnight, my age has caught up with me, and I'm wondering if I made the right decision to find a home instead of living off the land.

Even as a young boy, I enjoyed camping and riding down an open road. My dad got me interested in dirt bikes when I was just a toddler, and I started riding as soon as my feet touched the shifter and my hands could reach the brakes on the handlebars.

Riding became my oasis, which is why I chose the biker life.

My given name is Marcum LeBlanc, but the guys have dubbed me Kodiak because I remind them of my benefactor—the grizzly bear. I'm rough around the edges and I tend to growl a lot. I also have no issue using my snarl as a way to keep everyone in line when the occasion calls for it.

I don't allow myself to get close to people. After losing my entire family outside of

my blood brother, I've shut my emotions down and have locked them behind a steel vault in my mind. There are plenty I'm loyal to and would lay my life on the line for, but those are men that took two orphaned boys underneath their wings and showed us how to survive the streets.

Us Deviant Knights, we're hard-nosed criminals trying to go legit, which is why I'm forcing myself from my comfortable lazy boy and am up and moving instead of watching the ball game on the television and popping the tab on a beer. I don't give one single shit that it's only five in the morning either. I'm a man who wakes up to a can in my hand rather than a mug of coffee.

When we chose what businesses we wanted to run and use our start up funds for, we chose a career that uses our most potent attributes—our brutal strength. Starting up a security firm wasn't on my top ten list of things I wanted to do in life, but the majority voted, and here we are.

My job assignment for today is a cushy one. I'll basically be playing peacekeeper for a bunch of authors and their readers. I know women have claws and can be catty, but surely an event such as this won't have me needing to stay on my toes.

Walking over to the fridge, I grab one of my bottles of chocolate milk from the fridge and grab the file folder I placed on my counter that has all the details inside for this contract. Reading the event name, I snort.

Motorcycles, Mobsters, and Mayhem.

They have no idea that they're bringing in a wolf in disguise, one wearing sheep's clothing to their venue.

We don't market that we're a motorcycle club when bidding for a job and we don't wear our cuts while on the clock, so they have no clue whatsoever that a true-to-life

biker will be watching their backs.

Two of us will be walking the floor while the rest of us guard the outer perimeter. As I read further down the document, my jaw slackens when I read their concerns.

“I’m to keep my eye out for bullying, harassment, and overly zealous fans. That’s preposterous, these are grown ass adults and I have to play recess monitor?”

My brother zombie walks out of his bedroom, scratching his balls, and scowling. “Read that shit last night. I guess these things tend to get out of hand if there isn’t some sort of micromanaging.”

“At least it’s organized and they’re thinking ahead. These are presumed scenarios, doesn’t look like they’ve actually had these types of issues in the past,” I surmise.

“I’m not gonna complain if there’s a chick fight. It’d be amusing if nothing else,” he grumbles, walking over to the coffee machine, grabbing one of his pods and sticking it in the device before putting a mug beneath the spout and pressing down the lever. As it brews, he leans against the side of the counter and watches it with an eagle eye. I grunt because narrowing his eyes at it won’t make it fill faster.

“We’re supposed to prevent those outcomes,” I remind him, shaking my head.

He’s an egger, if two women were to go at it, he’d keep their fire burning, which is why he’ll be on the outside of the event instead of casing the inside.

“Whatever, man,” he grumbles. With his mug held tightly in hand, he heads back toward his bedroom.

“We leave here in thirty minutes,” I remind him. “Don’t forget we’re supposed to blend in with the crowd.”

“Yeah, yeah.” He waves me away as he continues walking. “I’ll be ready and at the bikes waiting for you. I don’t take as long as you do to put on pants and a shirt,” he teases.

I grumble because he makes me sound like I give a damn what goes on my body. I have a simple wardrobe consisting of dark wash jeans, either black, white, or gray tops and my boots.

That’s it.

I only own one button down shirt that I keep hung in my closet for special gatherings. The only reason I even have it is because a buddy of ours tied the knot not long ago, and when he invited me and Xavier, his one requirement was that we wear a nicer top and not a T-shirt.

Twenty five minutes and some change later, I’m tossing my leg over the saddle of my bike and putting my half shell helmet on my head. As our motors warm, the other guys working this signing with us pull up behind us in our circular driveway. They get into formation behind us.

I glance in my sideview mirror and do a crew check to make sure we’re not waiting on anyone. We have a skeleton chapter consisting of eight men and two prospects, and they’ll all be joining us today. We’d like to expand one day, but first we need to get our minds wrapped around the fact that we’re no longer running as nomads.

Risk, our enforcer, gives me a two finger salute.

Hemi, our sergeant-at-arms, nods at me.

Regulator, our road captain, lifts his hand in acknowledgement.

Midas, our treasurer, sends me a scowl, he's never been an early morning riser and is always grumpy until around noon.

Tritan, our treasurer, doesn't even lift his head from his gas tank to look at me. Guess he'll know it's go-time when I throttle my engine.

Behind him are our two prospects, Rosco and Stixx, both looking alive and alert. This is their first assignment that doesn't have them sitting behind a desk taking calls or filing papers, so I suppose they're raring to prove themselves to us. They'll have to in order to earn their bottom rocker.

And at the end of the line is Rev, our tail gunner. He has a keen eye on us all, even before we hit the highway leading to our destination. Looking up, I notice Auto, our computer whiz, standing in the doorway with a mug of steaming coffee in his hand. When he lifts it up to wave us on, I switch gears and mentally prepare for today's agenda.

Once my motor is nice and warmed up, I lift my hand in the air and twist my wrist with two fingers pointed in the air, our sign that it's time to hit the road. The roar of our bikes as we pull out is like music to my ears.

To me, this is what brotherhood is all about, riding together and living outside of the box.

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CHAPTER ONE

LUNA

Nerves take flight in my belly as I look at my reflection staring back at me from the hotel's mirror. I twist my body from left to right, inspecting my outfit and practicing my welcoming, game day smile while doing so.

I don't do well in crowds, I have what some refer to as a RBF face, but it's not because I'm a mean person who enjoys scowling at others, it's because I don't always mesh well with others.

My mom says it's because I'm sensitive, empathic even, and feed off others. So if they're stressed out or having a bad day, I tend to pick up and exhibit their emotions.

This isn't my first book signing as an independent published author, but it's a significant one considering the genre I write.

Motorcycle club and shifter romance. Rawr.

I love creating an alpha man, both in and out of human skin, who loves getting down and dirty with his woman behind closed doors.

The more protective and dominant, the better in my opinion.

"You can do this," I say, giving myself a pep talk. "Don't let others' feelings affect yours. You're strong. You're impenetrable. Keep that smile on your face, girl."

Nodding my head, I swivel on my heels and pluck my laptop bag from the floor that I packed my personal belongings—wallet, keycard, as well as my cash and credit cards into last night before hitting the bed.

There are other talented writers attending MMM whose books I enjoy reading and would like to add their paperbacks to my bookshelf stash.

“Remember, Luna. You’re an author yourself so don’t go all fan girl on your unicorn authors.” That last reminder is said aloud as I close my hotel room door behind me. “It’s go time.”

From here, I have to keep my poker face on. I don’t want to be unapproachable, so I’ll be thinking of things that make me happy throughout the day.

The elevator ride down to the main floor is eventful, loaded with excited attendees. I don’t have my lanyard on saying who I am, and my profile picture on social media is my logo, so I’m not recognized by them as of yet. But my excitement for the day grows as I overhear them discussing my series.

When I was in school, I struggled to get good grades. As an adult, I was diagnosed with dyslexia—a learning and reading disorder that wasn’t tested in the school district we resided in and I attended when I was younger. I was always told that I was stupid and my dream of writing stories as they unfold in my mind was an impossibility as far as career goals go.

My mom always worried that I’d end up in a menial job and wouldn’t be able to support myself. But when I started proofreading for a few of my favorites and they talked me into giving my dream a try, I was surprised when I accomplished it. And after meeting a few new friends in the industry, and gathering my tribe, they helped me with editing, taught me how to format, hooked me up with cover designers as well as photographers, and they gave me their indepth attention when it came to

smoothing out my plotlines and looking for holes so the stories flowed.

I will forever be grateful to them for taking me under their wings and teaching me how to fly. None of them judged me for misused words or spelling errors, and that gave me the confidence to continue along this path.

Their endless encouragement and teaching made a difference in how I approached my books. Some of them I've never met in person, then there are others who live nearby and we've had a few lunch dates plus group writing sessions.

I'm brought out of my thoughts as I near the ballroom where we'll be signing, I reach into my laptop bag and pull out my nametag. Only, my limbs are severely shaking with nervousness and I end up dumping everything out of it.

"Shit," I hiss as I crouch down on my knees and begin gathering my belongings. "Double shit." I'm mortified that this is happening in front of an audience, I must seem pathetic in their eyes.

Muscular hands land before me, helping me wrangle up the things that rolled further away from where I'm kneeled.

"You okay?" his husky voice asks. It's a soothing yet dominant tone that has my head snapping up.

When our eyes connect, the blood drains from my face. He's possibly the most handsome man I've ever seen. He's muscular in all the right places, his clothes are tight, showing off his powerful dimensions, and even though he's wearing a ballcap on his head, I can tell his hair is dirty blond. His eyes are a piercing shade of green, they're mesmerizing and drool worthy—he's cover model material in the flesh. And I'm staring at him while making a fool of myself.

“Yes. Thank you,” I rush out, sounding out of breath before ducking my head.

Jesus, Luna. He’s a man not a Greek God , I internally scold myself.

When he reaches out, handing me my signing pens that weren’t within my reaching distance, and our fingers touch, I’m zapped with charged electricity. The hair on the nape of my neck stands on end as my throat dries out.

I’ve never had this sort of reaction to a man before and it has me feeling conflicted. I’m not good at flirting unless it’s being typed into a scene. My imagination is far better than I am during real life encounters.

“Damn, sorry,” he mutters. “I must’ve shuffled my feet on the carpet.”

“No biggie,” I reply, shrugging my shoulders.

Once I’ve replaced my items into my bag, I stand up on shaky limbs and send him a shy smile.

“I have to get in there and finish setting up my table, have a good day.”

“Marcum,” he remarks. “It’s my name.”

“Luna,” I state, holding my hand out and shaking his. “I appreciate your help, Marcum.”

“Anytime, Luna,” he asserts, sending me a smile that has me becoming oxygen deprived.

I need to remove myself from his company before dark spots begin floating in my vision. He is simply gorgeous, and men of his caliber make me panicky. As far as I’m

concerned, I've made a fool of myself enough for one day and it's time for me to make a hasty retreat before I'm the one he's picking up off the floor.

"See you around, Marcum." I quickly turn around and scamper away.

I shake the blooper off and square my shoulders. I can't let what happened in the hallway affect the rest of my day. I need to come off as self-assured and relaxed. Otherwise, I'll end up making deals and wondering afterward how I came out earning less money than I spent on merchandise.

When I hit my assigned table, I rush around and open up my tool box that has my swag inside of it and start to place them neatly on the table. Making sure it's eye-catching and not cluttered, I'm finally satisfied even though I know it won't remain the same once the readers arrive.

My eyes widen into saucers when the mass amount of attendees begin jogging in. I knew it was going to be a packed house, but this exceeds my expectations and we haven't even begun letting in the general admission ticket holders yet. Giddiness strums through me as a line forms in front of me.

"Hi," I say to the first person I see.

"Hey," she replies, sounding just as anxious as I am to be here. "I have a preorder with you. My name is Linda Cardova."

"Great! Let me get that for you, Linda."

Thankfully, I had the forethought to sign them and put the goodies inside my preorder bags before leaving home. Otherwise, with the line before me, I'd be nursing my hand after the event winds down. That may still be a possibility, but I'll gladly deal with it later if even a quarter of the folks in the room buy something.

CHAPTER TWO

KODIAK

A low growl leaves my throat when, not for the first time, I'm stopped while doing my duty and asked if I'm a male model.

"Absolutely not", has been my answer every single time I've been approached, and it hasn't changed this time around either.

In the beginning I was polite, but now I'm at the end of my rope, that shit has shredded and I know that I need to remove myself from this group of women before I lose my cool.

"If you'll excuse me, ladies," I say as I side step them.

Deciding the main room isn't where I want to be right now, I wave my hand at Stixx and call him over. "What's up, pres?" he asks as he steps up beside me.

"I'm taking my break, watch out for the ladies. They're adamant we're models in disguise. Why they'd think that, I don't understand. Whatever their reasons are for thinking this, don't entertain it. Be courteous, but keep them at an arm's length," I warn, giving him a stern look as I shift on my heels and march my way to the exit doors.

When I hit the smoker's section, my head hangs when I witness my brother taking selfies with a few rambunctious attendees.

“Hey, Marcum,” Xavier greets me, using my given name since we’re on the job and there are people within hearing range. “This here is Marissa and Talia.”

“Ladies,” I say, trying to sound as polite as possible through my gritted teeth. “Xavier, what are you doing?”

“These lovely women think I’ve got the right looks to be on covers,” he proudly tells me.

“Seems to be a lot of that going around,” I reply.

“You too, huh?” he asks, a sly smirk aimed back at me.

“Apparently,” I mutter, pulling out my pack of smokes and a lighter. “You on break?”

If he’s not and he’s socializing and trying to pick up a bed buddy for the night, he’ll find himself in the ring with me.

“Yeah,” he answers, “Hemi relieved me so I could grab a smoke since we can’t walk the parking lot with one lit. Supposedly, it’s unprofessional.” Using his fingers, he air quotes the word ‘unprofessional’ while rolling his eyes, causing the two women hanging on his every word to giggle.

Fuck’s sake, he’s acting like he didn’t have a piece of tail in his bed two nights ago.

Placing the bud of my cigarette to my lips and lighting it, I remind him, “Lunch will be passed out soon so keep an eye on the authors who’ll be coming out to grab themselves some fresh air.”

“We’ll rearrange our positions and make sure we’re watching in case they need us,”

Xavier says, nodding his head.

I'm not a sociable person, so I decide to walk up and down the sidewalk near the smoking section so I'm not dragged into any conversations.

The most I've spoken to anyone outside of my brothers is the gorgeous brunette whose bag exploded in the corridor. Fuck, her sugar brown eyes will haunt me from here until eternity.

Looking down at my wristwatch, I notice there's only three minutes left before boxed lunches begin being passed out and that's when I'll be needed. It's unclear if they'll ask the readers to leave while the authors eat or not, so we'll be there to assist if necessary to escort everyone out of the ballroom.

The coordinator advised me that they don't kick out the crowd while the authors eat since they only have so much time reserved for the signing, and they sold out. So my job here will be to keep the peace and watch for anyone needing help.

Simple enough.

Not for the first time, my eyes travel over to the woman who makes me drool and causes my dick to go ramrod stiff. She has a friendly smile for every person she speaks with. I memorized her name the first time I spotted her.

Her banner proclaims her name to be Luna Crane. I let that name roll off my tongue and it feels right being in my mouth.

Although, it's my understanding that most of them use pseudonyms.

Can't blame them really, I'd do the same thing if I were in their situation. Especially after finding out that nine-tenths of them end up being on the other end of some

vicious keyboard warriors, cyber bullies, and stalkers.

Childish and reprehensible behavior.

That shit was high school and these are grown assed adults we're talking about. But envious people have hate flowing through their veins and don't have a considerate bone in their body.

As Luna's table clears, I watch as she gulps down an entire bottle of water. Knowing she must be parched, I hit the coolers at the front of the room and walk one over to her.

"You seem thirsty," I say as I hand over the ice-cold bottle.

"Parched," she responds, her eyes widening to a comical size. I think I make this little pixie nervous. For some damn reason, that has me wanting to puff out my chest. She uncaps it and brings the rim up to her lips and takes a few sips before sitting it down behind the stand holding her paperbacks.

"You wrote all of these, huh?" I ask, not wanting our discussion to end. I pick one up and start thumbing through it. When I land on chapter eight, a cunning grin grows on my face. "Porn?"

"No!" She gasps, her cheeks blushing. "It's romance."

"You ever tried this?" I ask, teasing her as I place my thumb over the page and marking the scene I'm curious about. Her arms tremble as she reaches out and takes it from my grip.

My eyes trail her facial movements, zoning in on her mouth as she bites her bottom lip in contemplation. With bravado she hasn't shown before, she leans over the table,

wiggling her finger to draw me in, and whispers, “I’ll never tell.”

“Fuck,” I grit out, rearranging myself in my jeans. “You’re trouble, aren’t you?”

In response, she shrugs her shoulders and turns away from me, hiding whatever emotion she’s feeling.

One thing I’ve observed, and that’s the fact that she’s got no poker face. Everything she feels is right there on display.

When a few ladies sashay around me, and begin to form a line behind me, as well as around me, I take that as my cue to leave. “I’ll come back when it’s time to pack up and help you get your things to your car,” I offer.

“That’s okay, I don’t want to impose. I can get it,” she rebuts, but I shake my head at her and take a few steps back.

Mouthing, I remark, “Not happening.” Her face flames, but when she sees the seriousness etched on my face, she nods her head in acquiescence.

For the rest of the event, I walk around with a satisfied smile on my face. I’m determined to peel her out of that tight layer she’s swathed herself inside of and find out what she’s been hiding from me behind that cellophane wrapping.

After all, the center is always the sweetest part of any candy.

CHAPTER THREE

LUNA

I don't know what's wrong with me. I've been acting like a blushing bride whenever the guard, who introduced himself as Marcum, is around. When he loads the last of my totes into the back of my SUV, I begin to panic. I don't want this to be the last time I ever see him again.

"We're having an after party and I have an extra ticket. Would you like to come as my guest?" I ask, clamping my eyes shut, preparing for rejection.

"Luna. Look at me, babe," he commands, placing his thumb on my chin as he tilts my head upward.

As if I'm hardwired to listen to him and do his bidding, my eyes flash open and my heart takes flight when I see the lusty haze in his eyes staring back at me.

"There she is," he says in a soothing manner as our eyes clash. "I'd love to be your plus one. Trade numbers with me so we can coordinate where I'm meeting you at and you can let me know when you're ready."

He holds out his phone after unlocking it and passes it over to me. I enter my digits and hand it back to him. Then a ding comes from my pocket and I know he's sent me a text so I have his number.

"The party starts at seven, so I'll meet you in the lobby at six forty five," I tell him,

not ready to pass out my room number.

We've only shared a handful of words, and seeing as I've only just met him today, I'm not ready to make myself vulnerable to his sexual prowess.

I'm not that girl.

I'm not shy per se, and one night stands are something I've always been curious about but haven't had the nerve to act on. I'm too skittish and trust is a hard thing for me to dish out.

"Is there going to be drinking at this shindig?" he inquires.

Not once since we started this conversation has he taken his eyes away from mine, it makes me feel seen. With this man, I don't have the desperate need to stand back and let him lead our interaction.

I don't feel self-conscious or worry about saying the wrong thing.

Squaring my shoulders, I draw on my favorite heroine's bravado and stand tall, not letting what I want scuttle away without making sure my interest is known. "It's an open bar, but I have two tickets that'll get us one free drink. Don't stand me up, okay?"

"Never planned on it," he answers, a serious, deadpanned look painting his face. "I'm not like most men you'll come across, Luna. If I say I'm going to do something, you can guarandamntee I'm gonna do it. I'm a man of my word if nothing else. Clear?"

"Clear," I repeat, gulping. "Yeah, uh. So I'll meet you in the lobby."

"See you in a couple hours, beautiful." With a wink, he leaves me standing by my

vehicle with my jaw hanging open.

I don't think any man outside of my father has ever said that I'm beautiful before.

And with him, I don't think it's a line, I think it's his truth.

It's six fifteen, and I'm applying my lipstick. Looking at the shirt tossed over the back of the chair I'm leaning against, I can't help but think that I'm glad I brought a couple of tops with me so I have several different options for tonight's party.

A woman has the right to change her mind. It's written somewhere in the female code of conduct book. Just like it's stated that I don't have to watch what I say in the company of my man.

Not that Marcum's my man, I redirect my thoughts.

Jesus, Luna, I sneer at myself, shaking my head at where my thoughts went. Let's not jump any guns here and run him off before we find out if we want this to go further than a simple meeting and company for the evening.

"It's just a blanket statement," I reassure myself.

The shirt I laid out this morning and ironed until it looked fresh off the rack didn't catch my eye after I hopped out of the shower. I didn't like the way the ensemble looked once I put my ankle boots on and checked myself out in the body mirror. So I dragged another one out of my bag and fired up the iron, then proceeded to smooth the wrinkles out.

Gathering my cash, folding it around my driver's license, and keycard, I shove them in the back pocket of my skinny jeans and waltz out of my room, making sure the lock engages before sprinting down the hallway until I reach the elevator.

Just my luck that the hotel placed me at the very end of the hall so I have a long, perspiring walk down the sweltering path. You'd think they get enough from reservations to put some air conditioning in the corridors. My makeup is a work of art, and now I'm concerned that it's running since I feel dampness gathering at my temples.

Leaning forward, I use the mirrored wall to check my appearance, and when I see the humidity hasn't ruined my foundation, I nod at myself in satisfaction. When the doors slide open, I step inside and reservedly wave at the occupants.

It figures that Sapphire Knight, Darlene Tallman, K.L. Myers, and several of my other unicorn authors would happen to be onboard. Whereas I'm nervous about meeting these ladies, I'm also aware that I can't go all fangirl on them and ask about their upcoming releases like I want to.

No, I need to be professional with them and act as if I belong in the same circles as they do, I internally remind myself.

"How is it going, Luna?" Sapphire asks me. "I looked down the aisle to check on you several times today and each time I did you had a line formed at your table."

"I was aghast yet grateful that so many people came over to buy and were interested in talking about my series," I admit. "Being a baby author, I didn't expect to receive such a turnout."

Darlene giggles and K.L. gives me a knowing look. "This signing is like candy to the readers who swallow these genres whole," Darlene says. "Hell, Sapphire, those security guys you hired? They were as much eye candy as the models who attended as far as I'm concerned." As she and Sapphire chitchat about the gorgeous men walking the floors during today's event, I lean back against the elevator walls and glance over at the third occupant.

“We’ve been there,” K.L. states, shooting me a compassionate smile. I give her one in return and then avert my attention back at the two other ladies. I’m so nervous about meeting up with Marcum, my mouth is drying out and responsive words are getting lost on my tongue.

“You’d never know by looking at you today that you were shocked or nervous,” Darlene assuages, settling my nerves. “I think we all remember those first few signings when we were afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing.”

She just voiced my biggest fear before meeting a lot of my social media friends today. Talking with people behind the protection of your screen is far different than speaking with them face to face.

“You’re right. I know I have RBF at the best of times and I definitely didn’t want to put off any readers, you know?” I state.

“Well, judging by your lines, you were doing something right,” Sapphire says, smiling at me. “You’ll find your tribe who’ll help encourage you in this crazy industry. It just takes time.”

“I have a few already, but it’s hard knowing who to trust,” I admit.

“We definitely understand that one!” KL advises. “I think I can safely say that we’ve all been burned a time or two. Just keep your eyes open, your mouth closed except to those you trust implicitly, and you should be just fine.”

We go our separate ways when the elevator hits the floor. I step off to the side just before entering the lobby to gather my wits. I don’t want to come across as pathetic or unsure of myself.

Why is it that I’m always having to take a deep breath and give myself these little pep

talks before doing something monumental in my life?

Not only talking to Marcum but inviting him to join me tonight is not something I'd normally do. I always let the man make the first move, and even though he initiated our earlier conversations, in the end, I'm the one who took the bull by the horns and put myself out there.

Way out of character for me.

“Okay, girlie,” I say to myself. “You aren't going to ask the man to marry you. Get your shit together. If things go well tonight, y'all will share a couple of text messages, have a few phone calls, and from there, you can see where things go.”

“Sounds like a solid plan to me.” A husky voice inserts itself into my solo conversation, causing me to jump and squeal.

Once again, my propensity for talking out loud to myself has bit me in the ass.

CHAPTER FOUR

KODIAK

A chuckle escapes me as she jumps sky high, clutching her chest and narrowing her eyes at me.

“Dammit,” she mutters, the color draining from her face. “You just scared nine lives outta me.”

“How many more do you think you have in you?” I ask, teasing her.

“Not enough to deal with having the ever-loving shit scared out of me,” she chides. “I think I’m on my last life after that scare.”

“Well, that won’t do. We have a party to attend. Shall we?” I ask, extending my elbow for her to grab so I can escort her to the event.

“Hmm,” she hums, eyeing me pessimistically. “Now you want to be a gentleman?”

“I’m always a gentleman to the ladies, Luna,” I inform her, only giving her a half truth. I’m only chivalrous to those who are deserving, and Luna, in my estimation from what I know of her so far, has landed herself into that extrinsic category. I don’t give that leeway to many, but she’s gotten under my skin and I’m determined to discover why that is.

“For some reason, I’m having a hard time buying that load of bullshit, Marcum,” she

jests, sounding more like herself.

“Why’s that, Luna?”

“Because you don’t strike me as the type of man who gives anyone clout without them earning it,” she says, calling me out.

“Wow. Way to put a man under the spotlight there, Luna Moon.”

“Luna Moon? Wasn’t that a cartoon character back in the nineties?” she asks me.

“No, babe. That was Sailor Moon,” I correct her, causing her to chuckle.

“Do I even want to know how you know that, Marcum?”

“Once upon a time, I had a little sister. She was obsessed with that show and my brother, Xavier, and I were good big brothers who’d sit down and watch it with her,” I answer.

“Had? I’m sorry for your loss,” she tells me, her tone laced with sympathy.

Thinking of Tessa always chokes me up. She was the twinkle in mine and Xavier’s eyes. She was our sunshine. She kept us grounded, and out of trouble, but once she passed, we got a little wild and were unmanageable to our parents who all but shut down and forgot they still had two sons to live for. They shipped us off to our grandparents and ran for the hills.

“It was a long time ago, Luna.”

And now, my only living blood relative is Xavier. Everyone else has passed on, leaving us on our own. My grandparents from old age issues, and my parents due to

drug overdoses, which I suppose became their crux. Their way to deal. Everyone deals with grief differently, for me it was fighting and destroying my enemies, for them, it was getting lost and making their memories of Tessa fuzzy, the only way they were able to deal with her death.

Maybe it was a long time ago, but I've found that grief is a funny, fickle thing. Sometimes, it's as if no time at all has gone by when the emotions hit again over something that Tessa missed out on. Then there are other days when Xavier will reference our childhood and we sit and reminisce with fondness and smiles instead of glowers and tears.

"I'm still sorry for your loss, Marcum. If you ever need a shoulder to lean on or an ear to listen, I've been told I'm good at both of those things," she offers.

There's something trustworthy and easygoing about her. She's like a bartender, making me want to open up my old wounds and let her see the infection that still festers within me. There are times when telling a complete stranger about Tessa is uplifting and enlightening. I've done it over a bottle of Jack a time or two when her ghost spent the day haunting me.

"Appreciate that. Cancer sucks and especially leukemia. That disease is what took Tessa from us way too soon. It hit hard and fast, we only had a few short months with her after her diagnosis. It hurts sometimes to think about her, but at the same time, it feels good to remember all of the good times the three of us had together."

"I understand that feeling more than most. I lost my twin sister when we were twelve. She was out swimming at the quarry with a group of her friends and drowned. We don't know what caused it, it could've been a cramp or something else, but her loss ripped a hole in our family that's never been sealed," she conveys, wiping a stray tear from her cheek. "It's hard losing a sibling, especially when they're your other half. Do you believe in soul mates, Marcum?"

“You mean like insta-love shit? Can’t say that I do,” I honestly answer her.

“That’s more like a twin flame,” she laughs. “No, I mean like a person who completes you. For me, that was Lana, my twin. Once she was gone, it was as if a piece of my soul had been torn from me.”

“One day, when I’m drunk, I’m gonna have you explain that twin flame thing, but right now, I don’t think I’d have the patience to sit and listen to what that is. But the soul mate thing? I can see where you’re going with that, and yeah, I believe Tessa was that for both me and Xavier. Moreso for my brother.”

“How so?” she questions. When she squeezes my elbow, it’s the first time it’s become clear that we’re not only walking toward where the mass is gathered in front of a set of double doors, but we’ve been pouring our hearts out to one another while doing so. Not a typical behavior for me.

“All these years later, he hasn’t been able to let down his shields and let anyone else get close to him. I’m the same way, but his burden is worse than mine where it comes to our baby sister. He shies away from commitment unless it’s toward our club and a few close friends.”

“So he’s a manwhore, but you’re not?” As Luna asks me this, her eyebrows raise into her hairline. Called out. It seems my little Moon has a backbone and isn’t afraid to ask the hard questions.

“Depends on the day,” I say, trying to deflect her question. “I’m no saint, Luna. And I’m far from virginal. I live a rough and rowdy life and there are times when I need to release the stress before it explodes.”

“I get it,” she murmurs, but I know that for women like her, what I’ve admitted to is a turn off. She needs to be looking for greener pastures because my shit is dead and

brown.

When I think of somebody like Luna, all I can imagine is that she's looking for a man who can give her the whole nine yards—white picket fence, two kids puttering around the house and a dog barking in the background. I know I'll never be that man and should end things here and now before it gets complicated. But I'm a sonofabitch who feels a tug toward her and when something appeals to me on the level that she does, I snatch that shit up and use it until I've lost interest.

Does this make me a motherfucker? I'm sure it does, but that doesn't mean I'll change my ways. I won't apologize for who I've become, my belligerent anger is ingrained in my DNA. Abandoned by my parents, then being raised by grandparents who weren't interested in investing their time into two emotionally damaged boys, and friends who only used us for what we could do for them has filled me with a simmering rage. Meaning, those friends used us for our protection seeing as we hit a growth spurt before any of our classmates and were intimidating to those smaller than us.

By definition, we were bullies, ones made by our peers. I won't say we succumbed to pressure the way most teens do, but we got a high off being bigger and badder than those around us. Hell, our reputations were such that we seldom had to do anything more than glare. Our fists were rarely used, although from time to time, we did what we had to in order to prove a point.

“Ready to throw me away yet, Luna?”

“Why? Because you have a past, Marcum? That'd make me a hypocrite, wouldn't it?” she poses the question. “I've done things I'm not proud of, things I'm sure would be a reason for you to bail on me before getting to know me.”

“Like what?” I ask, wanting to dig deep into her psyche and bury myself in it until I

know her better than she knows herself.

“Buy me a few drinks and I’ll tell you all about it,” she proposes, smiling at me as she hands over our entrance tickets to the ladies manning the door.

“After you,” I say, swiping my arm toward the door.

“I’ll grab us our free drinks, Marcum. Why don’t you find us a table?”

I nod my head without giving her my drink order. Curious about what she’ll bring back for me and hoping it’s a cold beer and not some fruity chick drink with an umbrella as its garnish.

I walk toward a table while she heads to the bar.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUNA

My bravery begins to waver as I stand in line.

What the hell was I thinking laying my life's woes at his feet the way I did?

Who am I?

I'm somebody different with him than with anybody else and I'd love to know why that is. I don't usually throw all of my dirty laundry at people and expect them to fold it for me. Especially when it's a stranger I've just met and want to impress. Word vomiting isn't my best attribute which is why I always think over what I want to say before expressing my thoughts out loud.

What is it about him that makes me so comfortable and confident?

Without overanalyzing myself and my instant reaction to him, I decide to just go with the flow as I order our drinks off the menu. If nothing more than a night of tantalizing conversation is meant to be, it's okay. I didn't come to this signing expecting to find the man of my dreams. I was here to connect with those who love the written word full of angst and romance as much as I do—not salivate over Marcum and fill my head with whimsical fairytales.

Without cognitive thought, my feet eat up the distance between us as I spot him in a dark corner with his back against the wall. As I take all of him in, the cut laid over his

shoulders catches my eye. Could it be that he's my fantasy come to life? How I didn't notice the leather before now is a mystery, but now I find myself more intrigued with him than I was before.

"I got you a beer," I tell him, dangling it in front of him. "I watched as they filled a Jack and coke order and it seemed watered down and I didn't think you'd appreciate that."

"Beer's good," he says as he reaches out and plucks the bottle from my hands. "Look at that, they even removed the cap."

"Yeah. But I watched it the entire time," I swear. "Nothing was slipped inside of it. You'd have known if there was."

"Oh yeah? Tell me how I would've known that, Luna?"

"Ever seen a cat fight before, Marcum?"

"A time or two," he says around a chuckle. "Would you have thrown fists for me, Luna Moon?"

"If the bartender or a patron was dumb enough to try something as ignorant as that, damn straight I would have," I respond with an emphatic nod of my head.

"Well, thanks for being willing to throw down for me to keep my honor intact," he smiles at me, lighting up the room. Damn, now I'm quoting lines from my books. How cliché of me.

"It would've been the right thing to do," I state, taking a slow sip of my fruity, mixed drink. I don't mind if it's watered down, it'll make it easier to keep my wits about me.

Loose lips is not something I'm comfortable with asserting at this moment. I've already dug a few skeletons out of my closet and revealed things about myself—more than I'm comfortable with, I'm not sure the rest of my demons are ready to be exposed yet.

“Not everyone sees things that way,” he corrects me. “I've seen some shit while on the road that you wouldn't even begin to think was humanly possible. When men or women are predators, sexual or otherwise, they'll do whatever they feel is necessary to win the hand life's cards have dealt them.”

“I may not have seen things such as that in person, but I've watched the news and I'm a true crime junkie. I know how vile some people can be when they're not living a traditional lifestyle,” I explain.

“Traditional,” he snickers. “You mean a civilian life full of sunshine and rainbows? Is that what you consider traditional?”

“I'm not Dorothy, and I don't live in the kingdom of Oz. I don't envision a perfect life for myself full of yellow brick roads and flying monkeys. As a matter of fact, my fantasy life is nothing like what you'd believe it to be,” I say, righting his wrong assessment of me.

“Oh, yeah? Wanna clue me into what your fantasy life would be like... notwithstanding munchkins, cowardly lions, and tin men, Luna?”

Feeling bold, I lift my finger up and run it down the cool, buttery soft leather of his cut. I tap it on his president badge and let his road name slip free from my tongue, “Kodiak. It suits you, doesn't it, Marcum? Are you wild and grizzled?”

“That's what they say,” he tells me, leaning in until we're close enough that we could share the same breath. “I'm curious, however. What is your impression of me, Luna

Moon?”

“That’s cheating, Mr. President. I asked you a question first,” I remind him, looking upward until our eyes connect. “Are you wild, Marcum?”

“Very,” he answers, his voice husky and hoarse. The mixture of cigarettes and beer wafts from him, and wouldn’t you know it, it seems to be an aphrodisiac for me.

“I’ve never been wild,” I admit, leaning back against the backrest of the chair. “I’ve always been cautious. I was too afraid of letting my parents down. The worst thing I could hear from them was the word disappointment when it pertains to me. After losing Lana, I felt like I had to be perfect to make up for them losing one of their children.”

“You’re an adult now, though,” he responds. “You shouldn’t set the bar so high for yourself. It’s too far to fall if you slip and make a mistake.”

A humorless giggle escapes me. My parents, they all but forgot they had a kid once I graduated high school. They paid for my college tuition upfront and hit the road. Last I heard, they were doing some global jumping.

I received a postcard six months ago saying hi from France. That’s it, just hi, not this is how you can reach us nor we miss you and wish you were here. Just a simple word, hi. I guess I should be happy that they remembered to sign the damn thing.

Well, my mom signed it for both of them with the words mom and dad, so at least they were thoughtful enough to remember she birthed me.

“That laugh says more than any words could. They abandon you, Luna?”

“The very second my feet crossed that stage at graduation,” I admittedly confess.

“They paid my tuition the first year then had their accountant pay the tab for the next three years. I never tried to go for anything higher than basic education in English.”

“Why’s that?” he asks, canting his head to the side.

“Because while my folks are out scouting the world, they decided to do it electronically free. Every once in a while they contact their bookkeeper but other than that, nobody ever hears a peep from them. Dad sold his shares in the law firm, and my mom cashed in all of their CDs and they never looked back. Didn’t even make an effort to attend my college graduation.”

“That sucks,” he says in commiseration.

“That it does,” I say in reflection. It seems to be the going theme for my life as an adult.

“So then, if they’re no longer around to state that they’re disappointed in you, what’s holding you back?” His question draws me up short in response. What is holding me back? I don’t have a right or wrong answer for him.

“I don’t know,” I reply. “I suppose nothing should, huh?”

“I’m thinking it’s time you start living your life for you, my moon. If anything you do disappoints someone, then that’s on them, not you. Come on, Luna. Let’s go be wild and disorderly... together.”

“How?” I ask, suddenly excited for whatever adventure he has in mind.

“Ever been on the back of a motorcycle before?” he questions.

“No. But I want to.” Excitement radiates through me. I write about feeling the wind

in your hair, but I've never experienced it for myself.

“Well, come on then. Let's go see where the road takes us,” he suggests, standing up from his seat, tipping back his beer and swallowing it in one gulp. Twisting his torso, he dumps the empty bottle in the trash can, then with life blazing in his eyes, he holds his hand out to me. Challenging me?

With a smile on my face, I accept and reach out my palm, placing it in his.

“Take me where no man has ever taken me before, Marcum.”

“I could interpret that in so many different ways, Luna. You should watch what you say.”

“Not if I mean every word, Marcum.”

“Touche.” He chuckles as he leads me outside. As we near his bike, my nerves begin to flutter in my stomach. But I'm not backing down.

No way, no how.

I want this and seeing as I don't do a lot that my parents wouldn't approve of, it's a thrilling sensation that's strumming through me. Suddenly, I don't care if they'd scold me for doing something so dangerous. After all, that's what makes this wicked behavior of mine feel electrifying. I'm tired of being a goody- goody, it's time to let my wild child out and explore all life has to offer.

CHAPTER SIX

KODIAK

I've never had a woman on the back of my bike before. Not even when we were living nomadic and had sweetbutts around to service us.

If they wanted to be part of our wandering lifestyle, they had to get themselves from point A to point B on their own. We paid for their gas as well as their other roadworthy essentials and amenities. I have to admit to myself, even if it's begrudgingly so, that their cars came in handy for things we couldn't carry on our bikes.

But the part of my saddle that Luna's on, it's always been reserved for a title I never thought I'd consider getting for myself—an old lady.

Didn't want the complication of one.

Wasn't in the right frame of mind in those days, but Luna, she's making me reconsider my assessment on that aspect. I'm not convinced she's the one for me, but she feels right where she is. Like that part of my seat was made with her in mind. Maybe this settling down in a one horse town shit has changed my perspective. I've felt more lonely than I ever have in the past, the open road never left room for loneliness—there was always a new background and people to meet that kept things fresh and entertaining.

As I pick up speed, my odometer reaching sixty five as I glide in and out of evening

traffic, heading out of the metroplex, an excited squeal blasts into my eardrum. I thought ahead and brought an extra helmet we had in storage, which has Bluetooth capabilities.

I reach back with my hand and squeeze her thigh as I navigate the bike around two slow moving vehicles. “Having fun, Luna?”

“This is amazing, Marcum,” she gushes out. Her voice is lighter than I’ve heard it since crossing her path. “Now I know what the thrill is that my readers get when they read scenes exactly like this.”

“Better in real life?” I ask her, my lips tilted upward.

I remember the first time I experienced this freedom, the way your body comes alive and I’m overjoyed that she’s experiencing this firsthand instead of vicariously through one of her books.

“It isn’t comparable,” she says around a sigh before asking, “is it sad that I want to take a class and learn to drive one for myself?”

“Why would that be sad? Women ride, they own motorcycles and shit,” I remind her.

“It’s sad because that would be the most exciting thing to happen in my life, Marcum.”

“Then we need to find ways to liven your life, Luna Moon. What else have you wanted to do that you haven’t tried?”

“So much,” she dreamily says. “Snorkeling with the dolphins, going to England and walking on Abbey Road. The list is endless, but those are the two things on my bucket list I’d like to do.”

“Beatles fan, huh?” I ask, teasing her. “Always thought Lennon was a dipshit, but his music was good.”

She gasps, and asks, “Why was Lennon a dipshit, Marcum? John was a musical genius.”

“Because the fucker left his family for some tight ass. I have no respect for a man who would toss what’s his aside for new tail. Not to mention, she became a dictator for his life. Where did the man’s balls go?”

“Don’t judge him,” she berates, constricting her arms that are wrapped around my torso, coiling herself around me letting me know she’s about to go off on a tangent. “We don’t know what things were like behind the scenes, we only know what the media showed the public. Unless we’ve walked a mile in someone’s shoes, we shouldn’t have opinions on their lives.”

“True enough,” I agree. Doesn’t mean I’m gonna suddenly find any admiration for the man, because no matter what was going on in his personal life that we weren’t privy to, he still tossed them to the side like yesterday’s shiny toy that dulled. Any man worth his salt will end things with his current woman if another one sparks his fancy. Maybe that’s a bit odd coming from a biker who’s lived the way I have, but it’s one of the few things I stand by.

“You still don’t like him though, huh, Marcum?”

“Didn’t know him to say if I liked him or not, Luna. What I can say is I don’t respect the man.”

“And I respect your opinion, Marcum.” This time when she tightens her limbs around me, it’s light—more like a caress. “Everyone’s entitled to them, it’s how we deal with them that matters.”

“Getting all philosophical with me, Luna?”

“Sure. Why not,” she teases as she giggles. I can feel her shoulders bouncing with her laughter. “Gotta use our minds or they’ll wither away and rot.”

“I can dig that. As long as we steer clear of topics that we’re passionate about that’ll start a riot, I can debate anything,” I tell her.

“Now, why wouldn’t I want to see that passion of yours fly, Marcum?” she whispers, causing shivers to race up and down my spine.

“Passion, huh? I can think of other ways for you to ignite my fire, Luna.”

“Then we’d burn together, Marcum. I have a feeling if we were to both let loose and allow our inhibitions to lead, we’d light the world down around us.”

“Are you flirting with me, Moon? Because I gotta tell you, I’m ready to see how bright the flame would be if we gave in to this thing brewing between us.”

“Too bad my room is so far away. I’d love to brighten my horizons with you, Kodiak.”

Using my road name has my libido’s embers erupting into a full inferno. I’m itching to get my fingers, tongue, and dick inside of her as I feel her inner walls tighten around my digits as she cums. I bet it’s a beautiful sight to see.

“You still feeling adventurous, Luna?”

“Without a doubt,” she purrs through the mic.

“Then hold on tight, I have a sudden urge to make it to our destination,” I warn her.

I pull up to the lake. There's a private alcove I found once when I needed to take a breather from the club and brothers. I've camped out here a few times and have never been disturbed by wardens or other campers and hikers. I like the thought of sharing this place of solitude with her.

"Wow, this is gorgeous," she whispers as I help her lift herself off the bike before dismounting it myself.

"There's an alcove up the trail a little ways. It has a stream that feeds into it. It'll protect us from the wind and other elements for this time of the year. Makes a nice backdrop when you're trying to find a semblance of peace and serenity from the pressures of the outside world. There wasn't rain in the forecast, but this is Texas, the weather can flip on a dime so if things were to change, we wouldn't get soaked."

Other things getting soaked, like her pussy, are on my forecast for the night's activities.

I take her helmet from her and put it with mine, locking them up in my saddle bag after grabbing the blankets I keep stored in them for when I come here after I have the need for some alone time.

When it comes to me, you can take away the nomadic lifestyle, but you can't take the nomad out of the man.

I'm a traveler, a wanderer.

It's in my blood.

Ingrained so deep inside of me that when the walls start closing in around me, I hit the open road and let the bike take me away like those bitches on the commercials do when it comes to a bath and some Calgon.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LUNA

I knew there were some aesthetic sights buried in the more rural parts of Texas that I hadn't explored yet, but this scenery Marcum is traipsing me through is breathtaking, and I've decided it needs to be a backdrop in one of my books.

A tingle of excitement races up and down my spine the closer we get to what sounds like a stream. It's so majestic that if I didn't know any better, I'd swear we were headed toward a tropical paradise.

"How did you find this place?" I ask, already aware of the fact that he said he found it on a ride, but what made him take this route? It's not well lit, and if you were passing by, it'd never catch your attention—the turn off is not visible to the naked eye unless you're looking for it.

"One night, I was getting too claustrophobic at the clubhouse, the guys were partying and it became too much for me, so I packed up my camping gear and hit the open road. Crowds are okay for a short time, but when it's shoulder to shoulder, I'm out." His face pinches and his brows draw inward as he voices his explanation. "I was looking for a less traveled route when by chance I came across the road we turned down. I've always been an explorer at heart so I figured, why the fuck not. When we first moved to town, I picked up a map and started looking for camping sites that wouldn't be jam-packed."

"Even in Mother Nature you were looking for some solitude that was less congested

by the population, huh?" I question, my words feeling like a tongue twister. I'm beginning to understand this man and his introverted personality a little better.

"Yeah," he simply answers with a shrug of his shoulders. "I've done some things in life that require me to decompress. I've found that there are only two things that help settle the darkness inside of me. Riding my motorcycle and backpacking until I find a spot that calls to me."

As a man involved in a one-percenter motorcycle club, which according to the patch on the back of his cut they are, I can take a guess at some of the less than savory things he's had to do in life. But with them working security at a signing event, it makes me wonder if his club is trying to go legit.

"Listen," he says, stopping us as he turns his body to where he's looking down at me. "I'm not a good man. I'm not even gonna pretend like I am, but here's the thing, when I find someone important to me, I shield them from that part of me and my lifestyle to the best of my capabilities. If things go further than this night, I want you to know you have nothing to fear from me or be scared of any repercussions blowing back on you from our jobs or extracurricular activities."

"Wouldn't be here if I didn't trust that you could keep me safe," I answer, letting the honesty and conviction of my words pour out through my voice. "It's good to know this connection I'm feeling between the two of us isn't one-sided."

"It isn't. I do want you to know, however, that I can't always be available when you need me, Luna. I'll always be available to you if you pick up the phone, but I won't always be in a place where I can drop things and head your way." I get that. I'm a loner myself, it's why my stories and characters become family—friends that I use to eliminate and ease the loneliness of my nights.

"I gathered that, Marcum," I reassure him as we begin walking again. "I've done my

fair share of research on motorcycle clubs. Had to so I could get as close to realistic issues clubs face with a twist of romance tossed in.”

“Sometime, I’d like to hear what you discovered, Moon.”

“Sometime, I’ll tell you,” I tease, glancing up at him beneath my lashes, I notice a grin spreading along his cheeks. “That is, if you’re a good boy.”

“I’m always a good boy,” he says, playing along. “Until it’s time for the man in me to surface. A woman doesn’t want a boy between the sheets, she wants a man who knows how to pleasure her.”

I begin fanning myself with my free hand, asking, “Is it me, or is it hot out here?”

“It’s a little humid,” he muses, leaning down and nipping the shell of my ear. “But that could be because you’re burning up for me.”

“Is that right?” I ask, pestering him. “Because I could’ve sworn I just felt a chill in the air.”

His fingertips frivolously graze my skin, traveling up and down my forearm before he smirks with gratification.

“Those are goosebumps, darlin’, and you don’t have them because you’re cold. It’s sexual tension, and it’s the same reason your nipples are hard as a rock.”

A gasp escapes my lips as I send him an accusatory stare. “How do you know that?”

We make it to an area you can tell upon first inspection hasn’t seen any activity outside of wildlife before he turns me to where I’m facing him and informs me, “Because I’m a man and a woman’s nipples are like a beacon inviting him home.”

His eyes lift and capture mine as his fingers begin grazing along my waist and trekking upward until he pinches my distended nubs. “Any more questions?”

“No,” I breathlessly answer. “You’ve made your point.”

When he’s satisfied that he has me hanging on the edge of a carnal cliff, he wraps his arm around my shoulders and escorts me into a cavern that’s hidden by ivy and other foliage.

“Stay here for a second,” he orders before he lifts his phone out of his pocket and opens up the flashlight.

I vigilantly watch his shadow filled figure walk further inside and crouch down. It isn’t long before a lantern is switched on, illuminating the area while drowning the pitch black darkness and brightening the area.

Marcum shifts his body and lays the blanket down on top of a cot mattress. I can tell he comes here a lot seeing as he stores things here so he doesn’t have to carry them on his bike.

My vision stays stuck on him as he opens a plastic storage container with locking clips on the sides and pulls out a pillow, tossing it on the topside of the pad.

“If you have stuff here, why do you store and carry a blanket in your saddle bags?” I ask, my curiosity winning over keeping my mouth shut and simply enjoying this evening.

Instead of becoming frustrated with me like most men would, he patiently answers, “Because this isn’t always the place I go. It’s my favorite and the location I visit most, but like I told you earlier, I’m an explorer. I wander all over so I like to be prepared. I hate sleeping on grass, I wake up the next morning and am itchy.”

I begin scratching my arms.

I don't know what it is, but subconsciously, someone mentions the word "itchy" and I feel prickly, the urge to rub my flesh is instantaneous.

"A true Boy Scout."

"Never been one of those. I'm a survivalist," he corrects, but not with any sort of malice or incrimination added to his timbre. "I was a nomad before settling down in Benbrook."

Benbrook is a suburb of Frisco where the event was held. I know why they chose that location. Not only is it a beautiful town surrounded by lakes known for competitive bass and catfishing, but it's a small town that has an old school mentality— you stick to your side of the fence and I'll stick to mine . "Mind your business," should be their motto. After all, it's the way they live.

I understand how that aspect would be appealing to him and the rest of the Deviant Knights. That club name—rawr. I'm considering the fact that they may have chosen it to make a woman's panties wet.

"Come here, Luna," he says, wiggling his fingers in his direction.

My feet lift up off the ground and begin eating up the distance between us.

Talk about a homing beacon!

My breath hitches in anticipation the closer I get to him. I thought I'd be more nervous about being yanked out of my comfort zone. If anything, the adventurous side of me that I'd long ago buried rises and I can't wait to feel the fireworks explode behind my eyes as he possesses my body, throwing it into an erotic submission.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KODIAK

The nervous energy coming off of her has me counting to ten so I don't shred her clothes and mount her like a wild man. My animalistic instincts are riding me, my brain and dick at war with each other.

"We don't have to do anything other than talk," I say, attempting to reassure her. I'm no longer a teenager wanting to hit home base, I can control my baser side.

"It's not that," she quickly reveals. "It's just... I'm worried."

"What has you worried, Moon girl? I need your words so we can work through it."

I want to slay the fear worming its way into our evening plans. Being with a man like me is different from her past conquests. I'm not eloquent or chivalrous, I don't hold back from going after what I want, and I sure as hell don't bite my tongue when there's something I want to say. I don't want to scare her away, but I want her with a desperation I've never felt before.

"I'm not experienced, Marcum." When I give her a look full of fright, she expands her explanation. "I've had sex, but it was with someone I was in a relationship with."

"So you're not worried about being with me? What has you standing there like a deer caught in the headlights is due to the fact that you've never fucked someone you weren't already committed to?" I ask for clarification.

“In a nutshell... yes,” she replies.

She momentarily clamps her eyes shut and I know there’s more. “What else?”

She clears her throat and conveys, “My experiences, for lack of a better word, weren’t all that dynamic. They were... bland.”

“Vanilla?” I clarify.

“Yes,” she says, bobbing her head. “It’s why when I write sex scenes into my storylines, I use my imagination before channeling my past experiences. I mean, it’s not like I’m into BDSM or anything like that, but well... I know from my research for my books that there are other positions out there! Pathetic, huh?”

Right now, her face is beet red, but what bothers me more is the insecurity pouring out of her has me wishing I could track down these men that didn’t give her that glow she should have when talking about her past ‘experiences’. No woman should ever feel like she was at fault when it’s the man’s job to bring the vixen out of her.

“Not on your part, no. Luna, the men you’ve been with, should’ve made you feel wanton and shit. It’s us who are responsible for making sure you enjoy yourself, not the other way around. Sounds like to me that they were in it for one thing... themselves.”

“My ex said I was broken because I never... climaxed,” she bashfully says. That explains why she’s so timid and still not as close to me as I’d like her to be. It also tells me that the likelihood that one of her former boys, and let me be clear, they were definitely boys, never ate her like she was the finest meal in the world and they were starving.

“Come here, Luna,” I repeat myself. She’s not going to realize there’s nothing wrong

with her until I prove it to her. Actions speak louder than words. “I want you in my arms.”

She shuffles her feet in place before gathering her courage and eating up the rest of the distance between us. I scoot over onto the cot pad and lift my hand up to help her. The cavern floor is cold and uncaring. I don’t want her to crack her kneecap when she bends down. When her hand hits mine, I pull her down into my lap.

“That’s better,” I say as I snuggle her back into my chest and wrap my arms and legs around her, adding some warmth to her trembling body. I don’t think she’s shaky because there’s a slight chill in the air—my thoughts are that it’s skittish energy. Something I plan to nix once I get my hands on her.

“Much better,” she acknowledges, parroting my words.

Her perfume wafts into my sinuses and I can’t help myself when I bend over and begin skimming my lips across her pulse point. When I begin nibbling on the lobe of her ear, she starts moaning. Every sound she makes begins chipping away at the iceberg encasing my heart. There’s something so beautifully naive and enticing about her that I can’t resist.

“I don’t think the problem was you,” I whisper into her ear. “It was them. Their issue. You’re so responsive to me.”

My compliment hits her where I want it to—between her thighs. When her legs begin scissoring back and forth, trying to find some friction on her clit, I decide to be a gentleman, for the first time in my life, and give her a helping hand. I glide my palm between her legs and add some pressure to her center. When her hips buck, I lightly bite down on her clavicle causing her to release a yip.

“Marcum,” she moans out my name as her head lolls to the side.

“Can I take your clothes off, Luna? I want to worship your body.”

“Yes. Please,” she purrs.

I don't waste any time. I won't take the chance of her getting caught up in her head and denying me what she and I both want. Darting back, I grab her top at the waist and begin shuffling it up until it's off and I fling it to the side. With practiced ease, I release the clips holding her bra closed and slowly lower the straps down her arms. When she goes to cup herself, hiding those luscious globes from me, I grip her wrist in my hand to halt her.

“Get out of your head, Luna. Let me see you,” I command. Giving her a few moments to collect herself, I slowly move my free hand until it sets under the weight of her breasts. “Beautiful.”

Her breath hitches as I thumb underneath her laden breasts, the pent up tension inside of her gradually starts to ease.

“That's it, Luna. Let go,” I encourage. “Trust me to take care of you.”

Shifting our positions, I lay her on her back and hover over her. I don't usually kiss those I bring to my bed, but with her, I want to taste every inch. Leaning down, my tongue swipes her bottom lip until she opens up for me. Once she does, I slide my tongue inside of her mouth and coax hers into tangling with mine.

Sparks of lusts dance behind my eyes, which have stayed steadily attached to hers. This confirms my suspicions that she and I have some sort of metaphysical connection. Our stars aligned on the day we were born. We are spiritually drawn to one another. When that thought drifts through my mind, I momentarily stall. Am I really ready for this? Because once I give into the temptation, my life will no longer belong to me, it'll be hers.

My fears exit stage right once her fingers rake along my jawline. My dick jerks at her touch and I plunge my tongue back into her mouth, taking possession. Somewhere along the line of us making out, we've both shed our clothes. Our skin is touching, our tongues are still dueling, and I barely remember to lift myself away from her and reach into the pocket of my jeans to grab one of the square packages out of my wallet.

"Boy Scout," she whimpers as she hears the crinkle of the wrapper as I remove the condom and roll it down my shaft, lifting her midsection to where her slick coats my rubber covered dick.

"Realist," I correct her. "Your protection is my only priority right now. I'm clean, I get tested regularly for insurance purposes, but pregnancy is a concern."

"Guess we should've talked about this before getting started," she huffs. "I'm on birth control, but since we don't know each other well enough to trust the other's word, we should keep the other safe. I haven't been with anyone in a long time and I was tested after that relationship failed. I'm clean, Marcum."

"I believe you," I say, my voice coming out raspy.

"Show me what I've been missing, Marcum," she begs. "Please. I ache all over for you."

"Then let me fix that for you, Moon."

CHAPTER NINE

KODIAK

Trekking my fingers downward to test her readiness, my eyes fly to hers when I feel her honey dripping down her thighs. She may be high-strung in her head about laying with me, a stranger, but her body is telling a different story. She wants me as much as I want her.

“You’re soaked, Moon. Dripping. Your mind and body are at war with one another. Which one is going to win?” I lift my saturated fingers and pop them into my mouth, cleaning the sweet nectar from my digits. Fuck, she tastes like the finest ambrosia, and I’ve had more than my fair share of women over the years. There’s something about a leather-clad, tatted biker that seems to rev a woman’s engine.

“My body,” she moans, arching her back when I insert a finger into her swollen channel.

“That’s my girl,” I chuff, removing my fingers and lining my dick up with her opening. While I want to feast on her, there’s time enough for that later. During round two or maybe round three, who knows? Leaning over, I sip on her lips as I push my length inside of her. Her whimpers aren’t from pain, there are no tears in her eyes.

This is desire.

Eagerness.

A woman ready to let herself free from human sins and experience what it's like to fly.

“Let's dance,” I state as I bury myself balls deep inside of her.

Fuck me. She's so damn tight, I have to start rebuilding an engine in my head to keep from blowing my load like a two pump chump.

“Oh, fuck,” she shrieks as I swivel my hips in an arc, hitting that spot deep inside of her that'll guarantee she sees stars.

She lifts her legs up and wraps them around my waist, pulling me closer to her. Her nails dig into my shoulder blades, giving me that hint of pain I love to experience with my pleasure. As I pound myself inside of her warm, heated depth, I release my inhibitions and allow my inner animal to surface. I nip, pluck, and soothe her lips with my blunt teeth and tongue.

Goosebumps erupt on her skin as I continue my assault. Losing my mind, I begin plunging inside of her, my body now in complete control. She's so fucking snug and is gripping me like her pussy wants to hold my dick hostage. There are worse ways to go. Biker heaven doesn't sound like a bad place to spend eternity.

“Marcum,” she mewls, releasing her nails from my flesh and yanking me down until our cheeks are touching. I'm trying to be considerate of the fact that she hasn't had many lovers, but I want to show her there's more out there than vanilla fucking. Hell, even missionary, when done right, can be mind-blowing.

I sit up on my hindquarters and anchor her to me, lifting her midsection up and then letting gravity drop her down. We both moan the first time she swallows me whole then it's as if the floodgates have opened and we more than crave each other, we're ravenous.

She begins grinding down on me, and my eyes cross at the erotic vision of her playing out before my eyes.

“Luna,” I groan. “Fuck, you feel damn good wrapped around me.”

“You fill me up, Marcum,” she pants, rotating her hips. “We fit. We were made for each other. I’ve never felt like this before.”

Her words would normally have me pausing, I don’t believe in love at first sight and all of that storybook bullshit. I’m a criminal—plain and simple. I enjoy dangerous activities and enacting revenge. I get off on torturing people who’ve wronged my brothers and blowing up towns in the name of my family, that means my hands are dirty—too damn dirty to be touching this innocence cloaked in my arms.

But there’s a small voice inside that whispers, Would it be the worst thing in the world if she fits? She’s a writer so she can work from anywhere as long as she’s got internet access. It’s something to think about, because while I’d never admit it to my brothers, I’m tired of the nameless, faceless women. Most of all, I’m tired of being alone.

I shake my head and release those thoughts. There’s no room for them to be here. This is about me and Luna, not my past and the fears that’ve settled inside of me. We’re not promising forever, we’re living in the here and now.

Plucking her off my lap, I twist her onto her hands and knees. Gripping her hips in my palms, I line myself back up with her and plunge inside. My fingers dig into the divots of her skin and my hips begin pistoning in and out of her. Watching as my cock drives into her pussy has me gripping her tighter as I strive to push her over the edge and into oblivion.

Luna tosses back her head and howls, her walls clamping down on me. A few thrusts

later and my own orgasm hits, and I growl out her name as I fill the condom full of my cum. In another place and time, I'd love being able to see our combined releases as they flow from her satiated body, but it's too soon for any of that nonsense to fill my head.

It's still dark in the alcove when I wake. Looking down at my wristwatch I notice the time and chuckle. We reached for each other on three different occasions last night, each time more adventurous than the time before. Glancing over at my Luna Moon, I smirk when I see her tangled hair fanned out around her. She looks spent but satisfied if the smile gracing her sleeping face is any indication.

I quickly jump into my clothes then decide I've stalled long enough. Throughout life I've had regrets, my biggest one to date is dropping her off and watching her walk away from me. It's the reason I didn't set an alarm last night, I wanted to enjoy her for as long as I possibly could.

"Luna," I whisper, gently nudging her. I know that her check out time is drawing near and we need to get moving if we're going to make it in time so she isn't be taken for another night on her credit card.

"Hmm?" she asks, stretching her limbs. Her voice is raspy and my ego soars knowing it's because she called out my name every time she came.

"We have to get on the road or you'll miss check out time," I tell her, stroking her skin with the pad of my thumb.

"What time is it?" she questions, glancing up at me from beneath her eyelashes.

"It's closing in on eleven," I state, placing my hands behind her back and helping her sit up. "I can get us there in twenty minutes, but you won't be out in time if you aren't mostly packed."

“Everything other than my overnight bag has been packed and loaded in my car already,” she says, yawning. “Excuse me.”

“Excuse you for yawning?” I laugh.

“Yeah,” she says as she picks up her outfit from last night and begins dressing.

As soon as we get stuff cleaned up and stored, I reach out for her and lace my fingers with hers. We walk out into the midmorning sun and both use our free hand to shield our eyes from the rays.

“Got an extra pair of sunglasses in my saddlebag. They may be too large for your face, but they’ll protect your eyes.”

“Thank you, Marcum. Um... would you be okay with giving me your number?”

“I’d be happy to, darlin’. Keep in mind, I may not always be able to respond immediately, but when I get some time to myself, I will.”

“I remember you telling me, Marcum.” She opens up her phone’s address book, enters my name then hands it over so I can input my digits. After that’s done, I shoot myself a text so I have a way of getting a hold of her in case she gets lost in her head and chickens out.

“Let’s get you back now,” I suggest. “This isn’t goodbye, Luna Moon.”

“I know,” she whispers, sounding defeated. I squeeze her shoulder and help her onto my bike. As we roar through the streets my own trepidation hits me. Like her, I don’t want this to be the end. I may not have been searching for that woman that fills the void inside of me, but nonetheless, I think I found her anyway.

CHAPTER TEN

LUNA

The day I had to walk into the hotel and away from Marcum was devastating. He may have said it wasn't the last time we'd be seeing each other once we kissed in the parking lot, but I couldn't shake the feeling that it was. Still, the memory of our night together has given me the memories needed to add a little bit of oomph to my future sex scenes.

Men like him don't settle for women like me. That's just the way it goes. He'll find himself someone who's model beautiful and I'll end up with an accountant who thinks tax season is on the same level as Christmas.

Marcum has surprised me, however. He was the first to reach out, sending me a meme he found funny. I admit, his sense of humor is like a breath of fresh air. Mostly, he sends me things biker related, but my favorite is the one with a kitten wearing a mini helmet sitting on the handlebars as a biker rides down the road.

His text that followed that one has me grinning.

Marcum: Would you still find me sexy if I went to the shelter and found myself a kitten and trained it to ride with me?

I laughed so hard when he asked me that, tears fell down my cheeks. I responded of course, biting my lip waiting for his reply.

Me: I'd toss you down and ride you like a bronco bull. Does that answer your question?

That resulted in a phone call where he told me that he could arrange that. I told him that if he did, I'd put on my shitkickers and a tight pair of bootcut jeans. Then that progressed where he demanded I put on that attire and pose for him. I did more than just toss on the outfit, I curled my hair, added my cowgirl hat and wore a tight V-neck shirt. I posed in front of my white wooden fence and told him his cowgirl was waiting.

Now he has a fantasy that I had to swear I'd help him create the next time our paths crossed.

Shaking my head, I focus on my current manuscript. It amazes me that I somewhat plot out my stories but when I put my fingers on the keyboard, my characters run amuck.

"Dammit, I need to just erase that," I mutter, my pinky hitting the delete button. I swear I can almost hear my character chortling as I rework what I was going to say.

One day, these guys and gals are going to get with the program and realize that I run the show and their lives, until then, I'll continue to somewhat give them their way. After all, following their script is what has my readers enthralled with the life they lead.

My phone rings, and I sigh. Normally, I turn my ringer off, but I'm afraid that if I do, Marcum will try to reach out and I'll miss him. I wish I understood what my fascination with the man is, and when I voiced that concern to him, he advised me to let it ride. Neither one of us can predict the future, therefore, we should ride the wave until we reach the sand. I asked him if he was a surfer in a past life because he loves using metaphors dealing with surfboards and oceans when it comes to us.

His response was as expected, the only waves he's ever ridden were the ones between a woman's thighs. If I were any other woman I'd be jealous of the fact that he's as experienced as he is, but for some unknown reason to me, I'm not. I may not have as much experience as he does under my hat, but I do have a past too so I can't judge a man who thought he'd be living a life of solitude.

"Hello," I answer with a grin on my face after reading the caller ID and seeing my best friend's face flash across the screen.

"Bitch, I miss your face," Demi says. "I'm back in town, girl and I need a wing woman to go out with me while I paint the town."

"Demi," I groan.

Her version of painting the town as opposed to mine is astronomical. I don't mind hitting up the bars and relaxing with a mixed drink or maybe even two, but my bestie, she takes things to an entirely different level.

"My bail fund is still depleted from the last time you came home," I tell her.

"That was a misunderstanding, Luna," she declares.

"Punching the bartender in the nose was a misunderstanding? Demi, seriously?"

"It was," she insists. "I can't help it that she leaned into my fist, Luna."

"After she called you a Barbie doll? That was you lashing out, Demi." I'd take a bullet for her, I really would, but whenever she's around, I always end up paying fines to bail her out or end up in a brawl. I hate being punched, that shit hurts and the bruises last for weeks. At least if I ate lead, I would be too drugged up to give a damn.

“I was simply reaching out,” Demi excuses. “She’s the one that took it as we were fixing to rumble, Luna. She dove for me, remember?”

“And... you were reaching out to do what exactly, Dem?”

“I was gonna fix her collar,” she lies. “That thing sticking up in the air wasn’t a good look for her.”

“Neither is me wearing an orange jumpsuit,” I say, snorting.

“You got me there. Orange does wash you out, you look better in earth tones.”

“Demi, I swear. You drive me to the point of insanity. I can never tell if what you're saying is a slam or a backhanded compliment.”

“I’d never insult you, Luna. You’re my girl,” she argues. “Come on, Luna. Come out with me.”

“Maybe,” I tease her, knowing damn good that I’ll be right there with her no matter what.

“I’ll pick you up at six. Love ya,” she sings as she disconnects the call.

“Asshole,” I mumble as I sit my phone down beside me. Looking back at my screen I groan. Now, I’ve lost my train of thought and there’s no way I’ll be getting any more work done today. Thank God I’m ahead of the game with my pending releases. My personal assistant and I decided to do books that were not as long so I was able to release them quickly. I have some longer manuscripts I’m working on, but they’re for new series that won’t be ready for a bit. My new game plan involves having several books done and ready to go before I put them up for preorder. It’s something I picked up at the signing after talking to several author friends.

Guess I'll soak in the tub until it's time for her to pick me up.

“Want another drink?” Demi shouts over the jukebox.

I'm feeling nauseous so I decline with a shake of my head and place my hand over my tummy.

“Hungry? They have a menu here. It's mostly finger foods to sop up the alcohol, but I saw an order of onion rings come out earlier and got a whiff of them, they smelled delicious.”

The thought of downing food has me dropping my purse in her lap and sprinting toward the bathroom. I pray along the way that I make it in time because right now, it's not looking that way. I shove three women aside as I shuffle past them, my hand now covering my mouth as bile rises into my throat.

“Excuse you,” a snotty voice says. “You can't cut past us. We've been waiting for nearly twenty minutes.”

When an arm reaches out and grabs me, I remove my hand from my lips to apologize and make my excuses, but instead, I projectile vomit all over her.

I feel a slap across my face which has my head twisting with the momentum of the hit.

“Hey, bitch. What's your malfunction?” I hear Demi ask as she goes toe to toe with one of the three women who are squaring up to me.

My stomach feels better now that I've expelled it, and the next thing I know, we're a part of a full out bar brawl.

Fuck my life.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

KODIAK

“Did you hear about the chick fight down at Piggly’s last night?” Xavier asks as he plops down in the recliner beside me.

“No,” I say, intent on ignoring him. Apparently my blunt response isn’t stopping him, because he continues telling me the latest news. Fucking gossipy old hens, the lot of them.

“Man. Midas and Tritan were on protection detail last night at the bar and said it was epic. There were fists thrown and everything,” Xavier tells me, his voice giddy. He lives for this shit. “None of that hair pulling shit women tend to do according to Midas.”

“Remind me again why we accepted that contract?” I ask, rolling my eyes. The money is mundane and the fights that break out are downright stupid. A ninety year old grandma could break them apart most of the time.

“Free beer, brother. Plus, we get to prowl for chicks. Ones that aren’t from our town and won’t become stalkers.”

“Bullshit,” I reply. “Last time you went to Piggly’s and met that brunette, she followed you home and left dildos on our front porch with messages for you. Creepy as fuck, Xavier.”

“Really? I found it hot,” he retorts, a grin stretched across his face. “Speaking of, she made promises she didn’t keep. I need to hit her up and see if she’s as bendy as she claims to be.”

“For fuck’s sake, Xavier. Take that shit to the clubhouse,” I spit out. “I had to bleach the kitchen counters the last time you wanted to see if someone was bendable.”

“Oh, yeah. I forgot about that. That chick was spectacular. My dick was sore after we were done,” he remembers. “She definitely had some moves and I haven’t been with another one as flexible as she was. Damn, what was her name? I need to see if I kept her number.”

“Her name was Kimberly,” I inform him. “I should know, she demanded you scream her fucking name all night long.”

“Yeah! That’s the one,” he recalls. “Kimberly Simmons, no relation to that workout guru, I asked.”

“Why would you ask that?” I probe, stumped. There are days when I can’t figure him out and this is one of them.

“What can I say?” He shrugs his shoulders. “I wanted to see if it ran in the family. Was gonna ask if she had any sisters or cousins that wanted to join us.”

“That explains a lot about the way she stomped out of here,” I tell him, bobbing my head.

“Apparently, she doesn’t like to share,” he muses. “Who knew?” I crane my head sideways to see if he’s serious. When I see the way his face is set in disappointment, a smirk appears on my face.

I decide to razz him some as laughter bursts out of my mouth. “Brother, the day a woman catches your interest for real and you wanna make her yours? I hope like fuck she leads you on a merry chase.”

It would serve the manwhore right to have to beg someone to give him a chance and I for one am here for it. If nothing else, it’ll give me a few laughs.

“Fuck that! There are too many fish in the sea for me to tie my dick down to just one, Kodiak,” he blusters. I just shake my head knowing he’ll have to eat his words at some point.

It’s been two days since I sent Luna a text and it’s been left on delivered but not opened or read. I’m starting to wonder if she’s blowing me off then think better of it. That woman is just as enraptured by me as I am of her. Something’s going on and I hope she’s alright. Because if anything’s happened to her and I catch wind of it, I’ll add another town to my list of ones I’ve burned to the ground. I’m not quite ready to examine my feelings too closely; it’s not how I was raised nor how I’ve lived my life, but my Moon has taken over most of my waking thoughts.

Plus, some of my dreams have starred her, which usually results in me taking my dick in hand as it plays out in my head.

Standing, I go to find Auto to see if he can do a search on my Luna Moon. I’m not sure if the last name on her books is a pen name or not, but it’s someplace for him to start at least. Finding him in his war room, I knock on the door jamb to get his attention.

“What’s up, pres?” he asks, lifting his head and looking me in the eye.

“Need you to locate someone for me, Auto. I don’t know if this is her pen name or not, but I need you to dig deep and find me an address.”

“What’s the name?” he questions, his fingers hovering over his keyboard.

“Luna Crane,” I tell him.

“Got it. I’ll dig and bring you what I uncover,” he says, dismissing me, already in the zone.

“Thanks, brother,” I say, leaving his room since he has a hard time concentrating when one of us is breathing over his shoulder.

I’m in the main room of the clubhouse catching up with the rest of the Deviants when Auto comes strolling into the room with papers clutched into his hands.

“What did you find?” I ask, ripping the band aid off not wanting to deal with any platitudes.

“You know that chick fight Conan’s been droning on about, Kodiak?”

“Yes,” I hiss, gritting my teeth. I’m sick and tired of him and the guys playing out imaginary scenarios and forcing Midas and Tritan to replay it.

“Well, your chick, Luna, was a participant in it. She’s currently in a lockup down in Denton County. She saw the judge last night and she and her friend, Demi Kelson, are stuck there eating the time up until someone bails them out. They should be hitting their time served in ten days.”

My head hangs and my cock stiffens in my jeans when I think about my innocent woman dueling. That’s a hot picture running through my mind. I look up at my blood brother to see his jaw hanging.

“That’s the girl you spent the night with?” Xavier asks as I nod my head. “Damn.

Why are the good ones always taken?"

"Because good women, they don't want a loser and a player like you, Conan," Hemi teases, which has the room breaking out in uproarious laughter.

"Fuck off. The lot of you," Xavier says, waving them off. "What do you want to do about your girl, brother?"

"I want someone to anonymously bail them out. Both Luna and her friend. I don't want it being traced back to me," I answer.

"Why not?" Auto probes.

"Because it'll embarrass her, that's why," I explain. And not that I'll admit this to them, but because I need some time to process.

There's a part of me that wants to march up those steps of the jailhouse and cart her away, then place her inside of a protective bubble. Plus, I need to take myself on a trip down to Piggly's and find out what went down. If Luna was targeted out of some sort of bitch jealousy, heads are going to roll and I'll be holding Piggly personally responsible.

Also, I don't want to jump to any conclusions and meet my guys in the ring. They're paid to keep things copacetic and that's not what ended up happening. We're still building our reputation and I don't want this incident to show up on any of our review sites.

Expecting my men to follow orders, I grab my keys from my pocket and hit the road. My first request is going to be that they let me watch the surveillance videos. Then I'll decide what to do from there.

Damn. This woman is going to keep me dancing. I have a feeling there's more to her than what I initially thought. She has a backbone that doesn't show itself unless it's dragged out from her. That brings a grin to my face. I can't wait to get her riled up and see what type of wildcat she can be.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LUNA

I'm over being sick and tired. Demi keeps casting me concerned looks, but I don't know what to tell her. This doesn't feel like the flu or anything of the sort. I haven't heard any rumblings of a stomach virus circulating either. And trust me, my readers will share that information. Especially if they have school aged children who've passed it onto them.

Not only that, but except for the occasions when Demi drags me out of the house, I live a relatively quiet life. I get my groceries delivered and outside of doctor appointments, which are few and far between, thank God, I'm pretty much always at home.

"What is going on with you, Luna?" Demi asks, scooting closer to me on the bottom bunk where I've been for the past couple of days. It's directly next to the toilet which makes things convenient when my stomach starts rolling.

"I don't know, Demi. I'm exhausted and feel the need to empty my stomach all the time!"

"We need to get you out of here and get you to a doctor," she remarks. "You don't look so good. You're clammy and your color is off."

"We don't have anyone to bail us out," I remind her. "I'm the one who gets you out of these messes. We don't have a backup."

“Well, this is a fine kettle of fish we’ve gotten ourselves into, my friend,” she teases. “Maybe we need to find a BFF we can use as that backup?”

Despite feeling like death warmed over, I start giggling. “And what would we say to this fictitious friend? Hey, you wanna be friends with us? Sometimes, Demi gets into trouble and will need to be bailed out and rarely, very very rarely, I’m along for the ride. I can see this mythical being running for the damn hills.”

I briefly wonder if maybe I can reach out to my personal assistant, then nix that idea. She’s signed a non-disclosure agreement with me, but she doesn’t have access to my money so there’s no way she’d be able to pay either of our bails.

“How many more days?” Demi questions. Not like she hasn’t asked that same thing each day we’ve woken up behind bars, but it’s kind of like a little kid asking, ‘are we there yet?’. It’s annoying, especially since I feel like shit. I’d call Marcum, but I’m too embarrassed to admit that I was thrown in jail for being part of a bar fight.

Me. Introvert extraordinaire. Tossed in the pokey because of some bitch who decided to put her hands on me. I do think she might’ve gotten the worst end of the deal, however, because she was covered in puke from head to toe and got locked up along with several others. I snicker when I picture her face; she was equal parts horrified and grossed out.

Echoes of footsteps as they walk down the corridor between cells have my ears perking up. Demi reaches over and grips my hand with hers. The guards so far have been sympathetic and understanding, but there’s always that chance that they’ll have one come on shift who isn’t empathetic to our plight.

My favorite guardsman walks up to the cell door and smiles at us both. Instantly my shoulders relax and my anxiety dissipates. “Today is your lucky day, ladies. You’ve been sprung.”

“By who?” Demi asks, craning her head sideways.

“Don’t know, girlie,” Pierson answers. “Does it matter? Take it as the gift it is instead of analyzing it to death.”

I snort then say, “He’s got your number, Demi.”

“Bite me,” Demi playfully spits. “I’m not that predictable.”

Rolling my eyes, I retort, “Really? I coulda told you how this was going to pan out the second that woman put her hands on me!”

“No one touches my girl,” Demi replies, pointing her finger at me.

“I know, I know,” I state, holding my hands up in a stop motion.

“Besides that. I’m protective, not predictable,” she continues to argue. “I’m a free spirit after all.”

I roll my eyes and huff before saying, “In more ways than one.”

“Hey, are you trying to say I’m easy?” Demi asks, hands now firmly planted on her hips.

“If the shoe fits,” I sing as Pierson ducks his head, hiding the fact that he finds our banter amusing.

“Woman, if you weren’t feeling so down in the dumps you and I’d be having words... with our fists,” Demi rebukes. Internally, I giggle because she and I have had a few scuffles throughout our long-winded friendship. However, those usually end with us rolling around laughing our asses off.

“Maybe try not to say that in front of the jail guard,” I hiss. Pierson just laughs while shaking his head.

“If nothing else, you two have been entertaining at least,” he says. “And for what it’s worth,” he leans in and looks around to make sure no one else is nearby, “that chick you puked on probably had it coming to her. She is the definition of a high maintenance bitch.”

This sets both of us off and we’re soon holding each other up while tears of laughter pour down our faces. “Sh-sh-she couldn’t decide whether to vomit or hit you,” Demi stammers, slapping her thigh with her hand. “You destroyed her fancy ass outfit too. No way that stain’s coming out after it set for days! ”

It figures that Demi would find that hilarious. She loves it when Karma pays a visit to those who are deserving. Hell, if she could, she’d offer to drive the bus, I’m sure.

“Come on, ladies. Get moving. Y’all can reminisce later. I have a schedule to keep,” Pierson reprimands us.

We both mumble, “Yes, sir,” and straighten up before sending each other mocking looks. We’ll be talking about this for years to come.

Once the paperwork is taken care of and we’re giving our discharge papers, we head out of the station like the hounds of hell are nipping at the heels of our feet.

“Can you believe these fines?” Demi asks, sniffing. “Thank goodness I have a hefty savings account.”

“My nest egg is going to take a big hit from these,” I say, shuffling through the papers. “No furniture was broken but we still have to pay a restoration fee to Piggly’s? What did we do, dent a few walls or something?” I don’t recall anything

being damaged. Then again, I was otherwise occupied trying to hold my stomach contents in as I smacked a bitch.

“Honestly, I don’t remember, Luna. I was kinda in the zone.”

“You should’ve been born a man,” I chide. “All you think about and live for are fucking and fighting.”

“Those are the highlights of my life,” Demi remarks. “That’s why I’m an underground cage fighter.”

“And it’s not even your day job,” I giggle.

“What can I say, insurance fraud is a boring job and I need an outlet,” Demi criticizes her profession.

“We need to call for a driver,” I say as we round the building and settle against the brick siding. “I hope like hell that Piggly’s didn’t have your car towed, Demi.”

“The way our luck is running, I’d say it’s probably sitting in the impound lot,” she muses. She doesn’t appear to be too concerned, but all I’m seeing are dollar signs at this point.

I’m lucky they let us shut our phones down or they wouldn’t have a charge left after spending three days in county lockup. “Maybe we should check on that before I pull up my app,” I suggest. “The lot is over there.” I point across the street where there are an abundance of cars stored.

“Why not,” she says, shrugging her shoulders.

“Why are you so nonchalant about this, Demi?”

“It’s not my first rodeo, Luna.”

“If you keep this up, you’re going to lose your license, lady.”

“Which one?” Demi asks, sighing.

“Both. Then what’ll you do?”

“Hire myself a driver and finally lose the boring chore of chasing those who want to fraud their insurance companies?”

“Are you asking me or telling me what you’ll do?” I ask my bestie.

“That has yet to be determined,” she states.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

KODIAK

“Shane,” I growl. “That bitch started it.” My finger hovers over the skank on the monitor. “Why would you let my girl be arrested for defending herself?”

“That’s what the arresting officers advised,” he tells me. “I just wanted them removed from the premises and banned.”

“You’re banning Luna and her friend from your... establishment .” I embellish the word, leaning over him. I know this move makes him uncomfortable, and since that was my goal, I don’t back off.

“I didn’t know she was yours at the time,” he mumbles. “I can lift the ban.”

“That’d be a good idea,” I retort. “What did she drink and how much did she ingest to make her that sick? She wasn’t wobbly when she walked so she wasn’t drunk. Did someone do something to her?”

Although, to be honest, I’m rather impressed by the amount she spewed. I’m sure she was embarrassed as hell, but she covered that overdressed heifer completely. Not only that, but the tape appears to show her trying to apologize until the other woman put her hands on her. Then, her friend jumped in front of Luna and that’s when the fists started flying.

“Not here! I run a clean club,” Shane argues. “Watch.” He backtracks and picks up

the day's event from the viewpoint from the back of the bar. "See. Nobody touched her drink but her and my bartender didn't slip anything inside of it."

"Did she only have that one mixed drink?" I ask, my brows drawn in. "I've seen her drink before and she can hold down one cocktail without it affecting her."

I'm at a total loss as to what would have her getting violently ill, especially since Shane has proven her drink wasn't tampered with, and it appears she only had the one at that, because once the cops showed up, all involved were arrested. I mean, a stomach thing could be going around, but it's not like I keep up with that shit. Plus, I'd like to think I know my moon well enough that if she wasn't feeling well, she wouldn't go out.

As my mind wanders, I leave without saying another word to Shane. Looking down at my wristwatch, I know that enough time has passed that she should've been released. Sliding out my phone, I send her a message to check on her. She may not be truthful about what's going on, but at least I'll get a gut instinct about how she's doing.

Me: You haven't answered my texts. Are you ghosting me, Luna Moon?

I wait on my bike for a few minutes, hoping for a quick response.

Luna: It's been an eventful few days. I'm sorry about the lack of communication. I'm not 'ghosting' you Marcum. I swear. I have a few things to do. When I get home I'll message you.

I'd rather hear her voice but I'll settle for a text. Slipping my phone into my cut, I take off for the clubhouse to wait. She's definitely more than I ever anticipated or expected, yet I'm finding out that I'm enjoying getting to learn all the different facets of her personality.

Auto is looking into her friend, Demi. Whereas she seems to be a good one, I'm not sure how I feel about the fact that she instigated the violent altercation and dragged my girl into it. Once I have more intel, I'll know better how to deal with the woman.

Yes, the skanky ass bitch in the line for the restroom ran her mouth, and yes, she put hands on my woman. Something I'll deal with later, but no fists were flying until Demi stepped in and amped up the conflict.

Lounging in the clubhouse with a beer, I watch as Auto comes rushing into the room looking excited about what he's gearing up to tell me.

"What?" I ask, initiating the conversation because knowing my brother as well as I do, I know he was preparing to draw the shit out and tease me about whatever it is he's discovered.

"Conan," Auto calls out my brother's name which has me narrowing my eyes at him in suspicion.

"What's up, man?" Xavier answers.

"When I say the name Demoness, what's the first thought that enters your mind?" Auto asks, a smirk on his face.

"That fucking wildcat we've seen at the underground circuit, why?" my brother questions. "She's undefeated and has been since she first stepped into the ring. Never seen anyone so fierce, either."

I'm growing tired of Auto and Xavier's ping-pong match so glaring at Auto, I demand, "Just spit it out. You're not Paul Harvey, for fuck's sake."

"Who's Paul Harvey?" Auto asks. Shaking his head, he says, "Never mind. The

reason I asked is because Luna's friend is Demoness!"

"No shit!" Xavier roars. "Damn, I gotta meet her." His head swivels my way and he drops to his knees and lifts his hands like he's praying. "Please, Kodiak. You're my in. Get me an introduction... please, please, please."

Of course she is, I think to myself. Only my woman could have a best friend who's fearless. I've seen her fight, of course, we all have, and she's a wrecking ball who regularly goes up against opponents who are taller than her and outweigh her. Then she proceeds to wipe the mat with them. She's become a headliner on the circuit and we've all made some serious cash thanks to her skills.

I choose not to think too closely about considering Luna my woman; that's for another time. I've announced to the public that she's mine, it's my way of giving her that umbrella of protection, but whether or not we make this a permanent thing has yet to be decided.

Frustrated with Xavier's antics, I lift my foot and push him onto his ass. "Stop begging like a little bitch. Do you seriously think I'd take that risk? Introducing you to the woman who's got the power to dissuade Luna from accepting me in her life? No way in hell, brother. You're too much of a risk."

He makes a pfft sound and says, "Oh, please, Kodiak. If she's half as enamored as I think she is, this lifestyle isn't gonna put her off."

"Let me meet her before I make any decisions," I lie, stalling. "I'll lay the groundwork with her and see if she's receptive. If I think you fucking her and discarding her will hurt my relationship with Luna, all bets are off."

"Since we know she's in town, maybe I'll track her down and 'accidentally' bump into her," Xavier says, thinking out loud.

“You’ll keep your distance until I say otherwise,” I growl out.

“Fuck. Fine, pres, ” Xavier sneers. “I’ll wait for your precious command before I do anything.”

Yeah, I know my brother better than that. The fucker’s gonna go behind my back, ignore my directive to try and find Demi so he can finagle an introduction. Sadly, we don’t have any runs I can send him on right now. Otherwise, I’d have his ass in his saddle in the next half hour so he’d be far away from either woman.

With him being the VP, and if he has another vote in his pocket, he can dismiss my order seeing as it’s not club related—it’s personal.

Motherfucker.

I want the chance to see if the spark I remember growing between us was real or a figment of my imagination. Anytime her face is brought up in my mind, the feel of her writhing beneath me follows and I want to experience it all over again.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LUNA

“Those fuckers bent my rim,” Demi complains as we drive out of the impound lot. “I should sue the towing company that picked up my car.”

“It was a police contracted company, Demi,” I remind her. “They’re protected against any lawsuits.”

“There has to be a loophole somewhere,” she drones. When she gets worked up, there’s no talking any sense into her.

“It’s not that bad,” I excuse, trying to soothe her irritation.

“Not that bad!” she shouts. “Can’t you feel the way my front end is wobbling?”

I bite my lip because you can clearly feel the way the car is driving. It’s not smooth like it should be, but I don’t think that the rim will have to be replaced. I’m sure they could bang it back into its original shape.

“I think it could be repaired, Demi.”

“How? I’ll have to replace it and these babies aren’t factory made,” she asserts. “I had them custom made.” She lovingly pats the dashboard. “They make my baby beautiful.”

I roll my eyes because sometimes, she's just ridiculous. But, I understand to a point because she's had to work her ass off for everything she's got. Her car and all the special modifications was one of the first things she bought for herself after driving beater cars for years.

"There's a place around the corner from my apartment that has excellent reviews," I tell her. "We can drop it off and walk home. We won't know how bad it is until we have a professional look it over."

"How do you know they have excellent reviews?" she asks.

"Because I need to get a new set of tires myself and started looking up places with four stars or higher," I acknowledge. "I've been saving to get some all-terrain because of the fact that I need to start traveling to further places for my upcoming signings."

"Fine, we'll do that," she grumbles. Then she perks up and says, "I can always start traveling with you as your personal assistant!"

Fear grips me at the thought. Demi is awesome and I'm the first to admit that fact, but as the bar fight proves, she's extremely protective of me. All it would take is one reader or author treating me poorly in her eyes and I'd be blackballed from the industry faster than some people change their socks. I've worked too hard to see my career get flushed down the toilet because of her shenanigans.

"We'll talk about it later. For now, let's get your car taken care of and get the stench of being in jail washed off our skin," I say, redirecting our conversation.

"Whatever," she harrumphs, side-eying me. "I know what you're doing, you know."

"What? What am I doing?" I ask, using my innocent voice and widening my eyes.

She sighs before answering, “Avoiding confrontation. It’s what you do when you want to tell somebody no but don’t want to talk about it.”

“I do not,” I state, aghast. “Why would I say no to your offer when you’re one of the most organized people I know? My flabber is ghastrated that you would say this to me!”

“Because you know I’ll whoop somebody’s ass if they upset you,” she imparts.

“Then you already know, so why are you even asking?” I probe, biting my thumb because she is right about the nonconfrontation thing. I’d prefer to avoid upsetting anyone if possible, especially my best friend.

“Stop chewing on yourself, you crazy lady. We can give it a test run and see what happens.”

She’s already made up her mind and there’s going to be no dissuading her. I’m gonna have to hire Marcum to be security for my readers. He’ll have to guard them from her if things go sideways and she thinks someone is disrespecting me or trying to take advantage of my “kindness” seeing as she always says I’m too giving and need to think about how much I’m spending in table fees, swag, paperbacks, banners, and other signing essentials.

“Demi, you know you’d have to slow your roll when it comes to how you interact with my readers and the other authors,” I tell her. “Because while I appreciate how protective you are over me, if what happened at the bar occurred at a signing? I’d be blacklisted and this is my bread and butter.”

She glares at me, taking her eyes off the road until I smack her arm so she pays attention once again. Thank goodness, because the wobbly tire coupled with those rumble strips on the shoulder have me feeling queasy once again. When she pulls into the parking lot of the tire place and parks, I get out, knowing our conversation isn’t

over just yet. Stomping away from me toward the office, I sigh then get out and follow her. Hopefully, she keeps her cool so we don't find ourselves back in jail.

Once she's advised the service technician of the problem and handed over her keys, she grabs me by the arm and pulls me back outside, where she slams her hands on her hips and starts tapping her foot. Great. She's worked herself into a full head of steam and there's no way to avoid whatever she's about to spew.

"Do you really think I'd risk your career?" she hisses at me, one hand coming out to point a long, bony finger in my face. "Seriously? It's like you don't even know me!"

"Demi, where did we just spend the past few days?" I calmly ask. "It sure as hell wasn't the Hilton. No, it was in jail," I retort. "Because of a bar fight that you started due to that bitch being a..."

She cuts me off and says, "A cuntasaurus rex. No one disses my girl."

"Don't you think me puking on her put her in her place, though?" I question. "Besides, I think you just proved my point."

She throws her hands in the air and shakes her head, still glaring at me and then... she bursts out laughing. "Okay, maybe being a front person for you isn't a good idea after all. Because I would kick someone's ass if they were nasty to you at a signing. What about if I help you get your stuff ready or something? I'm a good organizer."

I think about it for a few seconds and nod. My inventory can best be described as a chaotic nightmare, with books intermingled alongside swag. Demi prefers things to be in place, and I'd be willing to pay her to help me get my shit organized once and for all.

"That might work. It's going to take a week or so, and I want you to tell me what I

need to buy so that we can get it all in tip-top shape,” I reply. “And yes, I’ll pay you because you’re not gonna do it for free.”

“I don’t need the money, Luna,” she reminds me. “I make a mint at the arena.”

“I know you do, Demi. However, this is my business and I can use all the tax write offs I can get,” I say with a twinkle in my eye. I know I’ve got her there because like she said earlier, she won’t do anything that could mess with my business... unless fists are flying apparently.

“Fine,” she whooshes out with a heated breath. “But you’ll only pay me what the job’s actually worth and not a penny more. And I’ll be the one doing the research, Luna.”

“Now who’s not trusting whom, Demi?”

“Don’t try to bullshit a bullshitter, Luna dear. I know exactly what you’d try to pull on me and I won’t turn a blind eye to it either. We’re both headstrong, but I’m a little more bullheaded than you are.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” I mumble underneath my breath. “Why are you so determined to work for me?” I know there’s something going on at her day job that she’s holding back from me, and I’m not going to give up on pestering her for that information until she’s confessed all of it to me.

“You know I hate what I do, right?”

I nod my head before saying, “I do.”

As we walk in front of my duplex, she stops on the sidewalk and tells me, “Things are tense whenever I go to the home office.”

“How so? Demi, talk to me,” I beg. There’s heartache in her eyes and I don’t think it’s from an unrequited love. My girl, she doesn’t do those emotions unless it’s with me.

“All I’m willing to say right now is that there was a party, some drinking, and things taken that wasn’t someone’s to take,” she conveys, tears gathering in her eyes.

“Demi,” I say her name with a quiver. “What was taken?”

“My pride, my safety, and my self-worth,” she says, her voice hitching.

“No,” I gasp. “Demi. No.” I reach out and pull her into a hug, rocking her from side to side.

“I was a dumbass, Luna. I was in a workplace environment and I trusted that my drink wouldn’t be tampered with amongst colleagues. I set it to the side and went to dance with a few of the girls on the makeshift dance floor.”

“You were roofied by people you trusted?” I reiterate, anger now rising that my ride or die wasn’t safe with her coworkers

“Not trusted, no. But didn’t think they were scum,” she angrily states.

“Did you complain to human resources, Demi?”

“Can’t complain when one of your assailants is the founder of the company,” she confides. “I just... I just want to be done there.”

“Then we’ll write up your letter of resignation and go to the authorities,” I decree.

“No authorities, we can’t. I just want to forget it ever happened.” She wipes the stray

tears that have slowly trickled down her cheeks away and starts stomping her way to my front door.

“This isn’t over, Demi,” I whisper underneath my breath before vowing, “they will pay for what they did.”

Even if I have to ask Marcum to get involved. I know he’s got a dark side and hopefully, he’ll be willing to go to that place to help me get Demi the justice she’s owed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

KODIAK

My phone rings later that evening and I smile when I see Luna's name scrolling across my screen.

"Luna Moon," I say in greeting. "Everything alright?" I was expecting us to do our conversing via text since that was what she told me we'd be doing. Not that I don't want to hear her voice, but to some extent, she's driving this particular bus.

"Marcum." The way she says my name with hesitation has my hackles rising.

"Talk to me," I order, my tone harsh but I get a little brutal when I get worried. It's the same timbre I use when I'm telling my brothers what needs to be done. Xavier calls it my president voice, and if I wasn't concerned right now, I'd probably chuckle.

"It's been a day," she tells me.

"From the sound of your voice it sounds as if it's been a bad one. Tell me what's going on, Luna."

I can hear her sheets moving in the background and assume she's in bed. Thoughts of what I would love doing to her there has my cock growing rock hard. But when I hear her sob, I jump out of my chair grabbing my keys and wallet.

"I'm coming over, Luna."

“No,” she quickly says. “I have my best friend here and she’s finally passed out. I don’t want to wake her up. How about if I meet you somewhere? I’m not sure where you live, but I’m not far from the venue where we first met. What if we meet somewhere around there?”

Now I have a bit of confessing to do. I’m not sure how she’s going to feel about me prying into her life, but she knows who I am so it shouldn’t come to her as a shock. “I know where you live, Luna.”

“Of course you do,” she giggles. “Why doesn’t that surprise me, Marcum?”

“Because you know what type of man I am and what lifestyle I lead.”

“I’m not upset, not really. To be honest with you, I kinda expected it. Why doesn’t it feel like an invasion of my privacy?” she questions. “It should, you know?”

“Let’s deal with that later, okay? Right now, I want to see your face while you tell me what has you so worked up. Do you know where Ferry Park is?”

“Yeah. I like to go there and unwind. Feeding the ducks is the highlight of my day when I can’t think or things aren’t going my way,” she confides. A visual of her enjoying that simple task takes root in my brain and has me smiling, despite my worry.

“I can be there in thirty minutes, Luna. Stay in your car until I arrive.”

“Okay, Marcum. See you soon,” she says.

The sadness radiating from her tone has me picking up the pace. When I make it to my bike I have to take a second to compose myself. No need to ride recklessly since I want to make it to her in one piece. I’m not sure who’s going to die for upsetting her

like this, but I vow that somebody is going to pay.

The ride is short and sweet. When I pull into the park's lot, I notice her SUV sitting in a dark corner. I shake my head, surely she knows better than to pick an unlit place to keep her safe. Thieves and rapists take advantage of situations like this. She made herself easy pickings and we're going to have to broach that topic sooner rather than later.

Revvng my engine, I back into the spot directly next to the driver's side and shut off my bike, the faint ticking sound breaking the silence that surrounds us. I swing my leg around and march over to her door. I hear the locks disengage and reach out and grab the handle, dragging the door open.

"Luna, why didn't you park under a street light?"

She glances around, taking in her surroundings before closing her eyes and inhaling. "I wasn't thinking. I was on autopilot."

"Come on. Let's go sit on the bench while we talk," I say, reaching out my hand and helping her climb out of her vehicle. I sling my arm across her shoulders and guide her in that direction. When we make it to the bench, I sit and drag her onto my lap, my arm never leaving its wrapped position. Whatever she's about to tell me, I feel that I have to be touching her, so I'm going with my gut. "Okay, lay it on me."

"So, I know I've mentioned Demi before," she starts. At my nod, she continues. "Well, she's been a little bit off lately and after our um... recent weekend stay in jail, she kept pushing to work for me in some capacity. She's been more abrasive and aggressive than normal, which I should've picked up on sooner, only I've been buried in a new manuscript so missed some of the signs."

I don't mention that I know she and Demi were in jail but will get back to that with

her shortly. “What signs, Moon?”

She chuckles, but there’s no humor in it, and replies, “Demi’s always been protective of me, but lately, any time we go anywhere together, she’s almost hypervigilant.”

My heart seizes; I’ve been around long enough to know what that usually means when a woman becomes hyperaware, and I prepare myself for what she’s about to tell me.

“Anyhow, earlier, she lost her shit on me totally and I kept pushing until she finally told me what happened during her last work trip,” she whispers. “Marcum... she was out with her coworkers, drinking and dancing, and while... while she was out on the dance floor, one of them slipped something in her drink, then they assaulted her.”

“She was roofied by someone she works with?” I question, my temper seething. “People she should be able to trust to have her back?”

Luna nods, tears now steadily falling down her face. “She didn’t report it either.”

“Why the fuck not? Jesus fucking Christ, I’m sure wherever she was at likely has cameras where they could’ve seen it happening so it wasn’t a he said-she said situation.”

“Because it was the company founder,” she grits out. “He wasn’t the only one, Marcum. Every one of them raped her that night. Every. Single. One.”

By now, she’s sobbing, her voice so strained with emotion, it’s difficult to understand what she’s saying, but I now understand why Demi didn’t go to the police.

“Get me the names,” I command. “I’ll take care of it. In the meantime, have her quit that fucking job because the club business can probably find a position for her.”

“Make them hurt, Marcum, please?” she asks. “Because Demi’s a badass bitch but right now, she’s absolutely destroyed. They need to pay for what they’ve done to her.”

I’m already making plans in my head as to what we can do to bring those fuckers to their knees. Auto is one of the best tech guys there is and he’ll be able to find the information needed to hit them where it’ll hurt the worst, their bank accounts. A smirk forms on my face as I consider everything he can do. Because I’m sure it’s been done to others before; there’s no way Demi was the first woman they did this to, and we’ll get justice for them as well.

“They’ll pay, my moon,” I vow. “Get me the names and see if Demi’s willing to talk to Auto.” At her look, I continue. “He’s our tech guy and I’m willing to bet they’ve pulled this shit before.”

Her eyes widen and she says, “I remember that there’ve been two other women who had the job Demi’s in now who suddenly quit. That’s how she got that promotion.”

“That doesn’t surprise me. They probably offered them some sort of compensation to keep their traps shut. That’s how men like that operate,” I inform her.

“I’ll ask Demi if they offered her anything for keeping quiet,” she states, leaning into me.

“I’m in awe of the fact that you haven’t freaked out that I’m going to use violence to resolve Demi’s issue, Luna.”

“I’m not dumb, Marcum. I already suspected that things work differently in your world than it does for most civilians,” she edicts. “Plus, I was sorta hoping when I opened up to you that you’d use brutal strength when dishing out some payback.”

“I won’t let you down, Luna.” I squeeze her to me and place a chaste kiss to the crown of her head. “I need you to promise not to ask any questions though. Don’t beg for any updates because I’m not gonna tell you anything that could incriminate you.”

“My lips are sealed,” she promises. “Demi may be another story though. She doesn’t like to let things rest and is bloodthirsty at times which is how we ended up as guests at the local precinct over the weekend.”

“Then I’ll tell her the same thing I just told you. It’ll be better for both of you in the long run not to know anything, including the fact that I’ll be taking care of this one way or another. Got it?”

“Got it,” she says, bobbing her head.

“So, you mentioned something about jail, my moon. Care to share?” I ask.

I watch as a blush rises in her cheeks, my brows raise as I wait.

“Um, well, Demi and I went out and I started feeling kind of queasy so I rushed to the bathroom. Some woman took exception to the fact that I broke the line because I was about to be sick and she put her hands on me. Demi lost her shit and slugged her,” she says.

“What did you do?” I question. I know what happened; I saw the fucking video, but I want to see how much she trusts me.

She giggles, then looks me dead in the eye and says, “I projectile vomited all over her then started throwing hands to help Demi.”

“You puked on the bitch?” I query.

Laughter erupts as she nods. “It was so gross. I mean, I hadn’t even had a full drink, so it must’ve been something I ate but she was pissed that I was trying to make it to a stall in the ladies room. Gotta say, she deserved what she got. Of course, all of us involved got arrested, but at least I was with Demi and we were in a different cell from the whack job.”

“Good thing they separated you. Things could’ve gotten violent if they hadn’t,” I laugh.

“You have no idea,” she muses.

We spend a few hours talking, nothing consequential, just enjoying time together. Before we know it, the sun is rising and we need to get to our separate homes to get some rest before needing to start our days.

This time, watching her drive away is harder than it was the first time. At least we have a plan—she’ll be coming to the clubhouse to a barbecue the guys have insisted on having. I told her to bring Demi with her so I can lay down the law so to speak.

Luna won’t be telling her the guys and I are going to look into her past employers, I’ll be doing that myself. I’m not as easy to sway as my Moon is, so I’ve been delegated the task of keeping her out of the fray.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LUNA

I wasn't sure how Demi would take it when I told her I'd been talking with a biker in a motorcycle club, but surprisingly, she was enthusiastic. Encouraging even. What those men did to her might have hurt her emotionally, but she's a rockstar who's bounced back and refuses to let them dictate her future.

As she told me, they may have dented her a little, but she won't let them destroy her.

“Are you sure you're okay going to a clubhouse full of men, Demi?” I ask, not for the first time.

“Luna,” she says around a sigh. “If I wasn't good, I'd tell you. You know this about me.”

“I'm just checking. I won't have you going somewhere that'll make you feel jumpy or uncomfortable.”

“And I love you for that, I really do, but there's no need. I went to the office, cleared out my personal items, then left my resignation on his desk,” she advises. “If nothing else, I have almost five weeks of vacation time that I'm owed.”

“By any chance, did they offer you anything, money wise to not mention what happened that night?” I don't have to specify what time period I'm talking about—she knows.

“I didn’t speak to anyone,” she tells me. “I marched in there with my head held high, cleared my shit out, and eyeballed anyone who came near me.”

“You were in tigress mode, huh?” I ask, snickering.

“Oh, yeah. It didn’t hurt that I also had my pepper spray in my hand.” We look at each other and start giggling. She wields that thing like a weapon.

“I would’ve loved to be a fly on the wall and hear what they had to say about that,” I state. “I bet they were shaking in their loafers.”

“Couldn’t tell you. All I know is the room cleared out and everyone hit their offices and closed their doors. The employees who work in cubicles suddenly found their monitors interesting.”

As I bend over, laughing my ass off, a bout of queasiness strikes. “Fuck. I thought I was done with this shit,” I moan as I rush to the bathroom and kneel before the toilet.

“Okay, Luna. Enough is enough already. Tomorrow, you’re going to the clinic. We need to figure out what’s going on with you. I’ve had it up to here with you putting it off,” she rages, raising her hand to where it’s even with her forehead.

“Fine. I’ll hit the urgent care center off Main Street. They have the least wait time in the area. The last thing I want to do on a Sunday is sit in a waiting room for six to eight hours.”

“I’m going to hold you to that, Luna. I’ll drag you there myself if I have to,” she declares. “Could you be pregnant?”

“Pregnant?” My jaw drops to the floor. “Hell, no. The only time I’ve had sex in the last few years we used a condom, plus I have a birth control implant. The percentage

of that happening is less than nil.”

“You never know, Luna, you could be one of those mystery people. The last thing we want to have happen is you being one of those women giving birth in the bathroom because you were clueless to the fact that you had a peanut growing in your belly. Have you had your period since you were with Marcum?”

Yes, Demi knows that I was with him in that way. We tell each other everything. At least, I think we do but her last confession has me questioning that. “No. But you know that my cycle is hit or miss. Always has been. I’ve been known to skip it here and there. Sometimes I can go months in between having one. It’s why the doctors have always been skeptical if I’d be able to get pregnant in the first place. That’s why I think this is some sort of stomach bug.”

“A revolving one? Luna, come on. Let’s be real here. If you had a stomach bug, it’d be more consistent.”

“Demi, stop trying to scare me. Now, I’ve gotta Google my symptoms. For all we know I have a parasite or cancer. For fuck’s sake!”

Yes, I’m one of those people who research my symptoms. I do it all the time for my books, so why not for myself? I don’t want to be one of those people who ends up with a mystery illness that requires me to travel to some fancy hospital for treatment.

“Or, instead of scanning the internet, because let’s face it they always go to the worst case scenarios, I could walk down to the drug store and get a test.”

“Yeah. Okay, let’s do that.” I nod my head, lost in my thoughts.

It’d be my luck that in the prime of my life I have some sort of stomach eating parasite freeloading inside of my body. I mean, the least it could do is pay a fee for

invading my organs. I sit on my bed lost in thought as I hear the sound of my door closing. What am I going to do if it's something serious? Would my career be over before I got a chance to share my stories? Readers don't like to be left wondering what's happening when your last book ended on a story arc. Can I forgive myself if I set things up for the next couple and not give them their happily ever after?

I mean, I have started writing it. I bet I could finish it through chemo or antibiotics that are meant to kill strange organisms living inside of you. It'll be brutal, but I could do it. Right? There are women who complete online degrees while undergoing treatment. I'm young and strong, I can do this. I think.

"Fuck!" I shout, flopping back onto the mattress. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

I'm still laying on my bed, contemplating my life when Demi comes in. She leans over me with a plastic bag swinging between her fingers.

"You ready to do this?"

"No," I remark. "Because if I'm not, it means I'm dying."

"You're not dying, Luna. I won't let you," she vehemently declares. "Don't be dramatic until you have reason to be."

I snatch the bag from her and roll out of the bed to head to my ensuite, Demi hot on my tail. At this point, we've long ago lost any modesty so I set the bag on the sink counter, drop my pants and sit on the toilet. Demi helpfully opens the test and hands it to me.

"Pee, woman," she commands, which has me giggling. Who the hell can pee on demand?

“Demi,” I warn, my bladder suddenly freezing up. “I can’t go!”

She laughs but it sounds a bit... sinister, before she turns on the faucet until the water’s running full blast. “There ya go, bitch. Now pee, dammit!”

I finally manage to pee on the stick without covering my own hand in urine, finish then flush. While the test sits there doing whatever it’s supposed to do, I thoroughly wash my hands then dry them. My eyes are constantly straying to the stick as Demi finally reads through the directions.

“Okay, if it’s positive, you’ll get a giant plus sign. If it’s not, you’ll get a minus one,” she says. “Shit, these instructions are in four different languages!”

I start giggling at the absurdity of the situation, hysteria over what it might reveal pounding in my brain. “Four, huh?” I finally manage to stammer out.

The timer Demi set on her phone chimes and she peers at the test, before widening her eyes somewhat dramatically. “Um, Luna? I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but something failed for you and Marcum that night. You’re going to have a baby.”

“The test has to be defective, Demi. There’s no fucking way!” I deny. “I mean, I have the implant and it’s still good for another year before it has to be replaced. Plus, he wore a condom!”

She’s doing something on her phone then asks, “What was the name of your implant?” I tell her and she taps away again then says, “Luna, this particular implant was recently recalled.”

My heart starts racing while the room begins to spin. “Why was it recalled?” I ask as I slide down to the floor, my back against my shower stall. Right now, I’m grateful it has a glass door, because otherwise, I’d end up on my back because I feel absolutely

boneless.

“Because the failure rate is higher than the acceptable parameters. Apparently, there’s also a class action lawsuit that’s been started for women who ended up pregnant while using it,” she replies.

Oh. My. God.

Marcum.

How in the world am I going to tell him that I’m pregnant? We weren’t careless adults, we took the appropriate precautions yet here we are, pregnant.

This is like a storyline in one of my books. Woman and man meet, spend one magical night together, occasionally text back and forth, then bam. Baby on board.

We don’t know each other well enough to raise a kid together. We have chemistry, but outside of that, I don’t know if we’re going to work in the long run. I hang my head and place it between my hands. What the fuck am I going to do if he goes running for the hills? Lord knows that’s what I’d do if I were wearing his shoes.

Is he going to think I did something in order to trap him? That’s one of my biggest fears right now outside of the fact that I’m carrying his baby inside of my womb. I bet he’s going to lose his shit and go ballistic on me.

“What are you thinking, Luna?” Demi asks, crouching down beside me.

“What if he thinks I did this on purpose, Demi?”

“Then he’s a fool who needs my size eight up his ass,” she answers.

“Wait until you see him, Demi. You’ll understand that he won’t be intimidated by you and your foot won’t be viewed as a threat to his manhood.”

“All men can be taken down to their knees, woman. If anyone knows that, it’s me. But you can’t let your fear of what could be win this round, Luna. He’s your baby daddy, you have to tell him. You can’t hide this from him and raise this kid on your own.”

“How did you know that’s what I was thinking?” I ask, sobs wracking my body.

“Because you have a savior complex, Luna. You don’t want him hurt by this so you’re already trying to find ways around telling him and changing his life.”

“Don’t pretend like you know me,” I laugh, wiping my cheeks.

“No matter what happens, I’m here for you, Luna. If I need to be the daddy, so be it.”

With that, we chuckle, hugging one another closely. Tonight is going to be interesting in more ways than one.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

KODIAK

Bonfires are roaring in the back forty of the property, the sound system has rock music blaring in the background, the pit is roasting a pig, and drinks are free flowing. The club girls are dancing with solo cups held high above their heads, but none of that interests me. My eyes are steadily focused on the gate at the front of the property which I can see from my position.

“Brother,” Xavier says as he lounges next to me. “So, I know you said I needed to keep my distance from Demi, but since she’s going to be a guest here, it’d be considered rude if I ignored her.”

“Are you seriously going to go there, Xavier?” I know what he’s up to, and I’m not wholly impressed with his bullshit argument.

“I mean, we can’t have her thinking we’re a bunch of uncouth bikers, can we?” he asks.

“Uncouth? Where’d you learn that word?”

“Word of the day calendar, of course,” he replies, snickering. “I’ve got a whole arsenal of them to use now. This is a good thing, Marcum, especially with your little writer coming. She’ll know we aren’t uneducated assholes.”

“Some of us are,” I retort. “But some of us have higher education, too,” I add.

“Who are you trying to impress?” Xavier asks, his smirk tells me he’s in smartass mode.

“Not you, you’re as dumb as they come,” I joke, slapping his shoulder.

“Whatever, asshole. You have the same amount of smarts as I do,” he teases, slapping me back. “On a serious note, is she your one, Marcum?”

“I don’t know yet. She hasn’t been exposed to all of this,” I announce, opening my arms wide. “She could see the club girls doing what they do best and hit the road running.”

“Nah, brother. I don’t see that happening. As long as the girls keep their distance from you and mind their business it should be fine,” he assures.

I snort before asking, “What world are you living in, Xavier? We both know these bitches will do whatever it takes to get my attention. Every damn one of them is grabby when it comes to me.”

“It’s because you’ve got all the power,” he sing songs. “They want you because you’re the president.”

“What are you, two?” I grumble while he chortles next to me. “Fucker. Plus, we haven’t really spent a lot of time together. She might have habits I can’t handle.”

“ You might have those too, asshole. I mean, you snore like a lawnmower cutting grass, after all,” he replies.

“I do not snore,” I rebut.

“Sounds like a crew of lumberjacks taking down trees.”

“I don’t sound like a damn lawnmower nor a chainsaw, dickhead,” I argue, shaking my head. “I think you’re hearing yourself.”

“You saying when I’m laying in bed, minding my own business, I’m clearing the woods? You’re so full of shit, brother.”

As I go to add to our banter, I notice Luna’s SUV pull up to the gate. I gave the guard her vehicle details so she wouldn’t be detained. A smile lights up Xavier’s face when he notices where my attention is aimed.

“Showtime,” he snickers, rubbing his hands together.

Great, now he sounds like Beetlejuice. Shaking my head, I stand and walk toward where Luna is currently parking her vehicle, Xavier hot on my heels. Once she turns the car off, I walk to the driver’s door and open it for her, then help her out. I notice Xavier doing the same for Demi and barely hold back from rolling my eyes.

Leaning down, I brush my lips across Luna’s and say, “Hey.”

“Hey, Marcum,” she replies. “Who’s that with Demi?”

“My brother by blood, Xavier,” I tell her, placing my hand on her low back to lead her over by the firepit. We have several roaring seeing as the temperature drops at night since we’re not far from the lake.

“He’s handsome, not as sexy as you are though,” she teases, smiling up at me.

“Damn right he’s not,” I playfully growl, bending over and nipping her skin with my teeth. “He may have himself a little crush going on with your girl there.”

“Oh, yeah? A lot of men do,” she states.

“He’s a fan. We’ve been to several of her fights, she’s damn good.” My eyes swivel toward the duo and see that Xavier’s laying it on thick, using all of his best pick up lines on Demi. I internally grin when I note that she’s not falling for a damn one of them. She’s gonna give him a chase. It’ll be good for him. Women are usually an easy claim for him, and I’m glad that this one will knock him off the totem pole he’s placed himself high upon.

“Too bad it didn’t help her,” she whispers, a sad look crossing her face at the reminder of what Demi recently endured.

“Babe, she was drugged. If she was in full fighting form, she’d have laid those fuckers out and not broken a sweat,” I reply.

“That I have no doubt,” she says, agreeing with me. “I’ve seen her take on men twice her size and make them beg for mercy.”

“I’ve seen it for myself. She’s a badass. I think the fact that she can take men down at the knees is the reason Xavier is so taken with her.”

“So, he’s got a bit of a pain thing?” she asks.

I snort as laughter bubbles up. “Fuck no, unless it’s him causing the pain. He likes that a woman is able to take care of herself and do it so magnificently.”

“Look at you using all these big words,” she teases.

“It’s Xavier’s fucking fault,” I grumble. “He was using some really old word earlier and I gave him shit for it. He said he didn’t want y’all to think we were a bunch of dumbasses.”

“Oh, I’m sure you guys get up to dumbass shit, but I’d never presume about another

person's intelligence based on how they talk, Marcum."

Somehow, that soothes something inside that was a bit unsettled thinking about how she might see my brothers.

"Besides, do you know how often I have to reference my thesaurus to find a word I need?" she questions. "It's a trick of the trade which is the only reason I have the vocabulary I have."

"Makes sense. What do you want to drink? Beer? Soda? Water?"

A look crosses her face that I can't decipher before she says, "Water, please."

"Are you the sober driver tonight, Luna?"

"Something like that," she tells me, beaming up at me. But there are shadows in her eyes that say loud and clear that she's holding something back.

"You gonna tell me what has you looking so glum, sweet Luna?"

"Later," she mumbles, looking down at her shoes.

"I'll hold you to that, my moon," I say, gripping her chin between my fingers and angling her head upward. "I can't help you if you keep things from me."

"I'll tell you, Marcum. I swear. First though, I want to get through our conversation with Demi."

"I'll accept that. For now," I reiterate. "Let Xavier get a few drinks in her first so she'll loosen up before we hit her with what our plan is."

“That was my plan too,” she acknowledges. “But she can hold her liquor so it may be a few hours before she lets go.”

“We’ve got nothing but time,” I remind her. “The night is still young.”

Food has been consumed, and Demi is in the midst of the club girls, dancing and singing to the lyrics. I turn to Luna and raise my brows.

“Yeah. It’s time once we can convince her to come with us,” Luna says, biting her bottom lip.

“Don’t be nervous, Luna Moon. I’ll be the one doing the talking,” I reassure her. I know she feels as if she’s betrayed her friend by telling me about the assault. But after Demi cools her jets, she’ll understand that Luna had her best interest at heart.

Squeezing Luna’s hand, I let go and walk in the middle of the girl’s mob dancing. “Ladies. I need to speak with Demi privately for a few minutes. Stay warmed up and she’ll come back and join you soon.”

Demi gives me a quizzical look, but waves to the girls as she follows me. “Luna, Demi, you two follow me.” I know they’re not my men and don’t have to follow my orders, but out of respect, I still expect them to do it.

I lead them to my office and shut the door behind us. “Have a seat,” I state, pointing my fingers at the two chairs situated directly in front of my desk. I walk around it and plop down in my reclining office chair.

When I look at Luna to see if she wants to start this meeting, I notice that her eyes are clamped shut. I guess she expects me to do it all, which is fine, I prefer it this way.

“Demi, I want you to hear me out and wait until I’m done speaking to insert your two

cents. It's imperative that you don't jump to conclusions and let me lay it all out for you. Okay?"

"Sure," she says, shrugging her shoulders. However, I can see the devil resting on her shoulder, ready and willing to assert her dominance over me.

Yeah, this woman is Xavier's type to a T.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LUNA

Demi and I broached the topic of me asking Marcum to look into things. She wasn't thrilled or onboard, but she understood that as her best friend, it's my right to search for retribution.

After all, she's done the same thing for me on more than one occasion. When I pointed out that she can't say one thing then do the other, she sorta relented. But since I didn't outright tell her I already spoke to him about it, I'm expecting her to pull out one of her epic temper tantrums.

"Let's talk about your assault," Marcum insists, ripping off the band aid.

"W-what?" Demi sputters, turning an accusatory eye my way.

"Sorry, Demi. I needed an outlet and he was there when I broke," I confess.

"Dammit, Luna. I wasn't ready for this," she accuses, wrapping her arms around her torso. Then in a subdued voice, she asks, "What do you want to know?"

Any guilt I feel about telling Marcum what happened subsides when I see how quickly she capitulates. I'm sure we'll have words later about what I did, but the important thing to me is that she regains her power. Right now, she feels powerless and that's simply not who my girl is, not at all.

“Lay the scene out for me and then we’ll get to the rest,” Marcum suggests, his tone full of empathy.

Her eyes glaze over as she relives the night that changed her opinion of humanity. I reach out and place my palm on top of her hand, reminding her that she’s not doing this alone. As long as I’m around, she’ll never face her demons without me stuck to her like glue. Like everything else in our life, we’ll have each other’s back.

“It uh...” she stops to clear her throat. She clamps her lips together holding back a sob. But the way her throat is bobbing, I know telling a virtual stranger is harder than she’s letting on. “We were celebrating. We closed a case that we’d been working on for two years. The guy was good, we had to do some intense recon on him in order to catch him in his lies.”

Marcum holds up his hand and asks, “You’re an insurance fraud investigator, right?”

“Yeah,” she answers, licking her lips.

Marcum nods his head then says, “Thank you for answering that. Continue, please.”

“Our target was good. Damn good. He had a doctor in his pocket that he was sharing his profit with. He was suing our client for a large chunk of change. Six point three million dollars to be precise. We knew he was lying about the extent of his injuries, but with a doctor reporting he would never be able to work again, we had a hard time proving our case. He was never seen out in public without his wheelchair, witnesses claimed he had no feeling in his legs and whenever he would try to hold up his own weight, he’d fall. It was all bullshit. When we’d stake out his house, he’d always have the windows closed so we couldn’t see what he was doing inside.”

“How did you finally catch him?” I ask, now invested in this situation. “I mean, it sounds like he was almost an A-level actor or something.”

“We did some investigations on him and knew he had a certain type of woman he couldn’t resist. Thursday nights were his fantasy football nights. He was part of a league or whatever they call themselves and they’d meet up at a pub to watch the games. So we sent in our lady, and as we suspected she would, she caught his attention. Sheila didn’t let it phase her that he was in a wheelchair, she pretended like it didn’t even exist which made him more interested in her... if that makes sense.”

“It makes perfect sense. If he were really disabled and feeling less like a man, that’d be an added plus for him when it came to a woman seeking his attention,” Marcum excuses.

“How did Sheila figure things out and get the proof?” I ask, leaning closer to my bestie because I know we’re fixing to hit the harder topic.

“They exchanged numbers, had a few dates and eventually, he decided to invite her home with him. Once he got a few beers in him, he forgot that he was supposed to be immobile and got up to grab them another drink. She pretended to be playing a game on her phone and was actually recording him up and moving throughout the house without needing any aid.”

“Wow,” I say. I’m surprised because a man who took so many precautions to play the game he was playing, sure did let his guard down.

“Damn, she was good not letting on what she was doing,” Marcum says. “So, she what, turned the video over to y’all?”

“Yeah, as soon as she thought she had enough evidence, she emailed it to us and CC’d the home office. We were able to go before a judge and have the case thrown out of court. The owner of the company actually pressed charges against him to pay off all of the lawyer fees and court costs he’d acquired.”

“These investigations sound like they can be time consuming,” Marcum muses.

“Insurance fraud is a huge business for the criminal element,” Demi replies. “The schemes get more elaborate which is crazy to me, because when they’re caught, and they always end up being found out, they find themselves guests of the federal penitentiary. Seems it would be easier to just get a fucking job.”

Marcum shifts in his seat looking a tad uncomfortable where the conversation turned. Instead of broaching that subject, he orders, “So what happened when y’all went out to celebrate?”

“We were in high spirits. Happy to be done with this target so we could get on a plane the next day and fly home. Sheila has a little girl at home, so she declined going out with us and decided to book a flight for that night. I didn’t have anything urgent waiting for me, and the guys had been asking me to join them since I never did. I thought, what the hell. I wasn’t tired and didn’t want to go back to my room and be bored so I said yes to the invitation. Worst mistake of my life. There’s a reason I’ve always kept my personal life separate from my business one.”

“It’s okay, Demi. There’s no judgement here. You should be able to go out and celebrate a win without thinking something bad would happen to you. You worked side by side with these guys, and never thought for a moment they’d use your working relationship against you,” I conclude. “Our minds don’t automatically go in that direction when we think we know someone.”

“Thank you, Luna. I feel like a fool for letting my guard down. I never do that, even when I’m drinking.”

“I know,” I whisper. Because my friend has reasons that stem from her childhood for being cautious and aware of her surroundings at all times. But, that’s not my story to tell, nor is it pertinent to what recently occurred.

“What happened next?” Marcum probes. His voice sounds smooth and compassionate, yet the way his hands are gripped into fists, he’s working hard to maintain his temper.

“A song came on that is one of my favorites and I wanted to dance. I asked Joey, the guy I worked with the most, to watch my drink for me and he agreed. It didn’t even occur to me that he would betray me by slipping something into it. By the time that song ended, another one came on, and I liked that one too so I stayed out on the floor until my throat became parched. I was a sweaty mess by the time I slid my way back into the booth and grabbed my drink. Once that was empty, David offered to go to the bar and get me another one. I thought he was being kind since my feet were killing me. I wore a pair of heels that night and my soles felt like they were on fire.”

“So this Joey guy was in charge of protecting your drink and this David fuckwit went to get you a refresher. Were there more guys there with you?” Marcum asks, sometime during our conversation he pulled out a notepad and pen and is jotting down notes.

“Yes. Liam and Niles were with us. They both never talked, I thought it was because they were shy. It turns out, it’s because they are degenerates who were criminal masterminds themselves. They are the ones who pick out the women who are easily manipulated.”

A shocked gasp escapes my lips. “They thought you’d be one of those women? Did they not pay attention to who you are and what you do?”

“They knew. They also know that I can’t let word of what happened to me get out or it would make me look weak and nobody would want to get in the arena with me,” she explains. “It would ruin my career in the fighting world and opponents would use it against me.”

“Bastards,” I spit out.

“In a way, they manipulated you, but Demi,” Marcum says, stopping long enough for her to look up at him. “They didn’t take into account that you would fight back. They didn’t think far enough ahead to the fact that in your line of work, you are admired and that if you did decide to break the silence, there’d be hell to pay. Your fans would revolt and the men who do have your back would do more than break a few legs. You hear me?”

“I hear you,” she quietly says.

“How many of the men there were involved in your rape?” I flinch when the R word is used, I’ve tried not to think of it let alone speak it out loud.

“All of them,” she admits.

“Give it to me play by play,” Marcum commands.

“I got woozy and the room began spinning around me. The guys acted like they were concerned about me and offered to take me outside for some fresh air. I agreed because it was getting hot inside the bar. My feet felt like I was wearing cement shoes, I was having a hard time lifting them. My tongue felt swollen and I couldn’t get any words out to explain how I was feeling to them. They basically carried me outside and leaned me against the brick wall. I didn’t have enough coherent thoughts to realize they’d walked me to the back alley where it was pitch black. I remember the stench of the trash bins and how it made me queasy. But I couldn’t talk, I couldn’t move, I was no better than a limp doll left to their mercy.”

I’ve only heard Demi cry on one other occasion, but never have I heard the sound that emanates from her as she recalls this experience. It’s gut-wrenching and has tears freely flowing down my own face as I lean over and pull her into my arms as best as I

can given we're in two different chairs.

“Shhh, Demi, and finish purging this poison so we can figure out how best to fight these assholes,” I murmur. “Pull on that badass, Demoness, who pulverizes her opponents. We'll make them bleed for what they did to you.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

KODIAK

I pull a Kleenex out of the box and pass it over to Demi. As she wipes her cheeks, the door to my office bangs open and my brother is standing there. His eyes are red-rimmed but it's not from him crying, it's because he's so damn angry he could take on a raging bull.

"Xavier," I call out, worried about what he's going to do since he was eavesdropping on a conversation that had nothing to do with him. He's not okay with women being assaulted, it's one of the things that can set him off and cause him to black out.

"Out," he growls, his attention aimed at me.

"Fuck you," I rebut. "I'm not leaving this room. You had no right listening in on our private conversation."

"Get. The. Fuck. Out," he orders through gritted teeth.

"I don't know who the hell you think you're talking to like that, but you need to check yourself, brother."

"Right now, I'm talking to my brother. I'm asking as politely as I can that you vacate the room," he seethes. I tilt my head to the side, because if I didn't know any better, I'd say there's something between him and Demi that I haven't been privy to. And I don't like it.

“Conan,” Demi says his name like one would when they’re approaching a wounded animal. “Please.”

“No, Demi. We played this your way, now it’s time to do it mine,” he declares.

“What am I missing here?” I ask, damn near biting off my tongue. “Do you two know each other?”

A humorless chuckle escapes Xavier as he squints at Demi. “Would you like to answer that or do you want me to?”

“Please don’t,” Demi cries, burying her face into the Kleenex.

“Why? Still ashamed of me, Demoness?” The sound of his voice has my head bolting backward. “Only want to meet me in the backroom of your fights, release some stress?”

“Conan, you know why it has to be this way. Please don’t do this, I’m begging you,” Demi pleads.

“No, I don’t know why it has to be like this,” he retorts. “I’ve done as you asked. I’ve even taken other women to my bed to try and forget you. Forget us . But you’re always there like a ghost haunting me. It’s always your face I see, but it’s different for you, isn’t it?”

“No,” she whispers. “It’s exactly the same.”

“What the fuck?” Luna asks, sounding as if she’s been kicked in the gut. “Demi, what’s going on?”

I can hear the hurt in her tone and as little as I actually know about the two women, I

suspect that Demi's been keeping a few secrets from my Luna.

"Luna," Demi says, reaching toward her friend. "I... I just can't right now, okay?"

"You can't what, exactly? Tell me what's going on? Tell me why you've been hiding secrets from me?" Luna questions, her voice sounding like she's equal parts angry and upset. "I tell you everything . Every single thing!"

"Leave and let us talk," Xavier demands, glaring at me while motioning to Luna. "I promise, I'll explain it all shortly."

On one hand I want to give my brother what he wants, but on the other, Demi just relived something pretty traumatic and I'm not sure that Xavier's hurt feelings aren't going to cause her more emotional damage. So I express that, "Brother. Demi was in the middle of telling us what happened to her so I could bring it to the table to ask for help in getting her some revenge. This is not the time for you to go barbarian on her. She needs comfort right now, now a caveman."

"You take care of your woman and let me take care of mine, Marcum."

"Xavier, you're crossing so many lines right now. You need to step back and remember who you're demanding things from," I state, reminding him of his place in the pecking order.

"I'm not your woman," Demi argues. "This mentality is why we decided to not be in any sort of committed relationship. I'll never be anybody's property, Conan."

"No, you decided that, princess. I never said anything about wanting to control you. One of the things I admire most is your fierce independence. And for your information, being a biker's property," he sneers, using the same tone she just did, "means more than you know. It's a sign of a lasting commitment, one that supersedes

marriage, although I'm willing to give you that as well. Fuck, Demi, I want it all, woman! The highs and lows, the good and bad, the happy and sad."

Now I feel like we're encroaching in a territory I'm not comfortable being a third party to. This is something they need to work out between them without any witnesses. Since we're not going to get back on track anytime soon, because they are both distracted with whatever this is brewing between them, I stand from my chair and walk around the desk, holding my hand out for Luna to take.

"Come on, sweetheart. Let's let them hash this out. We'll revisit this at a later date," I implore, not wanting either one of us to be dragged into this mess. At least not any more than we already have been.

She takes my hand and we walk out of my office. "Luna, let's go to my place for a little bit of privacy," I say as I take in the rowdiness that is currently occurring in the backyard. The club girls have shed a lot of their clothes, several of the brothers are getting blowjobs and if I'm not mistaken, Pepper is being fucked from behind while she pleasures one of the brothers with her mouth.

"Yeah, that's not a bad idea."

Good because there's something going on with her as well and I think it's unrelated to Demi's situation. I want to get to the bottom of that and maybe get her into my bed.

My cock perks up at the thought, the memory of our night together plays on repeat, especially when I'm alone in bed or standing underneath the spray of my shower. I've jacked off so many times since first meeting Luna that I worry I may have taken off some of my girth from rubbing one out. I chuckle at the thought causing Luna to glance up at me.

I pull her into my side as we maneuver through the crowd. All of the brothers are in attendance, along with a bunch of folks from town, which is typical. The women want a walk on the wild side, while the men are hoping we'll let them prospect or some shit.

They have no fucking clue what it takes to be a Deviant Knight. It's more than sliding on a leather cut and riding a bike. It's in our blood; the roar of the wind as we travel down the road, the pumping of our blood as we take care of those who hurt the innocent. Prospecting for us isn't for the pussies of the world, and a quick glance shows me that most of the men posturing around the yard are nothing more than weekend riders, if that.

It doesn't take long for us to weave our way around the partygoers and head behind them, heading toward the crop of land where a few of us have built our homes. When we cross the threshold of my house, Luna stops and stands in the middle of our living area. I'd like to be able to be in her mind and hear what she's thinking. This is the epitome of a bachelor pad. It consists of two recliners, a large screen television hung above the fireplace, pictures on the walls of motorcycles with half-dressed chicks lounging over the saddle. Beer cans line my coffee table and kitchen counter and the dishes from breakfast are sitting unwashed in the sink. I hadn't had a chance to clean yet, and since Xavier could care less, that chore falls on my shoulders.

"I swear I'm not a slob," I chuckle. "Xavier doesn't help me pick up and I had a few contracts to look over and bills to pay before the barbecue started so I didn't get a chance to make things presentable."

"Honestly, Marcum. It looks better than I expected seeing as you're a single man. Xavier lives here with you?" she asks, walking over to Xavier's chair and removing the cross body purse from her body.

"Yes. We didn't see the point in building two houses when we've always lived

together. We haven't really ever been a part. We rode the nomad life together when neither one of us wanted to be stationary. That need didn't hit until a year back. We were happy riding on the open road with no responsibilities and nobody to answer to if we wanted to take an unplanned trip."

"It sounds freeing," she says, crossing her legs as her fingers begin trailing over the trim of her purse.

"What are you avoiding telling me, Luna?" I watch her face drop as fear washes over her.

CHAPTER TWENTY

LUNA

I don't truly know the man who's sitting as close as possible to me without actually being on my lap. When we first met and connected in such a spectacular way, there were no promises of a future, a relationship, anything, because neither of us were looking for one.

Plus, how do I tell him that despite our very best efforts, whether or not we become anything more than we already are, which is a step above casual acquaintances, we'll be irrevocably tied together due to the unexpected and completely unplanned pregnancy.

I won't say unwanted, because at some point, I did want to have children. However, I expected that would happen within a committed relationship, whether I was married or simply living with a long-time significant other. Not due to a one-night stand.

"Luna?" His voice is firm but the tone lets me know that my time has run out.

"Um, Marcum, I'm not really sure how to tell you something," I say.

"Just spit it out, Moon," he advises. "Best way to do it is just rip that bandage off."

Taking a deep breath, I exhale and then spit out my admission as quickly as is humanly possible, "ImpregnantandIdontknowhowitspossible."

Yeah, I smashed it all together; I like to think it's the writer in me, but the truth is this is going to upend both of our lives.

"Can you repeat that where I can understand what you said?" he asks, his brow wrinkled as he attempts to puzzle through my words.

"Marcum," I whine. "I don't wanna."

"Luna, are you two? Just fucking tell me!" he all but bellows.

"Fine, you asked for it. You're going to be a daddy, Marcum. I don't know how it happened, though."

"Well, normally, when a man and a woman have sex, they have the potential to create a... what the fuck did you just say?"

"Despite me having an implant and you using a condom, we're in that very tiny segment of society who still managed to get pregnant," I whisper, afraid to look at him.

"Son of a fucking bitch!" he roars. When he stands up and starts pacing, I glance from underneath my lashes to see him pulling at the ends of his hair as he mumbles almost incoherently to himself.

"I'm sorry," I say as the silence drags on.

"Why are you sorry? Did you poke holes in the condom? Magically remove your implant before I fucked you three ways from Sunday?"

"Of course not! But it's not exactly something you were expecting, am I right?" I ask.

"I was a safe bet, dammit."

The irony of the situation is not lost on me at all. He slumps down onto the recliner opposite me, his hands dangling between his thick, muscular legs. Remembering how they felt sliding against my own has desire pooling... no, focus, Luna, focus!

“No, I never wanted kids,” he admits. “Not after how we grew up. My genetics predispose me to having big kids, and I couldn’t abide having a child of mine being used the way Xavier and I were.”

My heart sinks. I know I’m a strong, independent woman and can raise a child on my own, of course, but I was secretly hoping that he’d want to be intricately involved. If not with me, than with his child, but I guess that’s a moot point.

“I’m not asking for anything,” I quickly tell him. “I’m fully capable of doing this on my own, Marcum. But I wasn’t going to hide the fact that you were going to be a father, either. That would be wrong in my opinion. Plus, I have Demi to lean on.”

Okay, she probably won’t be much help when the pregnancy hormones kick in, if my libido goes into overdrive the way all my book research indicates, but I’m sure she’ll be down for a trip to a sex store. Blushing, I rethink that and decide maybe some discreet online purchases would be the better way to go.

“There’s no way I won’t help support a child who’s mine, Luna,” he replies. “Whether or not we’re together.”

Well, that doesn’t exactly fill me full of joy, but he hasn’t kicked me out of the house, so I’ll count it as a partial win, I guess. Still, I decide to caution him because a lot can happen, after all.

“Marcum, I haven’t even gone to the doctor yet. She needs to know that the implant failed, because I don’t know if it would hurt a baby or not.”

A brief flash of fear crosses his face before he shuts it down. “Make the appointment, what are you waiting for?” he asks.

“Um, maybe because I literally just peed on the damn stick earlier today?” I snark at him. “Right before we came to the clubhouse for the cookout, as a matter of fact!”

He smirks and I realize that my sassy attitude is something he likes. “Fine. Whatever. But make that call.”

“I will on Monday,” I reply. “Already have a note on my calendar.”

“Fucking technology,” he grumbles. “When you make that appointment, let me know.”

“You planning on tagging along?” I ask, thinking maybe, just maybe there’s a chance that he wants to be included in everything. Most men that live his lifestyle are standoffish when it comes to bringing new life into the world. I cross my fingers that this brings us closer together instead of tearing us apart.

“Let me make something perfectly clear,” he states, leaning in closer to me. I can feel his breath mingling with mine. “I may be a biker, it will always be in my blood, but when it comes to mine, I will fight tooth and nail to keep them with me. Does that clear things up for you?”

“Sorta,” I answer slowly.

“What are you having issues with here, Luna? Get out of your head and spit the words out.”

“Okay,” I drawl before asking, “does that mean you’ll only be here for our baby, or am I included in that, too?”

“Do you love me, Luna?” His question catches me off guard.

“Do I... do I what?” I ask, canting my head to the side to see if he’s serious or not. “I don’t know you enough to say that I do.”

“You just made my point for me, Moon.”

“What point? How the hell did I do that, Marcum? I’m so damn confused right now,” I state, burying my head between my hands.

“Listen. I care about you; I want the best for you no matter what. Are you with me so far?”

“Y-yeah,” I stumble out.

“Love may or may not happen for us. Only time can tell that. But I have mad respect for you, you mean something to me. And the fact that you’re going to be the mother of my child, that means you will forever be by my side no matter what happens between the two of us. I can’t predict the future, but what I can say with one hundred percent accuracy, is that wherever you and my baby are, is where I’ll be.”

“Okay,” I mumble.

While I understand what he’s telling me, there’s a tiny part that’s ticked off. I mean, we might not end up being a true couple, but I’m not stupid enough to think he’ll remain single the rest of his life. Do I want another woman around my child? I tamp down my rising irritation, which really has no place here at all. I already know a lot can happen before a safe, healthy birth occurs. While I don’t want to borrow trouble, I’m a bit pragmatic about things, especially given all the internet searches I do for my writing.

“Should we talk about our expectations where it comes to other people coming into our lives? I don’t know if everything I’ve read on the internet is accurate or not, I haven’t lived in a clubhouse setting before, so you may have to clue me in on some things,” I ask.

“Other people? You mean like you dating and shit?” He looks fit to be tied right now and I’m getting concerned with each second that passes because his face has gone taut and I’ve never seen that shade of red it’s turning on anyone before.

“Um... Marcum? Should I be worrying that you’re going to have a heart attack here?”

“No, what you should be worrying about is me turning you over my knee and blistering your ass! No other men, period, end of motherfucking story.”

“Does that go for women when it comes to you as well?” I ask, unintentionally waving the flag in front of the bull.

“I don’t date!” he roars.

“Yes you do,” I counter. “What do you call what we’ve been doing?”

“Not dating. We’ve been getting to know each other. Besides that, you’re the exception to the rule, Luna.”

“Sure,” I sass, crossing my arms across my chest. “And so is any bimbo Barbie that catches your eye.”

“Bimbo Barbies?” he asks, coming across as being amused by my comparison to the women I’ve seen prancing around in the backyard today.

“Yeah, you know the half-dressed girls you seem attracted to?”

“The club bitches? Luna, you’re joking right? Did you see me entertaining them in any way while you were judging them?”

“I don’t judge,” I snap. I wasn’t, I swear. But I won’t lie to myself and not admit that the green-eyed monster reared its ugly head. I’m not as sexy or as confident with my body as they are. It caused those insecurities from the past to come back and all but slap me in the face. I was a chunky kid compared to my classmates. I didn’t start slimming down until my junior year of high school and by then, I was a pariah.

“You kinda did when you placed them in a certain category, Luna. You don’t know a thing about them. You have no idea what kind of lives they’ve led, that they feel as if they need to be here so we can provide for them and protect them.”

“They live here at the clubhouse?” I ask, aghast. “I figured they just showed up for the parties or something.”

“Fuck,” he says, raking his hands through his hair. “How did we get on this topic?”

“I don’t know, Marcum. I’m just along for the ride, this is your rodeo,” I reply with more sass than I probably should.

“For fuck’s sake,” he mutters. “I need a breather. Maybe we need to pick this up another time when we have cooler heads. Let yourself out whenever you’re ready. I’ll call you later.” Without looking back or saying another word to me, he swivels on the balls of his feet and leaves me sitting here with my jaw hung open.

“Asshole!” I yell, picking up one of the empty beer cans on the side table and tossing it against the wall. I watch as what was left in the can splashes out of the tin and splatters on the drywall. “Whatever. I’m not cleaning that shit up.” I grab my

crossbody purse and stomp out of the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

KODIAK

“Kodiak,” Peaches purrs my name as she drops down into my lap. After I left my house, I came back to the party. My plan was to down a few beers and look at the fire until I cooled my jets.

“Not now, Peaches,” I tell her as I use my free hand to unwind her arms from around my shoulders.

“Come on, let me help you relieve some of that stress. You don’t want that high-class bitch and you know it. She’s a new flavor, and you’ve had a taste. It’s time to let us make you feel better.”

“Us?” I ask, lost in thought of my woman. My crazy, full of shit woman. My pregnant woman.

“Us,” another voice whispers in my ear. I recognize the voice belonging to Kitty. These club bitches don’t know when to leave well enough alone at times.

Normally, they don’t bother me, but ever since Luna literally walked into my path, I haven’t been availing myself of their talents. Not that I plan to think about what that means any time soon.

“Not interested, ladies. Go help one of my brothers out,” I state.

“Oh, come on, Kodiak. You look tense, let us help you out with that,” Peaches murmurs as Kitty draws her finger across the nape of my neck, lowering her mouth to nibble on the lobe of my ear.

They tag team their attack against me and pick a side of my neck to nuzzle their noses into. The cloying body sprays they use have me fighting not to sneeze. Suddenly, I miss the crisp, clean scent of my Moon. “What the fuck are y’all trying to pull?”

Before I get my answer, I hear a sobbed gasp coming from behind me. I stand and Peaches falls to the ground, landing flat on her ass in the dirt. Twisting my torso, I see Luna standing there, tears trekking down her cheeks.

“Luna, it’s not what you think,” I defend.

“It never is, is it Kodiak?” she cries, shaking her head as if I’ve disappointed her. “That’s okay, you live your life and enjoy your evening.” When she cups her hand across her still toned belly as if she’s protecting our baby from watching his father cheating on her, I lose my shit.

“I’m already guilty in your eyes, huh? Don’t I get the chance to defend myself here, Luna, or is your mind already made up? I’m a cheater because your research says I am. Do I have that right?” I growl out, not caring that we’ve drawn an audience.

“Stop, Marcum. Just stop,” she pleads, her head turning as she takes in the witnesses watching our dramatic confrontation.

Over it and needing time away from her, I order, “Get out of here, Luna. Go talk shit about me behind my back with Demi. You two should have a great time eating some Ben and Jerry’s while smack talking about me and Xavier.”

“Newsflash, asshole. I don’t need a night with my girl while spooning some ice

cream into my mouth to trash talk you. You've already proven all of my theories and research right. Enjoy the sluts, Marcum, because you'll never have their hearts, you'll only ever have their pussies. You think these skanks are loyal to you? Do you?"

"Yes!" I spit out.

"You're a fool, Marcum. All they want is a patch on their back to lord over each other so they can climb the ranks. Patch chasers only care about one thing, but they'll never be truly loyal to you. Wanna know how I know that?"

"Sure. Tell me, oh wise one," I sarcastically demand. "How do you know considering you've never walked a mile in their shoes?" My brothers all look at me dumbfounded. They've seen my temper flare before, but it's never, not once, been so demeaning and accusatory. Women are sacred to me, the men surrounding me know I won't allow any disrespect tossed their way, and yet, here I am throwing shade at the one woman who makes me feel alive.

"Because I know women, Marcum. I've seen how catty they can be when they set their minds to something. Especially, when it's something they want that'll one up their opponent."

"So what? They want to take a ride on my dick? That's old news for me, Moon."

"Been there, done that," Peaches announces, sounding proud of herself. My eyes clamp closed because I know deep in my soul that her words just nailed the lid on my coffin.

"Many, many times," Kitty adds her two cents.

"Fuck," Risk whistles. "I think you're fucked, pres." I turn my head in his direction and stare him down. He imitates zipping his lips, but he knows as well as I do that the

damage has already been done.

“I’ll let you know about that doctor’s appointment,” Luna inserts, using the hem of her shirt to wipe her face. “Until then, I think we should keep our distance.”

“What’s with all of the shouting?” Demi demands as she stomps into the yard. Xavier walks out behind her, and he gives me a perplexed glare. “Luna? Why the fuck are you crying?” She marches over to her friend and gets right in her face, examining Luna and when she turns my way and sees me surrounded by the club girls, she looks murderous. “Really?” Her foot is tapping ninety miles per hour as she takes in the scene. “I think our welcome here has been worn out. Let’s go, Luna, before I knock the shit out of everyone that made you shed tears.”

Despite the abject misery on Luna’s face right now, I can’t help the slight smirk that crosses my face seeing how fiercely Demi has come to her aid. She’s got a warrior in her corner, something I’m sure she realizes, but the fact that Demi is looking at all of us, unafraid of the fact that she’s highly outnumbered if push came to shove, is admirable.

And right now, with shit so fucking sideways, she’s gonna need her because I suspect she won’t give me the time of day any time soon. As she takes Luna’s arm in hers and turns toward the parking lot, I give Xavier a slight shake of my head when he pantomimes handing me a bottle of liquor.

Xavier and I stand side-by-side as we watch two angry women stride away from us with their heads held high. “What the hell happened, brother?” Xavier probes.

“I found out tonight that I’m going to be a dad,” I confess. “Things were going good until I let something she said get to me and things went to hell from there.”

“Well, shit. I’m going to be an uncle?” he asks.

“Yeah, brother.”

“When you say shit hit the fan, I’m assuming the blades were Kitty and Peaches?” He looks down at the girl sprawled on the ground and the other who’s slowly backing away from us.

“You got it in one guess,” I hiss, opening and closing my fist.

“We don’t hit girls, remember, brother,” Xavier reminds me even if he looks ready to nail them himself.

“I remember. Girls, you’re on latrine duty for the unforeseeable future for that stunt. You knew I was with someone and you set your mind to cause division. You are also banned from attending parties for a month. Your pussies will not be touched until I say so but your mouths are still open for business. Got me?”

“Yes,” Kitty spits out.

“Yeah, Kodiak,” Peaches murmurs, sounding pissed. Good, because so the fuck am I.

“You heard him, get gone,” Xavier edicts. “If the men need your mouths, they’ll hunt you down. Do not go looking for them yourselves.” Both of them nod their heads and scamper from the premises like parasites running from the poison held in my hand and head indoors.

“So, how do you plan on coming back from this?” Xavier questions.

“I have no earthly idea,” I admit. “I think I dug my grave.”

“Six feet under, my brother. You better pray Luna remembers where she left the shovel or you’re fucked.”

It's been two damn days and Luna is only responding to my texts with one to two word responses.

Me: How are you doing?

Luna: Good.

I try again for the umpteenth time to get more than that from her.

Me: Have you made a doctor appointment yet?

Luna: Yes.

Me: ??? When is it?

Luna: In two days. Ten in the morning.

Well, I'm on a roll, that was more than two words.

Me: The address?

Does she answer me using actual words? Hell no. She sends me a pin drop with the building's coordinates.

Me: See you then. And Luna, we're gonna talk afterward.

Luna: Maybe.

Me: No. Not maybe. We will be talking. We have a baby to think about.

Luna: ...

Then I watch as the bubbles disappear before she begins again.

Luna: If you say so.

This time, I'm the one with a short response.

Me: I do.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

LUNA

“That insufferable, pigheaded dickhead!” I exclaim after rereading our texts. “He’s acting like we’re in an actual relationship or something.”

Demi pokes her head up from the instructions she’s been reading and says, “Well, ya kind of are since he’s your baby daddy, Luna.”

“Quit calling him that!”

Right now, every little thing is irritating me, including my best friend. She decided that now was as good a time as any to convert my chaotic office into a well-organized area. But, every time I approach what happened with her and Xavier? She shuts up. Clams up tighter than a damn oyster creating a fucking pearl. However, she’s sure sticking her two cents into what’s going on with me and Marcum and it’s driving me fucking crazy.

“Well, he is, bestie,” she sing songs. “Hey, do you think we can move your desk over there?” she asks, pointing to the opposite wall. “This side here will allow me to have all the bookshelves together. Then, I’ll see what I can use for the closet to organize the swag. We’ll probably need different containers though.”

She taps her chin with her index finger as she stares at me. “Yeah, we can move it. I think having more natural light will help me anyhow.”

“True. Plus, I’m going to get two more bookshelves to put on either side of the window for your author pretties you get at signings. Oh! And I found this really neat thing when I was scrolling on the book of faces that we can hang your lanyards on!”

“I only have a few of them, Demi,” I remind her. It’s not like I’ve signed at more than a handful of events. I didn’t start attending them until I had five books published.

“You’ll have more,” she blithely replies. “I’m going to write the dates on the back of them so you can see how your career progresses! And what do you think about me printing off your signing pictures and making collages of them? I’ve got my Cricut and can do some fancy shit.”

“Whatever you think would look good is fine with me. Now, I’m gonna dive back into this manuscript. Unless the house is burning down around our heads, I have to focus, okay?”

“Last thing, then I’ll shut up, I promise. You need to display at least one copy of each of your books on the pretties bookshelf, Luna. I want you to be able to see what you’ve already accomplished on those days when it’s hard, you know?”

“I like that idea, Demi, thanks for thinking of doing that,” I reply. “Thankfully, I haven’t really had any days where writer’s block tries to pull me down, but I’ve heard it eventually happens to everyone. Having something to look at like that, plus the displayed lanyards, will help a lot, I know it will.”

I’m actually ahead of the game right now. I have several preorders up and the books have already been uploaded, which is allowing me the freedom to keep moving forward without the added stress of deadlines. Several author friends suggested doing it like that so I wasn’t always feeling under the gun and I have to admit, it’s helped me to start having a better work-life balance. That’s something I need to keep in mind as my pregnancy progresses, because I know once the baby arrives, my time will be

even further constrained.

Sighing, I open up the document to check out my upcoming events. I only have one that's a bit iffy because it's close to what I've projected as my due date according to the wheel I found online and did the math with, but until I have confirmation from the doctor, I won't reach out to the organizer. Hopefully, if I have to pull, I can do it soon enough so another author can purchase my table so I don't lose the fee I paid. Well, except for the nominal deposit, that is, because those are non-refundable.

"Your appointment is tomorrow, how are you feeling about seeing Marcum?" Demi casually asks, keeping her eye on her task. I know I asked for her to give me some quiet time to dig into my work, but this is a topic I've been ruminating over and could use her as an outlet to get my feelings out there so I'm not upset she broke her word when she said earlier that it'd be the last thing she said.

"Nervous. Excited. Ready to rearrange his face," I honestly answer.

"All of the above, huh?" She snickers. "I can still come with you, Luna. I know you want to do this yourself, but you don't have to. I'm there for you."

"I know, Demi. But I have a feeling that Marcum and I are going to come to blows and I don't think it's fair to back him into a corner. I can do this." I'm not sure if I'm trying to convince her of that or myself. I don't honestly think he'd ever hit me, or any woman for that matter. He may be a biker, but he doesn't strike me as one who lays hands on anyone who is truly physically weaker than he is. Now, verbally? He slayed me and I expect he'll do it again as this pregnancy progresses. It's not something I look forward to whatsoever.

"Have you thought about what you want to say to him?" she probes, she's been worried about me and I get it. I've been moping around the house, more withdrawn than what's typical for me. But I've had a lot on my mind that I needed to sort

through.

“Not exactly. I mean, I’m still upset about what he said, of course, but then seeing those women splayed across him like they were keeps popping into my mind as well.”

“While I wasn’t outside then, based on the fact both were on their asses on the ground? I don’t think their attention was asked for at all,” she says.

“Only one was on the ground,” I giggle, recalling the shocked look on the female’s face as her ass hit the dirt. “And if it wasn’t such an emotional confrontation, and I wasn’t wrecked by what I witnessed, I’d have probably laughed in her face.”

“What was up with their display, anyway? Do you think they saw you lurking in the shadows and decided to give you a show? Remind you that they’re always around when you aren’t?” Demi questions.

“It’s something to ponder, I suppose, but the fact still remains that he let that bitch plop onto his lap and let both of them put their tongues on him. There’s no excuse on the planet he can come up with that’d excuse that behavior.”

“There is one,” she softly says. “Luna, you’ve said as much to me, but the two of you aren’t really an actual couple. Sure, you fucked, and you text back and forth all the time, but for all intents and purposes, you’re both still single as the day is long.”

“Whose side are you on anyway,” I huff out. “Stop being logical because even though your words have merit, it still hurts.” I rub my chest over the place my heart rests, trying to ease the ache. “We may not have verbally committed to one another, but my heart didn’t get the memo that he wasn’t technically mine.”

I mean, she’s not wrong, but in my heart of hearts, I had hoped that we would

eventually become a couple. I know he's leery because of his lifestyle and how different it is from my own, but I've always been of the belief that if a couple is together, they can overcome any obstacle. Only now, I'm not sure if I want to given how he was on Saturday. Damn, if this wishy washy brain is any indication of how my pregnancy is going to go, I can see I'm going to be checking myself into the nuthouse before I deliver because I'm driving myself batshit crazy.

“When you see him tomorrow, keep in mind that he's probably just as confused as you are about where you stand. The way he looked at you says to me that he already considered you his and you gave him puppy dog looks as well. If y'all can get past this, and talk it out, you still may have a chance at that future you've always wanted for yourself, Luna.”

“I'm not so sure about that, Demi. I don't know if I can handle those women pawing at him. And the fact that they live on the property doesn't make it any easier to get past. They're always going to be there. A temptation.”

“Listen. I know you've been cheated on and the fact that those women will be there isn't going to be something you can easily overcome, but you can't build a life with him if you don't find a way around that and learn to trust him. He's not the men from your past, Luna. He strikes me as the type of man that once he's in, he's in for life. Temptation doesn't mean he's going to let them drop to their knees and swallow him down their throats. From what I saw, he's in control of his dick, not the other way around.”

“What if I can't get past it, Demi? What if my insecurities always rule my life?”

“Do you want an honest answer here, Luna, or do you want me to placate you?”

“I want honesty from you, Demi. Always.”

She's definitely not Willy Wonka and won't sugarcoat shit, not even for me. It might hurt hearing what she has to say, but it's far better to hurt in advance than be blindsided, as far as I'm concerned.

“If you can't let it go, then you're always going to be alone. Because Marcum isn't the only man out there that has women willing to drop their drawers and spread their legs. Any man you get into a relationship with can be put in that situation. It's up to them to decline the offer.”

“And it's up to me to decide if I'm going to trust them if they're put there or not,” I whisper beneath my breath. “Shit, Demi. I'm a mess.”

Despite all my hesitation, I know Marcum is an honorable man. I can't see him cheating on the woman he's involved with, but old hurts are hard to overcome.

“But you're a beautiful disaster, Luna. Remember that because any man that catches your eye is the luckiest bastard alive.”

The next morning I'm a ball of nerves. My hands shake as I pull my hair up into a high ponytail. I don't attempt to put on any makeup outside of mascara and lipgloss. The last time Marcum and I were together, turned out to be a disaster.

Maybe we were meant to find each other so that our little peanut would exist and we weren't destined for anything else—relationship wise.

Shaking off those dreary thoughts, I nod at my reflection in the mirror, grab my purse, keys, and phone and head out. Demi had a few errands to run today so she got an early start so I don't have anyone here to give me any pep talks.

“You can do this, Luna. As long as he wants to be in y'all's kid's life, that's the only thing that matters.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

KODIAK

I'm early to the appointment, hoping that she'll be running ahead of time and we'll get a chance to clear some of the air between us. I want us to go into this with a positive outlook instead of tension and anger.

I've stewed over some of the bullshit that came out of my mouth and if I could kick my own ass for some of the shit I said, I would. It's bad enough some of my men are firmly in the Team Luna camp at this point while my own brother, the one who I've been side-by-side with our entire lives, is still raging at me over what happened at the party on Saturday.

Fuckers. All of them. What's happening is between me and Luna, no one else. Then the mantle of responsibility that I carry as the president of a club that's straddled the line of the law comes crashing back down and I realize it does concern more than just the two of us.

As I sit on the saddle of my bike, angling myself to where I can see the entirety of the parking lot, my heart drums in excitement when I watch her car pull in and park. I grin as I watch her school her features and turn off her engine. Seems I'm not the only one hoping we'd see each other before she was due to head inside.

Dismounting my bike, I march over to the driver's side and pull on the lever that'll open the door and allow me to breathe in Luna's perfume. There's something about her scent that settles my senses.

“Luna,” I say in greeting as I hold my hand out to help her out.

“Marcum. How are you?” she asks, her tone slightly melancholy.

“Feeling like a jackass,” I answer her.

“Is that so? Sorry you’re having that issue.”

“I don’t like the way we left things between us. I’m unsettled,” I admit, pulling her into my arms once she’s got both feet on the ground. “I didn’t mean a fucking thing I said, Moon.”

“Then why did you say those things, Marcum?” I feel droplets of her tears hit the material of my shirt and it has my heart clenching in my chest.

We may not know each other as well as we should considering where we’re at right this very second, but the thought that I may have broken something inside this strong, incredible woman has my gut twisting. I’m still not willing to examine how I feel too closely; I’ve never believed in all that happily-ever-after bullshit, nor the cheesiness of love at first sight. But I know I feel something for her that’s more than just a fuck.

“I’m not used to being called out for shit, and it instigated my confrontation mode.”

“You sound like a video game when you say it that way,” she teases, using the sleeve of my shirt to clean her cheeks. I’m slightly encouraged when I hear her giggle, then I picture the countless gaming systems in our clubroom and can’t help the chuckle that erupts from my gut.

“That sounds like a good assessment because I felt like a robot whose voice was being overridden when I spouted that bullshit. Can you ever forgive me for acting before thinking?”

“We can work on it,” she tells me. “Because sometimes my mouth says things before my brain’s fully engaged as well.”

“That’s a start,” I mumble. “I know we’re going to be walking in there with some hurt feelings, but I don’t want either of us to have a chip on our shoulder, this is a special time for the both of us.”

“I need to know something before we go inside,” she hesitantly states.

“What’s that, my moon?”

“Is this forgiveness only wanted for the baby’s sake, or do you want something to grow between us?”

“I’d like for there to be more between us, if I’m being one-hundred percent honest with you. I know we have some hurdles we need to jump over before that can happen, which is why I was hoping we could sit down and share a meal after this,” I say, waving my hand at the building in front of us.

“I could sit down with you,” she conveys. “We still have a lot of air to clear out, but like you, I’d like to go into this appointment without wanting to claw your eyes out.”

“My eyes and I appreciate that,” I joke. “We have about ten minutes before you’re scheduled to sign in, are you ready to head that way?”

“Yeah,” she tells me, biting her lower lip. She looks so damn sexy when she does that and I have to rearrange myself in my denim before taking a step. It’s painful to walk with a hardon.

“Today, we’ll be taking measurements and listening to the heartbeat,” Dr. Limons says as she types some of the basic information Luna gave her in regards to her health

history. “Lay back on the table and lift your shirt underneath your breasts and unbutton your jeans please.”

I place my hand on Luna’s lower back as she lies back, making sure she doesn’t strain anything. All of this has protective instincts pushing to the forefront. Not that I’m a completely heartless bastard but knowing that she’s growing a part of the two of us, one that shouldn’t even exist given the fact that she has an implant and I used a rubber, is taking my feelings to a higher level.

I’ll examine that later. When I’m alone except for a bottle of top shelf whiskey. Right now, Luna is the priority. Once she’s settled as comfortably as possible, I watch the doctor squeeze some lube out of a tube onto her lower belly, then she grabs a flashlight sized object, presses a button on the side and then runs it through the goop that’s smeared on Luna’s stomach. Occasionally, she presses in a bit and I see Luna wince, which has me biting my tongue to keep from saying something that’ll get me thrown out.

Well, they could try to kick my ass out, my mind whispers.

A sudden whooshing sound brings me out of my thoughts to focus back in on what’s happening right in front of me.

“That’s your baby’s heartbeat,” the doctor says, glancing at Luna. “Strong and healthy. The next visit, we’ll do an ultrasound, but right now, with your pregnancy being so new we’d have to do a vaginal one, and I try to avoid those for my patients whenever possible.”

“Why?” I bark out.

The doctor looks at me and replies, “Because it’s not all that comfortable for the mother, to be completely frank. It’s minimally invasive, but in reality, it still causes

discomfort and there's plenty of that during a pregnancy with morning sickness and the like."

I'm glad to hear her say that. While I have no clue what a vaginal ultrasound entails, it sounds barbaric and not pleasurable at all. Since I know Luna is going to have to deal with giving birth down the line, whatever keeps her from being uncomfortable right now is fine by me.

"Now I'm going to take a tape measure and get your measurements," Dr. Limon informs us. During all of this, Luna grabbed my hand and I laced my fingers between hers. If she's seeking comfort through me, I'm going to accept that. It's a good sign that we're on the right track toward forgiveness. And since I'm not experienced with relationships, I'm going to have to follow her lead on this one and hope nothing else stupid leaves my mouth—at least until we're on better terms.

Once she's cleaned up and her clothes are resituated, we make our follow up appointment for next month and scuttle out to our vehicles.

"Wanna ride with me and after our meal, I'll bring you back to your vehicle?" I ask her, my fingers crossed that she says yes because I want to feel her arms wrapped around me.

"I'd love to," she replies, her eyes brightening.

Lowering down, I unclip the latches on my saddle bag and pull out the helmet I bought her yesterday in hopes that she'd agree to take a ride with me.

"I love it, Marcum. Thank you." I watch as she examines it. Stixx is artistic and has a few supplies at the clubhouse. He airbrushed her name on the back in a cursive script with the tag *Property of Kodiak* emblazoned on the back in italics. "Does this mean what I think it means?"

“I wanted a way to show you that I want more than friendship with you. I’m not good with words as last weekend proved. To me, actions speak louder than any words can. I want you to be my old lady, Luna. In all ways. We’re going to have a few upheavals in our relationship as we get to know each other better. I know I’m moving fast here, but that’s the way I’ve always done things. Especially when it’s something I want... desperately. If you accept this, my moon, there’s no going back. This isn’t like a marriage contract where a mere piece of paper can dissolve our commitment to each other. It means that no matter what crossroad we face, we do it together and work our way over it. What do you say? Are you willing to take this leap with me?”

“I want to say yes, Marcum. I really do. But I’m scared to jump in with so much tension still between us. There’s so much I need to personally work through, like my jealousy as an example. What if it becomes too much for you to deal with? My insecurities have insecurities as Demi pointed out to me. I have trust issues from past boyfriends who gave into temptation and cheated on me. And none of the women who they slept with compare to the women you have living in your clubhouse. We both know there’s at least two willing to start shit with me... with us. They don’t want us together.”

“They aren’t a factor in this and I’ve dealt with them,” I vow. “They can’t tear us apart if we don’t let them. I’m telling you right here and right now that I will be faithful to you and I will not let my dick rule my life. I’m not a teenage boy, Luna, I’m a man. I’ve pointed that out to you on several different occasions.”

“If I say yes, can we take things slowly? I feel like we’ve done everything at a rapid pace and I’m having a hard time catching up.”

“I’ll give you all the time you need as long as you understand that it won’t change anything. You’re still mine and I’m still yours. From here moving forward, we don’t go days without speaking. If we piss each other off, we deal with it the way adults are meant to... we talk that shit out.”

“I can do that,” she confesses. Her tummy gurgles and she laughs. “Starting now.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

LUNA

The last four weeks have been glorious. Marcum is either here every evening, or I'm at his and Xavier's home at the back of the clubhouse. We haven't ventured inside with the mass of the main room but I've still managed to get to know a few of his men.

We're currently at Marcum's since Demi asked for a reprieve from hearing us rolling around in the sheets. According to her, we're loud and boisterous when we are in bed. With the sheet twisted around me, I lean over and lay my head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat as he sleeps.

Now that my eyes are open, there's no getting back to sleep. Once I'm up, I'm up. And as if my stomach is on some sort of alarm clock, queasiness strikes. I cup my hand over my mouth and head to his ensuite and drop to my knees in front of his toilet.

"Baby, are you okay?" Marcum drowsily asks as he turns on the faucet and runs a washrag underneath the steady flow of water. "That sounds painful," he adds as he crouches down behind me, wrapping me up with his arms and legs. He places the cool rag on the back of my neck and wipes away the sweat that's pebbled there.

"Thank you," I gag. "I hate this part."

"I hate it for you. I think when we go to see Dr. Limons, we need to mention this

symptom isn't easing for you, if anything, it's getting worse."

"I sent the nurse practitioner a message through the portal yesterday. They're sending a prescription to the pharmacy and it should be ready for pick up later this afternoon. I couldn't wait another day; it's getting harder to hold down water. I don't want to deal with dehydration on top of everything else."

"How will we find out if it's ready?" he probes. I suspect he wants me to have it sooner rather than later.

I've been losing weight everywhere but in my belly which is starting to round out. Most days, I subsist on saltines, ginger ale, and the occasional bottle of Gatorade that he forces on me.

"I'll get a message in my inbox. I haven't checked it yet this morning since I was preoccupied," I point out. "Your kid is going to be a ballbuster. I have this feeling he's going to be a testament to my turning gray earlier than I should."

"I think you'd be even sexier than you are now with silver entwined with your darker hair," he says, wiggling his eyebrows at me.

I giggle even though my gut's still roiling and I have that sickly sweet scent from sweating during my latest purge session. "I need a shower," I murmur.

Instead of letting me get up on my own, he scoops after unwinding the sheet from around me and heads into the freaking awesome shower he has that takes up almost half of the bathroom itself.

"Let me take care of you, Luna mine," he whispers into my ear causing me to do a full body shiver.

“Okay, Marcum,” I say, giving in because anytime I can have his hands on me, I’ll take it. Especially since right now, I feel like a wrung out noodle. I mean, there’s absolutely nothing sexy about holding my hair back as I throw up everything I’ve ever eaten or that my ancestors have at this point!

Of course, it will definitely help me when writing a badass alpha, that’s for sure. Marcum, for all his talk of never doing any kind of relationship before, has stepped into the role very, very well. And even the times we stay at his place, he understands that sometimes, the muse strikes and I have to write.

As he holds me under the warm spray jetting out of the showerheads, yes, plural, I allow my mind to drift to my latest binge.

“Luna, what are you doing up?” he asks, his voice rough with sleep.

“New character talking,” I reply, my gaze focused on my laptop screen as my fingers fly over the keys. “Gotta get it down enough so I can pick it back up and flesh it out some more.”

“You have a new story?” he questions, getting out of bed and walking over to his desk, which I’ve kind of taken over, to lean in and kiss my cheek. “Let me get you some ginger ale.”

“Thanks,” I murmur, not lifting my head.

I had a six-book series come to mind so right now; I’m jotting down the relevant notes I need. I’m a hybrid author of sorts; I do a general outline with names and various scenarios, then when I’m writing the actual story, I go by the seat of my pants. So far, it’s worked for me.

“My woman has a dirty mind,” he whispers, setting the cold bottle down next to my

hand. He's apparently reading over my shoulder which has me blushing. "Have you ever tried that?" he asks.

I snicker while shaking my head. "Nope," I reply, popping my p. Demi hates when I do it and I'm almost sure that eventually, Marcum will as well, but it's a habit I can't seem to break.

"Do you want to?" His seductive murmur against the shell of my ear has me leaning against him, desire now coursing through me.

I'm not going to complain, however, because outside of the constant nausea and vomiting which makes me have all-day sickness instead of morning sickness only, I'm enjoying the perks of being pregnant.

"Whatcha thinking about, Luna?" Marcum asks, bringing me out of the memory.

"Last week when we tried that scenario from my book," I breathlessly answer.

"Speaking of, you promised to show me more so we could test them out," he reminds me. "We need to make sure all of those positions you mention are doable."

"They are," I swear.

"How do you know? Have you tried them?" he asks, his voice now hot with jealousy.

"Not with a live person, no," I respond. "But I did make sure my body could hold the positions I wrote about instead of being twisted like a pretzel."

"When you're feeling better, I want to try out the one where you're bent over touching your toes," he admits.

“That would require a lot of trust. I’d need your promise that you won’t drop me,” I taunt, knowing damn good and well that he’s strong enough to hold me upright while he pounds into me from behind.

“I’ll never drop you, Luna mine. And you trust me, don’t you?”

“With my life,” I affirm. “Otherwise, the other night wouldn’t have happened.”

“That is one of the best memories I have,” he confides. “It’s good to know you’re so... bendable.”

“Jerk,” I say, laughing as I smack the back of my hand against the hard, muscular flesh of his abdomen.

“Seriously, woman, I don’t know how you did that.”

I think back on the pose he’s referencing and if we’re being completely honest, I don’t know how I did it either. He had my back flush to the wall, my leg tossed over his shoulder as he pounded inside of me. I was on my tip toes on the opposite leg so that I could meet his height. I ended up with a charley horse in my calf for most of the evening, it cramped up in waves and when it’d show up, Marcum would grab some oil and rub it out.

“What can I say? You’re very helpful when it comes to my research,” I tease. “Plus, with this pregnancy, my hormones are all over the place.”

“Feel free to use me any time, Moon,” he replies.

“That’s good to know. I’ll keep it in mind,” I say as he washes the suds out of my hair and off of my skin.

“Feel better, my Luna?”

“So much better,” I answer, as he turns us around so he can wash himself.

“Do you think you could stomach some breakfast? At least a protein shake?”

“I can try. But the second my stomach starts coiling, I’m done, Marcum.”

“I’d like to get some nutrients in you, I don’t like the dark circles under your eyes. I’m halfway tempted to take you to the emergency room, woman.”

“No. I don’t want to sit up there for endless hours. Please don’t make me go, Marcum.”

“Then maybe we should call Dr. Limons’s receptionist and see if they can fit you in today. I don’t want to wait until tomorrow. We both know a day can make a difference.”

“I’ll call once I’m dried off and dressed. Will that satisfy your neanderthal instincts?”

“I know you think I’m being overly cautious, Luna, but the book I’ve been reading says dehydration can be very serious.”

My heart warms at his words.

While I’d never say he was unintelligent because he’s by far one of the smartest men I’ve ever met—his vocabulary has proven that, the fact that he downloaded an app on his phone then bought a book about what to expect while pregnant has endeared him to me so much it’s not funny.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

KODIAK

“I’m admitting you, Luna,” Dr. Limons informs her as we sit in her office. “Your heart rate is higher than I’d like it to be and you’re a little lethargic, that can be caused by numerous things.”

“Like what?” I ask, my tone brash, laced with fear for my woman.

As if a mask slips into place, she shuts her emotions down and tells us what some of the higher probabilities could be. “Like preeclampsia, high blood pressure, the endless vomiting could be the cause too. We just don’t know until I can admit her and run some tests. I don’t want y’all to worry until there’s due cause. I also want to get you on an IV drip to help calm your nausea and give you the vitamins your body desperately needs.”

“How long do you expect her to be in for?” The reason I’m asking is because I’ll need to head back to the clubhouse and inform my brothers. Xavier will have to be in charge until I come back, and hopefully the club is still standing when that happens.

Of course, that’s the least of my worries. If he and the brothers burn it all down, we can rebuild. The important thing is that Luna gets better.

“Let’s plan for an overnight stay and if we need to add to that time we will,” Dr. Limons suggests.

“Whatever helps Luna get better,” I tell the doc before switching my attention to Luna so I can apprise her of my plans. “Once you’re settled in a room, I’m gonna head to the clubhouse and let the guys know what’s going on so they’re aware I’ll be out of touch for a day or so. Text me a list of things you need from the house and I’ll pack us an overnight bag with enough clothes to get us through three or four days.”

“Why are you packing for three or four days?” Luna inquires. “Dr. Limons said overnight, Marcum!”

“She said we’d start there, my moon,” I reply, leaning in to kiss her temple. “Besides, while you’ll have a lovely gown on, I’m not about staying in the same clothes for days on end.”

She wrinkles her nose at me then says, “Fine, whatever.”

Great, she’s using two of the deadliest words in a woman’s arsenal. “Don’t you want clean panties?” I ask, uncaring that the doctor is still in the room, sending something on her tablet if the tapping on the screen is any indication. “Or your toothbrush? Socks? Deodorant?”

“I said it was fine, Marcum,” she says as she pats my arm. “It really is, I’m just being snarky, I guess. I hate feeling sick all the time and I especially hate how many times I’ve thrown up.”

When Luna’s eyes closed and she fell asleep, I jotted down a note letting her know I was taking off but would be back later. Dr. Limons had already informed us that the medication to help with her curdling stomach would knock her out.

I don’t like leaving her vulnerable in that room while she’s passed out, but it’s also the best time for me to go and get my errands done. I have to trust the nursing staff to see to her welfare while I’m away. It’s not easy for me since I don’t know them, but

I'd rather be doing this now instead of while she's awake.

As I pull up to the clubhouse and shut down my engine, I decide to talk to the guys first before gathering our belongings. The club bitch's rooms are on the first floor so I have to pass by their rooms on my way to my office where I plan on gathering some files Xavier will need for our upcoming job. A conversation taking place between the five of them has my feet faltering.

I lean my ear closer to the door and recognize Peaches's voice as she complains about mine and Luna's relationship. "That bitch thinks she can waltz in here and steal my man. We all know that Kodiak and I have something between us. We have a spark and I'm the better woman to wear his patch."

"I don't know why you think that, Peaches," Heels says. "He only came to you, came to any of us when he had an itch to scratch and even then it wasn't that often."

"And Kodiak would never put a patch on one of our backs, Peaches. You know that, why do you want to torture yourself like this?" Kitty questions. "Women like us are only good for one thing to men like them and they tell us that before we accepted our position of club girl."

"You know what's going to happen if she stays, right?" Peaches asks, totally ignoring what the other women are saying to her. "Then other brothers will find their ol' ladies and soon, they're not going to want any of us around."

"Don't we want them to be happy, though?" Kitty muses. "I mean, it's not like fucking the brothers is the only thing we do around here. We help keep the place clean, cook, and tend the bar which frees the prospects up for other, more important club responsibilities."

I decide that if Kitty wants to live out her life as a club house mouse, she can do so.

The other women are still up for being kicked to the curb depending on what else I hear.

“That’s my point, Kitty! We’re basically married to them with everything we do. Why not have the added benefit of their name on our backs? Think about the bigger picture instead of settling for what you have.”

“But they’ve also helped those of us who wanted to change our lives by going to school,” Heels states. “Hell, I’m two quarters away from having my associate’s degree. So what if I sucked a lot of cock? I don’t have any student loan debt and both Kodiak and Xavier have promised to help me find a good job and leave this life if I want to do so. They’ve given that same vow to each one of us, remember?”

I briefly wonder how Heels will feel about being the office manager for the security business because I fucking hate paperwork and Xavier fucks it up more often than not. At least she’d know what she was doing.

“What about you, Fancy? Don’t you have something going with Stixx?” Peaches asks.

“Stop stirring pots, Peaches,” Pepper admonishes. “These guys may not end up being our forever, but they’ll always be our family and we’re not supposed to be plotting and planning against their old ladies. That’s treason and you know it. So just stop trying to incite a riot.”

“I’m not talking against what Kodiak and Luna have going on,” Fancy says. “I like her, she doesn’t treat us like we’re the scum of the earth. Plus, the club has helped me keep my grandma in a nice assisted living home.”

So far, the only bitch whose ass I’ll be kicking will be Peaches. I like the way the other women are standing up for the club, the brothers, and my old lady. I know the

other guys will appreciate it too once they start bringing women here who they are considering making theirs.

“Well, I’ll let y’all handle your shit if you want to because I’ve been handling mine,” Peaches states, a bit too much satisfaction in her voice.

“What have you done, Peaches?” Pepper growls, and if I’m not mistaken, there will be some claws coming out soon. I’m going to let it play out though because if Peaches is the reason Luna is so sick, I want to hear it firsthand.

“Nothing too serious. She won’t die or anything but it should get rid of that brat she’s carrying. Because that kid is the only reason she’s still around,” Peaches brags.

“Again, what did you do?” Fancy reiterates the question Pepper asked.

“Did you know you can find anything on the internet? I found this nice little herb called Lobelia. It is a toxic herb that if given in large doses, can cause nausea and convulsions, and sometimes it could put the person in a coma. I’ve avoided that because I don’t want to kill the bitch, I’m not a murderer. I just want to get rid of the baby so it’s not in my way. Can’t you see it? Me being a shoulder for Kodiak to lean on while Luna is drowning in depression?”

“How did you manage to get her to ingest that?” Kitty probes and thank fuck that she does because it has me stopping from barging into the room and slitting the cunt’s throat like I want to. In this case, I need every drop of detail I can get so I can advise Dr. Limons.

“I went to the pharmacy and got some syringes and punctured the top of the case of water Kodiak went and got for her. He dropped it in the kitchen long enough to have church. It was the perfect opportunity, I knew I wouldn’t get another one like it again, so I took advantage of it and inserted the herb into her water. Thankfully, it blended

in and didn't discolor it."

Agony claws at me as I realize I've unintentionally been helping Peaches with her nefarious plan, since every time Luna gets sick, I grab her a bottle of water to drink to try and keep her hydrated.

Fuck. My. Life.

"Have we heard enough yet?" Xavier asks, causing me to jump. I was so invested in what the women were saying that I didn't hear anybody else join me in the hallway. I turn my head to see him, Stixx, and Regulator standing behind me, all wearing different expressions on their faces.

Fury.

Bewilderment.

Disappointment.

Revulsion.

Fear.

Pure, unadulterated rage.

Every single emotion flowing through me seems to be streaming through them too. The fact that I've been unintentionally complicit in keeping Luna so sick is gutting me right now. How Peaches could be so fucking delusional as to think any of the brothers would make her their old lady is beyond me. Not that any of us look down on them for what they choose to do, because we've got our own sexual pasts. It's more that none of us want to make one of the club girls ours knowing that all of our

brothers have fucked them. Maybe that's misogynistic, but I don't think so; I don't think a woman would like to have a permanent relationship with someone all of her girlfriends had screwed.

"I think we have enough evidence to find them guilty," Regulator tells me, cracking his knuckles while mean mugging the door.

"I'm of the same mindset," I state, not bothering to announce my presence as I barge into the room. All of the women jump and turn to look at the doorway.

"Peaches, you've been a bad, bad girl," Xavier croons. "You've been tried and convicted. We're now at the punishment phase."

"Better let the hospital know you're going to be late, Kodiak," Stixx advises. "Unless we're going to keep her on ice until Luna's released."

"I think we should show her what it's like when we cool someone down," I proclaim. "I want to give Dr. Limons the information we just overheard and don't want to leave my old lady alone any longer than necessary. She'll keep."

"We'll make sure to give her the five star treatment," Xavier says, a sneer plastered on his face.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

LUNA

I'm brought out of my sleep when Dr. Limons comes into the room with a technician coming in behind her. When I see the equipment rolling in with her, I tilt my head in confusion. It's a sonogram machine, but I thought she said earlier that we were going to wait until my next appointment to do one.

"Dr. Limons, what's going on?"

"I wanted to do this at the office; however our machinery is at the warehouse being worked on. It was glitching and we had it sent out for an update. I was going to do this next month when you came in, but now that you've been admitted, we can move forward."

"Do what?" I ask her, not understanding what she's getting at.

"I want to look at your implant placement. We need to see if it moved from where it was planted or if it's malfunctioning," she explains.

"My best friend, Demi, looked it up when we considered the fact that I could be pregnant and found that the one I have is on a recall list. According to what she found, it's faulty and more women were getting pregnant than not."

"And that's what we need to determine," she remarks, giving me a sympathetic smile.

"There's a class action lawsuit, and as doctors, when we come across a patient who

it's failed for, we're obligated to report it to help the charts with that percentage ratio. We have to prove it was the implant itself and not the doctor who placed it in you. Your name may be added to the list of complainants if we find they're at fault."

"Are you going to remove it? Is it bad for the baby to remain where it is?" I ask, suddenly worried for the welfare of mine and Marcum's little peanut.

"I will remove it once I have examined where it is and charted everything required before I take it out," Dr. Limons explains. "As far as whether or not it'll hurt the baby, it won't cause any birth defects or fetal harm."

Relief courses through me hearing her say that because while I wasn't expecting for my implant to fail, I've already fallen in love with the tiny being that Marcum and I created. Maybe that would be silly to some people, but regardless of what happens with us in the future, it's a part of the two of us.

She adds gel to the tip of the wand on the machine and places it over my arm where the clinic I went to injected it. I watch as she takes measurements and photos for my patient portfolio. She hums a few times before wiping the gel off the instrument and me before placing it back into its slot.

She nods her head in satisfaction and tells me, "It's still in place and there's no signs of it being twisted or damaged in any way. The only reason I'm going to remove it is because if it's ineffective, there's no need for you to have it there. After you have this little one, we'll talk about other alternatives for your birth control."

"Yeah, I don't like the thought of having anything foreign inside of me that's ineffective. I do a lot of research for my career and have read some things about malfunctioning implants that make some women act irrational, and with my hormones already out of whack, there's no need to add to that."

“That percentage isn’t high, Luna,” she says, attempting to soothe my overactive imagination. Google can either be your best friend or your foe, depending on what you’re trying to learn.

“Still, why take chances?” I question. “Sometimes, I use the worst case scenarios for my characters,” I admit. “Because even though it’s fiction, life isn’t all sunshine and rainbows, so why should books be? Unless they’re in the fantasy genre, I suppose.”

Great, now I’m rambling. Maybe it’s the meds that’ve been pumping into my veins to control the nausea and vomiting, who knows? I’ve always been a bit of a lightweight when it comes to most prescriptions, and I feel a bit loopy and out of it. That could also be the dehydration, although I’ve had several bags of fluids at this point.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes with the numbing injection and a scalpel. Let’s get this thing out of you so I can bag it and send it to the lab contracted by the attorney in charge of the lawsuit. That’ll let us know for sure if it’s faulty or if you’re just one of those mysterious cases where the woman gets pregnant no matter what contraceptive is used,” Dr. Limons says, a teasing look aimed my way.

“Fuck. I hope not,” I humorlessly laugh. “Knock on some wood, Doc, we don’t want that thought out in the universe.”

Before she has a chance to respond, the door swings open and Marcum comes marching inside. He has a murderous look clouding his face.

“What’s wrong?” I ask him, leaning around Dr. Limons so I can see him better.

“Hopefully nothing that Dr. Limons can’t take care of,” he claims as he strolls around to the other side of the bed than she’s at and leans over, planting a chaste kiss on my lips. “Ever heard of an herb called Lobelia, Doc?”

She narrows her eyes at him and answers, “I have. It’s very controversial when it comes to its usefulness. The pros and cons don’t balance themselves out. Why do you ask?”

As Marcum tells her about the conversation he listened in on with the club girls, my vision grows fuzzy as my heart rate kicks into high gear.

What the holy hell?

Why would a woman do this to another, especially when there’s an innocent life at stake?

I’m so wound up and mad that I’m physically shaking. I now understand what Marcum meant when we were talking one night and he told me that there are some people born evil, and most of them aren’t redeemable and it doesn’t upset him in the least to be the one to put a bullet in their brain.

“Why?” I whisper when he stops talking. “Why would she do something like that?”

“You can’t fix stupid, hon,” Dr. Limons says, patting the top of my hand. But my eyes never leave my old man, I want his take on this, not hers. She doesn’t understand the lifestyle he lives so she’s not aware of how women like them operate.

“Later,” he mouths to me. I’m not happy with that as an answer, but I know how strong willed he is and know that he won’t answer me out loud until there aren’t any spectators in the room. I bet it falls under ‘club business’, two words I’m starting to hate hearing.

“Jackie, go get me the numbing vial and a scalpel. I want to get this taken care of quickly so these two can talk,” Dr. Limons orders the nurse that came into the room a few seconds ago to take my vitals.

“I’ll go grab them now,” Jackie says as she leads the technician from the room now that the equipment has been wiped down and ready for the next patient.

“Good luck with everything,” the sweet older lady says over her shoulder as she wheels her machine out of the room, chatting with Jackie.

“I’m sorry, my moon,” Marcum apologizes as he uses his fingers to wipe the stray hair away from my eyes. “I promise you I’ll take care of her when we get home. You’ll never see her again.”

“Where is she?” I ask, balling up my fists.

“She’s been put on ice until we are released,” he murmurs.

“We?” I snort. “I didn’t realize you were a patient.”

“I see the sass is strong in you today,” he says with a sly grin on his face. “You and me, we’re a we. What happens to you, happens to me. I thought I’d already explained all of this to you before.”

“You have but I thought you meant figuratively, not literally,” I rebut. “Because if that’s the case, maybe you’d like to be the one to be catheterized?”

Since I was so weak from the dehydration, Dr. Limons decided a catheter was the best option for the time being. She debated on using a new system they have, but opted to go old school so they could better monitor my output. I swear, the things I’m learning right now are definitely going to go in a book at some point!

“Nothing about us is figurative, Luna.”

I notice he avoids volunteering to get a catheter, but I don’t really blame him. They’re

unpleasant enough for a woman, so I can't imagine how having a tube shoved in his dick would feel. That thought makes me snicker a little which has him raising his brow at me. Instead of saying anything, I merely shrug.

“Are you ready to do this?” Dr. Limons asks. I turn around and see the nurse standing with her as she measures out the medication in the syringe. How I missed her coming back into the room with the tools she was sent out to get confounds me. I need to work on my observation skills when I'm in the midst of an imminent discussion. “It won't take long for you to be numb and even less time than that for me to remove the implant. I'll probably put a stitch or two in after I see how big the implant actually is and you'll be right as rain in no time.”

The moment I see the backsides of Dr. Limons and Jackie as they walk through the doorway and shut the door behind them, I shift my attention to Marcum, and demand, “Explain.”

It's a good thing my arm was numb because they did have to pull a suture kit out of the drawer and use it on me. It wasn't because the implant was on the larger side but because the damn thing moved when she went to fish it out. I'm starting to feel as if I didn't have bad luck, I wouldn't have any with the way things are going.

“The guys are putting her in a shack we have on the backside of the property for the time being. As I said before, I'll take care of her once we're back and I have you tucked in.”

“I have a few things I'd like to say to her before you release her,” I huff, picking at the cuticles of my thumb. This is why I'm notorious for getting hang nails, I'm always picking at the loose skin when I get nervous or upset.

“Luna. Look at me,” Marcum orders, leaning in closer to me. When I lift my head, our eyes meet. “You know what kind of man I am, yeah?”

“Yeah,” I answer, my tone dull and flat. “I know what kind of man you are, Marcum. What are you trying to tell me here?”

“Peaches won’t be leaving the property, Luna love. At least not on her own two feet. You get me?”

Shit. I get him, but I had hoped that if a scenario like this ever popped up, I’d be blissfully unaware. I don’t want to be an accomplice to keeping this secret. I hold my hand up in the air to stop him from saying anything else. “Don’t say anything else, Marcum. At least don’t say anything that can be used against you in a court of law.” The last part is said so quietly that nobody walking outside of the room could hear me.

“That’s my girl,” he croons as he nips at my neck. “Looking out for your man. I knew you were the right old lady for me. You don’t want to be forced to testify against me if it ever comes down to it.”

“Never. They’d have to lock me up next to you, Marcum, because I’d never, not in a million years, narc on you.”

“Then all I’ll say in the matter is that you’ll never have to deal with her again, Luna mine.”

“I’ll accept that, Marcum. I trust you more than I have anyone else in my life other than Demi.” As if the sun rises over the horizon, lighting me up from the inside out, I realize that I mean every word of what I just said. “Just do me a favor.”

“What’s that, Moon?”

“Make her hurt. She didn’t only make me sick due to her bullshit, but she could’ve killed our baby.”

“I promise you here and now, that the pain she’s going to feel will be worse than anything she did to you and our baby. Nobody hurts what’s mine. And Luna, make no mistake, you and this little one,” he says, cupping my belly, “are mine.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

KODIAK

It's been a bit since I've felt blood gushing over my hands and embedding my fingernails. The things I'm imagining doing to Peaches, is just as lethal and vindictive as it is to any man I've ever faced.

"Demi with Luna?" Xavier asks as he meets me in the equipment room. It's a private room that not all brothers have access to. It's located in a hidden closet behind a swinging panel that sits directly behind the bar, the wall swings open if you insert the correct PIN number. The keypad for that has to be located too. Only officers know the placement of it. It's not visible to the naked eye.

"She is," I answer, pulling out a few of my favorite torture tools. Most of them are for intimidation tactics, but not all. Today is Peaches's final day breathing.

Since meeting Luna I've tried to reel that side of myself in, but it's been bobbing right below the surface, ready to snag its prey. The fact that she dared touch someone who is mine means it's raring to go and I won't stop until Peaches is nothing but a memory. I still can't believe she had the audacity to try and hurt Luna as well as kill the baby thinking that I'd turn to her. It's positively mind-blowing.

"Think she'll give Demi all the details?" He asks. At my shrug, he continues, "because I'm thinking we may need to station one of the guys outside of the door if she does. You know how impulsive and quick tempered Demi can be. Especially when it comes to Luna."

“Why do you think that is?” I question him. “Because people don’t just go off script like she does. It’s like she has a trigger, or possibly even several. I’d like to know what they are so we can help her.”

“Hello. Pot meet kettle,” Xavier grouses.

I snort before saying, “Life is a trigger for me, Xavier. You know this.”

“I do,” he acknowledges. “But since meeting Luna, you’ve settled somewhat.”

“I was just thinking the same thing,” I confess. “She makes me want to be a better man. My first intuition isn’t to maim or kill.”

“Next thing you know, we’ll all be sitting around the firepit singing Kumbaya,” he teases. Always the jokester determined to lighten the mood. That is unless someone lights his match which I don’t bother to point out to him.

“Did you secretly want to be a Boy Scout or something, Xavier? You’re always talking about campfires and other bonding bullshit.” He snickers but doesn’t respond to me. Our formative years weren’t exactly amenable to what ‘normal’ kids experience, so there was never a snowball’s chance in Hell that either of us would’ve been Scouts.

My eyes light up when I find my Bowie knife sitting on the shelf. It went off to our cleaner to be sanitized and all traces of DNA removed from the blade, bolster, and handle. The gleaming metal has me near drooling.

Xavier shakes his head, mirth dancing in his eyes, so I know he’s fixing to say something ridiculous. “The way you’re looking at that weapon has me waiting for you to coo, ‘Come to Papa’.”

“Don’t talk about my baby like that. You’ll hurt his feelings,” I joke along with him. If you can’t beat them, join them—or so the saying goes.

“Peaches is nice and nervous,” Stixx tells us as he swings the panel open and marches in. “She’s begging us to let her go. Promises she’ll never show her face in Texas again.”

“Oh, her face will never be seen in Texas again. I guarandamntee that,” I reply.

“Let’s get this done and over with,” Xavier mumbles.

“What has a thorn up your ass suddenly?” I probe as I tuck Bowie, the name I’ve given my dear friend who’s been with me for going on ten years now, into my hip sheath and pull out one of our sets of brass knuckles from the drawer we house them in.

While none of us want to hurt a woman, Peaches signed her own fucking death warrant the second she concocted her fucked-up plan to betray not only me, but also the club.

We walk as a unit out of the clubhouse and meet the others who’ll be joining us on this session’s endeavor in the middle of the yard.

“Is everything in the shed ready to go?” I ask both Risk and Hemi.

“It is,” Risk stoically responds.

Hemi gets a gleam in his eye when he replies, “You should’ve seen the look on Peaches’s face when she saw me getting the straps attached to the eye rings.” We have it rigged so we can string up our perpetrator to the leather bands and have them dangling from the ceiling.

I don't want them completely immobilized, that takes the fun out of the chase. All predators want to have a little bit of entertainment as they take out their target. And since I won't ever take the chance that someone can run and escape, we don't allow ourselves to have a scavenger hunt—even if the thought of hunting them in the woods behind our clubhouse gets my blood pumping.

“Well, she's really gonna get a kick out of things when I start laying my tools out on the metal table, huh?” I tease, a maniacal laugh accompanying my words.

“Are we gonna stand here gabbing all day, or are we going to do this?” Rev asks.

“Anticipation is part of the long game, brother,” Xavier exclaims, smacking Rev on the shoulder. “We gotta build this shit up so she's quivering.”

“She pissed herself, does that count as quivering?” Rev asks Xavier.

“No, that's someone who doesn't have control of her faculties,” Xavier replies, a large grin spread across his face. “When she quivers, you'll know because she'll be a blubbering mess. I'm talking snot, shivers, incoherent speech as she begs for mercy.”

“No mercy,” I declare. “I had even thought about prolonging it by finding herbs and shit we could force on her so she could experience some of what Luna did, but truthfully, I don't want to waste that much time on her.”

“Okay, I'm calling time. I think she's had enough time to stew. Let's go play, fellas,” I decree. A round of wolf whistles permeate the air as we head to the shed.

I have a chair set with its back facing Peaches. I'm straddled on the seat, quietly watching as the guys set us up. A gleam of excitement races through me when Xavier picks up his carving knife and begins shaving the bamboo stick he keeps in here for interrogations.

“So, let me tell you how this is going to go, Peaches.” She shifts her eyes from where Xavier is working and sends me a pleading look. I don’t let it get to me like I normally would if a woman was in her position.

“Please, Kodiak. I fucked up, I know that and I admit it. But banish me, please don’t kill me.”

Shaking my head in denial, I give her my fiercest, merciless look that normally has those I’m aiming it at shitting themselves. “Should’ve considered the consequences of your actions before you implemented them, huh?”

“You fucked around and now you’re gonna find out what the repercussions are for your treachery,” Xavier sing songs, not even glancing in her direction. The sound of his knife on the bamboo lends an eerie tone to the atmosphere, which is another mindfuck we incorporate whenever we have someone trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey in our shed, awaiting our retribution.

“Yeah, play stupid games, win stupid prizes,” Risk adds.

I hide my smirk because these guys have all the latest quips thanks to social media apps, but in this case, they work spectacularly, because Peaches starts to sob as she realizes the futility of her situation. It’s hitting home that she isn’t getting out of this because it’s far more serious than taking one of the other girls’ clothes or some of the other stupid shit they’ve all pulled over their time with us.

Plus, it’ll definitely send a reminder to them as well not to fuck with a brother or anyone who’s in his life no matter what capacity. While none of us have old ladies, although Luna is mine, of course, there have occasionally been girlfriends from time to time.

And every damn one of them is untouchable.

Leaning over the back of the chair, I narrow my eyes at Peaches and ask, “I just want to hear from you why you thought that if Luna lost our baby I’d come to you for comfort? You and I, we’ve never had a thing. You’ve never touched my dick; I never gave you any signals that imply that we had something to build on. So why did your warped mind decide you’d be the one I’d seek out?”

“You know that’s not true, Kodiak,” she whimpers. “We’ve had a lot of nights where we shared a drink and talked about the future.”

“A future that didn’t have us together, Peaches. I never said a thing that had us living a life together. What did I say that had you believing otherwise?”

“You never said I wouldn’t be there. You stated that you didn’t want to find an old lady that didn’t understand the lifestyle and when I hinted that I was already entwined into the life, you gave me a look. It was heated, you wanted me... I k-know you did,” she informs me as she hiccups.

“I gave you a look?” I ask, dumbfounded. “It was heated, you say?”

“It was,” she desperately cries out. “You even patted my hand and then squeezed it!”

“Jesus, fuck. She’s whacko,” Xavier states, shaking his head.

Stixx whistles, then says, “She’s got a screw loose.”

“A few crackers short of the stack,” Regulator conveys.

“Definitely delulu,” Risk adds.

“Queen of denial,” Rev advises, adding his two cents into the conversation.

Since I don't remember this so-called conversation whatsoever, I just shrug. "Peaches, I'm not quite sure what a 'heated look' is exactly, but as I already stated, we've never been together sexually. We've never fucked, you've never sucked, and I would've never hinted at any kind of a relationship. That's not the kind of man I am, I'm a straight shooter. I've never seen myself having an old lady at all. And while it really isn't any of your fucking business, Luna is the first person to ever reach that position with me."

"She isn't right for you, Kodiak! She's too naive and she's a simpleton!" Peaches thunders.

"Did you just call my old lady stupid?" I ask, my jaw stiffens as I stand from my chair. "Are you really that full of yourself to think that by demeaning my old lady you'll help your situation?"

"And... now the cuckoo has flown the coop," Xavier drawls.

"No more mister nice guy," Stixx acknowledges. "You done fucked up now, bitch."

She has, and she's fixing to find out how much.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

KODIAK

“Conan, you have things ready to go? I think she needs to understand the pain from being deceived that I felt when I discovered she betrayed not only me. Not only Luna. But the club when she tried to murder my child!”

“Read out the crimes she committed,” Xavier orders.

“She tried to kill our legacy,” Rev inputs. “Our prince or princess, the future.” Once that offense has been read, Xavier, or should I say, Conan since right now he’s in VP mode, inserts a bamboo shard underneath one of her nailbeds.

“She betrayed the club then tried to get the other girls involved,” Risk says. “No fucking loyalty to the club that put a roof over your head, food in your belly, and money in your pocket.”

Her piercing wail as he pushes the second one under the finger on the opposite hand has me wincing since the decibel level is a bit hard.

The list is ongoing as each member steps forward with their accusations. When we make it to the sixth nailbed, she passes out from the pain Xavier is inflicting.

“Her pain tolerance sucks.” Hemi tsks as he pulls out the water hose and turns the lever that’ll have it releasing the spray. He dances around her as he drenches every part of her. By the time she sputters awake, she’s soaked from head to toe.

“Now, where were we?” I jovially ask. “Have all of her treacheries been exposed?”

“I’m sure we could tack on a few, but most of them aren’t things that we’d use as a reason to rid the world of trash,” Regulator advises.

Turning my attention to Peaches, I ask, “How do you plead?”

Xavier, once again, channeling Conan, stuffs a handkerchief in her mouth and states, “As her legal counsel, I’m submitting a guilty plea. We’d like a swift verdict and want to hear the sentence.”

I bang my hand on the wall like it’s my gavel hitting the top of the table, and state, “Guilty. The sentence is immediate death.”

Mumbled words are shouted behind Peaches’s gag, but nobody is interested in removing the cloth to hear what she has to say.

“All jurors, what say you to an old fashioned hanging?” I pose the question. Peaches’s eyes widen as tears stream down her cheeks.

“Why not?” Regulator spits. “I’ve got my shit kickers on; I’m feeling like I could cowboy up.”

“That line would’ve been epic if you were wearing your Stetson,” Xavier snickers.

“I’ve got the rope, let’s do this,” Rev says, showing us the wound up cord in his hands. “Here, Regulator, since you grew up on a horse farm, I’m assuming you’d be the best one to set up the noose.”

“I’d be happy too,” Regulator agrees as he takes the bound rope and begins to expertly twist it and knot it.

“That was a lot messier than I thought it’d be,” I fess up as I hold in the contents of my belly. “I’ve seen people shit their pants before, but fuck, it’s like all of her orifices exploded at once.”

“You getting a weak belly on me, brother?” Xavier asks as he sharpens his knife. I guess he doesn’t want the blade to dull after using it on the bamboo.

“Give him a break, Conan,” Stixx cackles. “He’s having sympathy and shit for his pregnant old lady.”

“I am not,” I disagree. “She must’ve eaten something toxic before we took her to the shed. Her shit smelled foul.”

“Well, she did have an empty belly,” Xavier revels. “You didn’t think we’d be serving her a last meal did you?”

“Didn’t even think about it,” I tell him. “I was dealing with other shit. Like having my woman being flushed out. Praying to a man I long ago lost faith in to keep her and our baby alive long enough for the anti-toxin or whatever that shit was they flushed through her veins to work. Dealing with her emotions because someone tried to poison her and steal our baby before he or she even had a chance to take their first breath. So feeding the stupid cunt never even crossed my radar.”

“But she’s feeling better now, right?” Risk questions.

“Yeah, still a bit fatigued, but I have a feeling that’s got more to do with being pregnant than anything. It’s why Demi’s with her today. I didn’t want her to be alone and really didn’t want to leave her, but this had to be handled,” I admit in a rare display of vulnerability.

Life is changing and rather quickly. Who the fuck knew that us taking on a security

job would end up with me finding the woman that settles something deep in my soul. Hell, I never even realized anything was missing, content with what I had, until Luna stumbled into me on that fateful day.

“Go home, Kodiak,” Rev suggests. “Let your woman settle you. The prospects are disposing of Peaches’s body. Thank fuck for the pig farmer down the street who’s thankful that we help feed his swine.”

“He thinks we’re feeding them our scraps,” Xavier chuckles. “Wouldn’t he be surprised if he realized that we were giving them human remains to devour?”

“That reminds me, what do you want me to do with her ground teeth?” Hemi inquires.

“Why’d you grind her teeth?” Stixx asks. “Nevermind, I don’t want to know.”

“For educational reasons I’ll answer that anyway,” I convey. “Hogs can’t digest the teeth so they’d be left behind as evidence and we don’t want to take the chance of the farmer calling the cops and having inquiries coming to our doorstep since we’re his closest neighbor. It’s a way to protect the club from any fallouts.”

After that admission, the room grows quiet as we sip on our beers. It takes a lot for us to stomach the fact that we had to take out a female. It doesn’t sit right with any of us. But the fact remains that she made herself an enemy of the club, and when justice is served, it doesn’t see in black and white and gender has no room for leniency in these cases.

“I think y’all are right, I’m heading home,” I tell them. “See y’all in the morning for church. There’s another issue that needs to be brought to the table I could use your help with. Let everyone know to be there. Ten in the morning, no later than that.”

“We’ve got you,” Hemi states.

As I walk away, I hear footsteps trailing behind me and instinctively know it’s my brother. “Are we going to bring Demi’s situation up to the club at the meeting?” he asks as his strides slow down to even out with mine.

“Yes. It’s been put off long enough. It’s time to get rid of her issue so she can live her life without watching over her shoulder,” I announce.

“Good. I’m ready to wipe the earth of the scum. What kind of pussy can’t get a woman willingly that he has to take something that doesn’t belong to him? I don’t think I’ll ever understand the mindset of cowards.”

“It’s because we may be lawless, but we aren’t rapists. It’s why we don’t understand and can’t wrap our brains around it,” I state.

“True,” he acknowledges. The rest of our walk to our house is done in silence as we both get lost in our thoughts of what we know about her situation. When we reach the edge of the porch, Xavier asks, “Are we going to tell Demi that we’re bringing it to the table?”

“Yeah. I think we should. That way, she’s prepared if the brothers have any questions about the ordeal. She’s the best one to answer those because she lived it,” I claim.

“I hate that she has to relive it over and over again. It’s like a plague that won’t go away,” he says through gritted teeth.

I understand his ire, so I simply nod. I don’t have any words to help him out here. All I can do is be here for him as a shoulder to lean on and an ear to listen.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

LUNA

When Marcum left, he tucked me in and gave me one of my anti-nausea meds. Needless to say, it knocked me out. When I roused from sleep, Demi was hovering over me, arms crossed and a determined look on her face.

“What?” I ask, rubbing my sleep riddled eyes.

“I think it’s confession time, Luna,” she insists. “The guys’ lips have been sealed and I want to know what led you to being admitted to the hospital because I know it was more than you getting sick all the time.”

Grunting from the physical exertion, I lift my body until I’m lounged against the pillows and pat the bed beside me. “I’ll tell you everything now that I’ve had a chance to digest it.”

“That bad, huh?” she asks, looking more vulnerable and nervous than I’ve ever seen her be. “What happened, Luna?”

With Demi, it’s better to rip the band aid off than to dance around the point. “Peaches poisoned me.”

“She did what?” Demi screams, her hands balled into fists. “I’m gonna kill the bitch. First, I’m going to rearrange her face then I’m gonna make her beg for me to stop with my own brand of facial reconstruction.”

“Wow,” I sputter out. “Demi. Why do you always jump to brutality as a way to solve your issues?”

I mean, I love that she’s so protective over me, but there are other ways to resolve problems. Communication for one instead of flying fists and threats of violence. Still, there’s a reason behind why she reacts the way she does and I need to see if I can get to the bottom of it once and for all.

“Because it’s the only way idiots listen,” she gripes. “Trust me on this, Luna. It’s a lesson I learned the hard way. We’ll talk about my issues another time, right now, I want you to explain the poisoning comment.”

Sighing, I tell her, “So, apparently, there’s an herb that can cause a lot of issues if you’re pregnant. She got syringes and injected it into the caps of my water bottles. It causes nausea, vomiting, and in worst case scenarios, can cause convulsions and even death. And if the woman is pregnant, a miscarriage.”

“What the everloving fuck?” she hisses with rage. “Why would she do something like that to anyone?”

“She was trying to kill the baby,” I whisper, tears slowly trickling down my face. “She sees him or her as competition.” When those words escape my mouth, I reach down and rub my belly where the baby is still safely holding on.

“And what’s Marcum doing about this?” she questions.

I grin and say, “That’s club business, Demi.”

“Club business?” She snorts. “What does that mean?”

“It means that he and the club are handling it, but he said she’ll never bother me

again.”

I don't mention the fact that it's because she'll be dead because Demi can read between the lines and she'll jump to her own conclusions, but that doesn't mean I have to lead her down that path. That'll keep Marcum from accusing me of sharing club secrets. Especially seeing as I was all but sworn to secrecy.

“Good. I hope they make it hurt,” she seethes.

“I have no doubts that they will,” I conclude. “These aren't the type of men who sit around in knitting circles and talk out their issues.”

She snorts before she ends up balled over, laughing hysterically. “Oh, my gosh, Luna! Why did you have to put that image in my head? I'm picturing Xavier with a ball of yarn, glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, and a knitting needle in his hands.”

Snickering, I say, “Knit one, pearl two.”

Demi's now slapping the mattress as she laughs so hard, tears are streaming down her face. “I-I-I can see it now, ‘motherfucker, stop falling off!’ every time one of them drops a stitch!”

“More like one of them would get pissed at another and jab the needle into their eye or something,” I tease.

There's no real reason why I know any of the terminology. I mean, I enjoy crafting, of course, but I've always preferred crocheting to knitting. However, I had a character once who was a model maker for a knitting designer, and I had to delve deep to ensure I was using the correct terminology so she sounded believable on the page. I know there are some who will say it's only fiction, but I find that the less fictitious

and more believable my characters are, the more readers enjoy the aesthetics of the book.

That sets her off again and I'm soon joining in, the hilarity taking us both away from the recent troubles we've endured. As far as I'm concerned, Peaches is a bad memory, kind of like getting food poisoning after eating some awesome Chinese.

After all the laughter has ceased, she leans over and cuddles into me. "I could've lost you, Luna, and I didn't even know there was a threat to you," she cries.

"It's scary that there are people out there who let jealousy rule their lives and emotions. But, Demi, I can't let the fact that people like that exist stop me from living my life. I know there are things from your past that you haven't shared with me, but I think it's time you find someone you can talk with and get it off your chest. I love you, and only want you to live your best life and you can't do that with this weight on your shoulders."

"One day, Luna," she whispers. "I'm not ready yet. I can't."

"When you are, know that I'll always be here for you. I'll hold your hand and we'll face it together."

"Thank you, Luna. You're not only my best friend, but you're my sister. My person. The only family I've ever had."

"I feel the same way about you, Demi. I may have had a family, but I never felt as if I fit in or was wanted. You gave that to me, and I'll forever be grateful that you found me and claimed me as a sister."

Demi and I both fell asleep wrapped around each other as we dealt with our overwrought emotions. I hear Marcum and Xavier come home, but my eyes are

heavy and I don't want to get up so I snuggle deeper into the blanket. I'm aware of my surroundings, but since my breathing is easy, nobody catches that I'm listening in on their conversation.

"Luna told me about that snake, Peaches," Demi informs the men. "Please say she's been taken care of."

"She has been," Marcum reassures her.

"Good. Because if y'all hadn't, I would've," she declares. "Did you at least make it hurt? And by hurt, I mean did you make her cry?"

"We did," Xavier promises. "I swear to you, Demi, that she regretted everything she did to Luna before her eyes closed for the last time." I internally laugh at the roundabout way Xavier just admitted that Peaches is no longer amongst the living.

"Demi, got something we need to talk to you about," Marcum interrupts, most likely because what happened to Peaches falls under the classification of club business, and Demi isn't club.

"What's up?" Demi questions.

"Tomorrow, now that Peaches has been dealt with, we're taking your problem to the club. I need to know if you can handle any questions the men may have. We can do it one of two ways... either you can be called in to answer them, or Xavier and I can be the go-between."

"I don't think I'm ready to face the men yet," Demi states. "I'd rather you or Xavier ask me any questions they may have."

"We can do that," Xavier guarantees. "Whatever makes this easier on you,

Demoness.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that,” Demi whispers. “I’m gonna give you and Luna your room back. Xavier, can I stay with you tonight? I don’t want to be alone.”

My heart breaks hearing the broken tone in her voice, but I have faith that my man will fix things for her. Still, I don’t say anything, content to listen to the trio as they continue to talk.

“Anytime, Demi. You know that,” Xavier tells her.

I listen as they quietly exit the room. Marcum wraps himself around me and I drift back to sleep feeling warm and protected.

EPILOGUE

KODIAK

It takes forever for my old lady to wake up as my head is buried between her thighs. When her hips lift and grind into my face, a smile forms on my face.

“Took you long enough,” I tease as I lift up on my knees and hover over her.

“Hi,” she shyly says as I line my dick up with her opening and slide home.

“Hi,” I reply as I glide in balls deep. “I’m going to make slow love to you, Luna.” Tears glisten in her eyes when my words sink in. We’re passionate people who never have control of ourselves long enough to take our time with one another.

Right now, though, I need to show her how I feel before I tell her. She’s the most important person in my life, next to my blood brother and the club, and I know that when our baby arrives, the two of them will be my whole universe.

“Yes,” she cries out as I hit her sweet spot, swiveling my hips. The feelings that flow through me are unlike anything I could’ve imagined experiencing with a woman.

Sweat drenches our skin as we stare into each other’s eyes, never losing our momentum as I pump in and out of her soaked channel. Her nails dig into my shoulders as my forehead lowers to hers.

“I love you, Marcum. I love both facets of you. The man, the club president. The

honor, devotion, and loyalty in you astounds me. I admire you in more ways than can be counted.” Her words awaken a part of my soul that I thought had long ago been destroyed.

“I love you too, Luna mine. You are the moon that lightens the dark part of me. You make sure I can see down the black path life has forged for me. You make me want to be a better man. I’m always going to be walking down a road that is lined in blood and death, but when I come home to you asleep in my bed, I can put that aside.”

I continue making love to her until we both explode, our releases catapulting us into an entirely new stratosphere. I never thought making love with the other half of my soul could be just as monumental as it was.

I slide off her and land on my back, pulling her over to where her head is resting on my chest. “I’ve got church scheduled here in a bit, but Demi is in Xavier’s room so you won’t be here alone.”

“I’ll probably go back to sleep. This pregnancy thing is exhausting,” she says around a yawn before she giggles.

“Then rest, baby. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” I tell her, patting her thigh.

She’s fast asleep before I have a chance to shove my feet into my boots. When I go to leave our bedroom, I make a mental note that I need to send our prospects to clean out her apartment and bring her things here. She may not want to terminate her lease, Demi may decide to take it over, so I won’t pay off her landlord until I speak to them about my plans. When my child is born, I want him or her to come home here. I don’t want us living in two different towns.

When I get to the living room, Xavier is waiting for me with a travel mug of coffee which he passes over to me. A determined look is settled on his face.

“What’s wrong?” I ask him, not liking the way his eyes have shut down.

“Demi had a nightmare last night, and some of the things she said means we have more than one group of men to take out,” he announces.

“Fuck,” I mumble. “One step at a time, brother. Let’s take care of the rapists, then we’ll nix any other fuckers who’ve messed with her.”

“I’m gonna hold you to that, Kodiak.” The fact that he used my road name instead of my given one lets me know how critical this is. “Because if I have to go nomad again in order to neutralize her threats, I will.”

“Noted,” I tell him as we leave the house and head for the clubhouse.

Looks like life is fixing to get more strenuous than relaxed. But that’s okay, I have to relieve my bloodlust somewhere and Demi’s enemies have just become ours.

DEMI

“No,” I mumble, lost in a familiar but horrific nightmare . My foster father laughs, the sound is menacing and for a six year old, that sound is something that makes me want to run and hide. But I can’t, because he’s placed a collar around my neck and is leading me around the house by a leash.

“Lick it up,” he orders, pointing to the oatmeal that I burned that morning when he demanded I make him breakfast. Despite the fact that I want to puke, I shake my head even though the collar and leash tug on my tender, already bruised skin.

Even at my tender age, I’m defiant and refuse to do as he bids. I can handle the beatings and humiliation. This place is better than the last one where the dad there made me bathe in front of him. He’d stroke his hand up and down his middle until white stuff poured out from it as I’d run the washcloth across my privates.

I never felt clean after that, it made me feel dirtier. The only reason I'm not still there is because another child told their aunt, and she reported him to the social worker.

This may not be a happy place to live, but to those looking in, I'm clean, fed, and the man and woman now fostering me, pretend like they care. They don't, not really, they just want the check the state gives them. Of course, it's not spent on me and my needs; I wear thrift store clothes and hand-me-downs from the church, while my foster mom has fancy nails and hair. But the clothes she buys second hand are clean and none of them are torn or tattered so it doesn't matter if they come with price tags or not.

My case worker told me to stop complaining, because the next place I live may be worse than this one. That advice, I took to heart and never, ever tell about the fact that I clean the floors with my tongue and am led around the house on a leash whenever he gets mad at me. I don't understand why she doesn't stop him, though. Aren't mothers supposed to protect their kids? Even if they're not really theirs?

I jolt awake, coated in sweat as the sheet is wrapped around me, trapping me. It must be what triggered me awake. I look over to the side and sigh in relief when I see it empty. Xavier must've already left for his meeting, and hopefully, he didn't notice I was trapped in my mind.

"Dammit," I mutter as I crawl out of bed and gather the bedding so I can wash them. "These dreams need to go away. I'm in charge of my life now, not the monster."

I never opened up to Luna when we were children. She's one of the few reasons I stuck things out and didn't report the happenings going on inside of the Gillis's house. I may have been humiliated, but they never sexually abused me and I counted that as a win back then. But as an adult, I know that the mental and emotional abuse I suffered through can be just as traumatizing.

When I toss the sheets and blanket into the wash, I notice that my hands are shaking.

I close my eyes and try to center myself. One day, the demons from my past will no longer haunt me.

I'm not sure when or how I'll get there, because opening up to complete strangers is not going to happen—I don't trust a damn person outside of Luna. And I refuse to tell her about what I was going through right underneath her nose, she'll blame herself and that's not okay.

Xavier's face floats through my mind. But can I trust the man, the VP of the Deviant Knights? Conan is a different man in my observations than Xavier is.

My gut and mind are at war with one another when it comes to him.

I guess only time can answer that question.

THE END