



Marked by the Protective Biker (Heat & Ink)

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Category: Romance

Description: He's not supposed to touch me.

I'm definitely not supposed to want him.

But rules blur when a broody, inked inmate looks at you

like you're his salvation.

I'm the sunshine counselor that sees the good in him.

He's the tattooed ex-con with a shady past.

We had one night the night before he walked free and

I told myself it was over.

But he watches me when I leave work.

He protects me from a distance.

He tells me we're wrong together...

But he keeps coming back.

And when I show up at his door, desperate for answers,

he finally stops running.

He puts his mark on me the only way he knows how.

Ink on skin

Heat in every stroke.

A secret tattoo that says what neither of us can.

We don't make sense.

We don't fit.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 2:56 am

FELON

I'm tense, sitting in my metal chair, with my gaze locked on Miss Riles. Her name is Emily, but we're not supposed to call her that. She's the only one in this place that offers any kind of light in all the darkness. She looks for the best in all of us, even the ones that don't deserve it.

I've been here in Jasper Prison for a little over a year, and it was six months ago that Emily started working as a counselor to the inmates.

I had resisted counseling up to that point, but one look at her, and I knew I wouldn't skip another meeting.

Hell, I attend more group meetings than is required of me, and the one-on-one meetings are the moments I cling to.

Emily fidgets in her seat, and I know it's because she feels something for me. There's no hiding it even though she's tried. But every meeting, I plant my ass in the seat closest to her and soak in her every move, every glance, and every hitched breath she has.

I arrived early to the conference where group therapy is held, hoping to talk to her for just a second, and she's spent her time, head buried into case files, acting if she's ignoring me. "Can we talk after?"

Finally, she lifts her big green eyes up to me.

I wonder if she realizes that desire is plain to see on her face.

She looks at the guard standing by the doorway across the room.

He's not paying us any attention because he's more focused on his phone than anything.

Just watching him pisses me off. He should be protecting Emily even though she doesn't need protection from me. But that asshole doesn't know that.

She sucks in a breath and slowly releases it. "I don't think that is a good idea."

I slouch down, trying to make myself smaller even though I've spent most of my life doing the opposite. I'm a big man compared to her, and the thought of her being afraid of me keeps me up most nights. "Are you scared of me?"

"No. I'm not scared of you at all," she answers immediately, and I let out a sigh of relief.

She's not lying. I'd know if she was. She may not realize it, but every emotion, every thought, everything shows on her face.

She doesn't have the experience or the know-how to keep things hidden, and that's why leaving her here scares the shit out of me.

These guys in here will prey on her innocence. They will fuckin' ruin her.

"Then talk to me after the group session."

She looks at me, surprised. I've never pressured her, but today I feel like I have to.

"Please, Emily. I get out tomorrow. I just need to talk to you."

She wants to. I can see it in the way her eyes are sparkling and the way she's looking at me. Just when I think she's going to say yes, she shakes her head. "I can't."

I fist my hands in my lap to stop from reaching for her. The thought of leaving her here is making me crazy. I want to protect her. Hell, I need to protect her, and I'm not sure how I'm going to do it when I'm outside these walls.

The door swings open, and more inmates walk in.

I watch each of them, and every fuckin' one of them looks at Emily as if she's a feast meant just for them.

The thought sickens me and pisses me off at the same time.

The urge to stand up and take down each and every fucker in the room is intense, but as if she senses my growing anger, Emily stands up and moves to the opposite side of the room.

She appears to be putting away files, and when she's done, instead of joining the circle, she sits behind her desk.

I'm not sure if she's putting distance between her and the whole group or just needing to put distance between the two of us, but I'm happy she's over there, half hidden behind the big desk.

She starts the group session, and we all go around talking about anything we want to talk about since the last meeting. Every one of the guys has their eyes glued to Emily.

She doesn't even seem to notice the effect she has on all the men here.

She's the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on, and I'm not the only one to

think so.

She's curvy and has a grace about her that makes me salivate just watching her.

When she's in any room, she commands everyone's attention. I'm not sure if that is her beauty or just the fact that whoever she's talking to, she makes them feel like they are the most important person in the world.

I'm in here with some of the worst men there are, but she makes them believe in themselves.

In these sessions, most the guys don't say much, and I'm normally that way too, but today is different. If this is my only chance to talk to Emily, then I'm going to have to find a way to do it now.

"Jack, do you have anything you want to say?"

Emily is the only one that can get away calling me by that name. To everyone else, I go by my last name, Felon.

I clench my fists together in my lap and look directly at her. "Yeah, I've got a few things to say."

She tenses ever so slightly, and I'm sure she's worried about what I'm going to say.

Does she think I'm going to announce my attraction to her, right here in front of everyone?

Hell, she may not know it, but every man in this prison, including the guards, knows she's mine.

This is why she's been protected and no one will touch her.

They won't go against me or my club, the Exiled Guardians.

But I'm still worried about what may happen when I'm out beyond these walls.

She clears her throat. "Go on."

I nod and stand up. "I get out tomorrow, and even though I'm leaving here, I still have eyes on the inside.

If anyone in here thinks they can take what's mine...

put their hands on what is mine, well, then they have another think coming.

"I look around the room, making sure that I have everyone's attention.

"Do not cross me. Do not cross my club. Do not touch what's mine. "

Everyone is nodding their heads because they know I'm not lying. Only a dumbass would cross me, unfortunately there are probably a few of them in this room or in this prison right now. I sit down in my seat, and Emily nods her head before turning to the guy sitting next to me.

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EMILY

The guy sitting next to Jack drones on about the injustice of him being in prison. I really should be paying closer attention, but instead I'm focused on Jack.

He asked to talk to me after the session, and I told him no.

Not because I'm scared of him but more like I'm scared of how I'll react to being alone with him.

I don't trust myself not to touch him. Hell, I can totally see myself begging for his touch.

I've never in my life been attracted to a man like I am to Jack.

When I first saw him, it was his big shoulders, chiseled chin, and big blue eyes that drew me to him.

I swear when he looks at me, I feel so much heat I've had to stop myself from fanning my face.

And that was at one glance.

When I got to know him through counseling, I started to fall for him. I shouldn't have, and I know better, but it was inevitable. He's irresistible.

He's my complete opposite, but he calms me in ways I never saw coming.

Hell, he's part of a motorcycle club. He's in prison for killing a man and was sentenced to twenty years and he's getting out after only serving one. I'm sure there were strings pulled, but they are saying he's getting out on some technicality.

The sad part about this is, I don't think he wants out. I think he was content being in here and now that he's about to get out, there's a restlessness to him that he can't seem to get a hold of. Which sort of explains the speech he just gave.

It worries me some because I can see him doing something to be able to stay in here, and that would be the worst thing for him. He needs to take his freedom and run.

As the guys continue talking, I look at Jack.

He's staring straight at me, and I don't have to wonder if everything he said about claiming what's his was about me.

I've known since the first words we exchanged that I was his.

We may never act on it, and we may never do more than talk, but I feel as if I'm his.

It's like I belong with him, and the thought should freak me out, but it doesn't.

I stand up from behind my desk and move across the room. Every eye in the room is on me. Charles is talking about how his ex-wife won't bring his kid to see him, and I search my brain. When he pauses, I ask him, "Your daughter is thirteen, right?"

He nods, and I give him a look of understanding. "I understand you want to see your daughter, but have you tried reaching out to her? Maybe write her a letter and let her know you love her and are thinking of her."

One of the other guys jumps in with a mocking laugh. "Charles can't write."

A few of the others snicker, and I am about to take back control of the session when Jack chimes in. "I'll help you write it tonight."

Charles nods at Jack and thanks him.

And that right there is another reason I've fallen for Jack.

He's not like the other guys here. He is hard and strong, and no one here doubts that, but he's also compassionate and caring.

A lot of these men are in prison because they've done really bad things.

And yeah, Jack killed a guy, but he did it protecting a child that was being assaulted next to a park in Whiskey Run.

He broke the law, and he hasn't shown any remorse for what he's done because he said if he had to do it again, he would. Who can really blame him for that?

I nod toward Jack. "Thank you for helping him. Now, Mike, what about you? Anything you want to talk about?"

The next few guys grumble through their confessions and complaints, and I take notes of things I can help them with.

Before I know it, time is up, and I start to panic.

Jack is about to walk out of here, and who knows if I'll ever see him again.

Do I want this to be my last encounter with him?

Am I going to be able to just let him walk out the door without another word?

The thought makes me sick to my stomach, and as all the guys start to file out of the room, I step in front of Jack, putting distance between him and the guard. “Hey, Bradley, I’m going to go ahead and do Jack’s exit interview now, okay? I’ll just need around thirty minutes.”

Bradley is an older guard, and he’s taken it upon himself to look out for me. His wife sends in cakes and cookies to give to me at least once a week. Bradley leans his head back and looks up at Jack. “You going to give her any problems?”

Jack shakes his head. “No, sir.”

Bradley measures him with a look and nods his head. “Fine. I’ll be right here, Em—I mean Ms. Riles. You just say my name and I’ll be here.”

I nod, unable to hide my relief. It’s not much, but I have thirty more minutes with Jack, and it’s going to have to be enough.

I’m going to have to commit everything he says and does to memory because I don’t want to forget anything about any of it, but mostly I don’t want to forget how he makes me feel.

Bradley steps outside of the room, and I grip the door and close it halfway.

Without looking at Jack, I walk back toward my desk.

The long skirt I have on feels tighter, and I know Jack is watching my ass move side to side as I go.

I resist shaking my hips even though I want to.

Even though this is inappropriate, I can at least put up a modicum of professionalism.

As I settle at my desk, Jack walks toward me. His gaze is penetrating, and I slide my thighs together, wanting the friction there.

“Have a seat,” I tell him breathlessly.

I point at the chair across the desk, but he grabs it and picks it up like it weighs nothing. I hold my breath as he carries it around the desk, sets it beside mine, and then settles his heavy frame into it.

It feels like something is lodged in my throat, but I mumble, “What are you doing?”

He turns toward me. He’s caged me in with his arms and thighs.

His right arm is on the desk in front of us, his left arm is on the back of my chair.

His left leg is behind me, and his right leg is pressed against my knees.

I hold my breath because even though we’ve sat close before, this is closer; this is different.

He leans his head toward mine, and just for a second I wonder if he’s going to kiss me.

His breath is hot on my cheek. He's that close. “I leave here tomorrow, Em. I have thirty minutes to breathe you in, and the only way to do that is to sit close to you.” His hand comes down on my thigh, and I jump. Not because I’m scared but because I wasn’t expecting his touch.

“Please, let me have these thirty minutes touching you.”

My voice is shaky and filled with need. “We shouldn’t do this.”

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FELON

She's right. We shouldn't be doing this, and I shouldn't be touching her.

Maybe it's the thought that I'm about to walk out of here and leave her unprotected.

Maybe it's the fact that I've yearned for her since I first saw her, or maybe I just can't hold back anymore, but I don't move back, and I don't remove my hand.

"We shouldn't do this. I shouldn't touch you. Do you want me to stop?"

She shakes her head side to side, and I grip her tighter.

She sucks in a breath, and I tell her the one thing I've never said to her before. "I want you to quit. I can't leave you here, Em."

Her eyes widen, and she sputters, "I can't just quit. This is my job... my calling."

I try to calm myself, but just thinking of her here without me makes me crazy. "Why? What made you want to do this job?"

She shrugs and says in a hushed voice, "My brother was in prison, and he died here. He didn't have anyone that believed in him or tried to help him." She jabs her finger into her chest. "I couldn't be here for him, but I can be here for someone like him."

I shake my head. "Honey, it's not safe."

She juts her chin at me, and I can already tell she's not going to listen to a word I say. "I can take care of myself. I'm not stupid, I didn't just wake up one day and decide to get a job here. I thought about it and prepared for it."

I have no doubts she thinks she can defend herself, but if she's up against someone that is twice her size—which is the case most times in here—then she doesn't stand a chance. My voice deepens. "I don't know how I'm going to walk away knowing you're here. I won't be able to protect you anymore."

She gives me a doubtful look. "We both know that even when you're gone, you'll still have control in here. I may not know a lot about your club, but I do know that people respect it... respect you."

I slide my hand up to the apex of her thighs. She looks at the door and then back at me. I lean over and whisper, "I want to touch you."

She pauses, and I don't relent. "Don't try and lie to me, honey. You want me to touch you, too."

Her breath hitches shakily, and I pat her between the thighs. "Pull your skirt up."

She sucks in a breath and looks at me and then at the half-closed door again. She wants to do as I ask, but the rule follower in her resists me. I pull my hand away and pat the folder on her desk. "Read to me."

She looks at the papers, and I pat them again. "Read to me, honey."

She opens the folder that has my name on it and starts to read. Her voice is soft in the room, and I tug at the material of her skirt. "Pull this up for me."

With her eyes wide, she hikes her skirt up and sits back down. She turns to look at

me. “We shouldn’t. I mean, I shouldn’t be doing this.”

I lean in, wanting to kiss her so badly, but I don’t. Instead I put my hand over her panty-clad pussy. The gusset is wet, and I stroke my finger back and forth along her warmth. “You’re not doing anything, Em. You’re just sitting here, reading to me from my file.”

She hisses, and her legs widen.

I slide my fingers under the silky material, and as soon as we’re skin on skin, she tenses, gripping the desk in front of us. There’s a movement at the door, and when I see Bradley’s back, head tilted, looking at his phone, I put my focus back on Emily.

She’s stopped reading, and I chuckle. “You need to read... or say something, Em. If it’s quiet...” I let my voice trail off because I don’t want to say the words. If she’s quiet and someone comes in here, I’m going to have to stop, and I’m not sure I can.

She’s soaking wet, and I know it’s because of me. I grunt at her ear. “Fuck, you feel so good. You’re soaked, baby. Is this all for me?”

Her head falls back, and she whimpers. Fuck, her arousal even sounds good.

As I pump my finger in and out of her, the sounds of her whimpers and her wet pussy fills the room. “Talk, Em. You need to talk.”

She starts talking again, and it’s like she’s talking from memory.

She’s relaying what’s going to happen when I leave tomorrow and everything I’m going to have to do to adjust to normal life.

As she goes on, I press my finger to her clit, circling it, applying more pressure until

her hips start to jerk and she's gyrating against my hand.

Her hand goes from the desk to my wrist, and she holds on to me. Her grip is tight, and I whisper to her, "You want me to stop?"

Her eyes widen, and she shakes her head side to side. "No, please, no."

She's so close, and I stroke her swollen nub relentlessly. I feel her body tense, and when her orgasm hits, she moans. I put a hand to her mouth to stop the noise, and she bites her lip. Her pussy clenches around my hand as she rides it to completion.

When she comes down, it hits her hard what she just let me do. Her mouth drops, and she panics.

I pat her pussy, pulling her panties over to cover her. She's pulling her skirt back down her legs, and I can't stop myself. I put my fingers in my mouth and moan around the taste of her. Both her hands are back on the desk, and she's looking at me as if she can't believe what she's seeing.

"Fuck, you taste so good."

Her whimper fills the room, but I don't stop until I've licked my finger clean and her tang is coating my tongue.

She lifts her eyes to mine, and the way she looks at me is my undoing.

I thought I could walk away tomorrow. Yes, I would make sure she was protected behind these walls, but now it's not enough.

I need to know she's always protected. I need to know that anyone and everyone knows not to touch her... because she's mine.

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EMILY

WHAT DID I JUST DO?

I open my mouth and then close it again.

I'm not even sure what I should say right now. He taps the desk. "Talk to me, Emily."

I sit up a little taller and say the first thing that comes to mind. "What are your plans when you get out?"

He searches my face. "I'll work for the club."

Confused, I ask, "The club?"

He nods. "Yeah, I'll probably work at Heat & Ink."

"The tattoo shop?"

He nods. "Yeah." His voice softens. "Do you have one? A tattoo, I mean?"

I shake my head. I've thought about it, but I've just never done it. Mostly because I don't know what I would get. "No, I don't."

He juts his thumb at his chest. "You ever get one, I'll give it to you."

I shrug. "Okay, so you're going to work at Heat & Ink. Where are you going to live?"

“The club.”

I nod and try not to let the jealousy take over.

I’ve heard about parties at the Exiled Guardians clubhouse and I’ve heard about the cherries there.

I never understood the concept until someone explained it to me that the cherries are there to take care of its members.

Before I can ask him about them, I clear my throat and whisper, “I’ve never done this before. I’ve never crossed this line before.”

He nods. “I know that.”

What else is he going to say, though? I feel like I need to explain. “No, seriously. I have never?—”

He cuts me off. “Emily, stop, I wanted this. I wasn’t leaving here without touching you, so this is on me.”

I let out a low, slow breath. “Okay... so what about you? Is this a normal thing for you?”

He tilts his head. “You mean do I go around touching women in prison?”

I shrug. I’ve heard some stories about some of the administrators here, and there are nurses and other women in and out. I’ve seen the way some of them look at Jack.

He shakes his head. “No, honey. I haven’t wanted to touch anyone but you.”

I roll my eyes. I don't even know who I am right now. This is not me. I don't break the rules. Heck, I don't even bend them. I've never looked at an inmate twice in a romantic way, but when I get around Jack, it's like I'm a cat in heat.

He grips the chair, turns me to face him, and then locks his hands on each side of my chair. "You're quitting."

I lift my chin in denial. "I'm not quitting my job. I can do good things here, Jack."

He growls, and it's obvious he's not happy with me. I'm sure he's used to getting his way and hates to be told no.

"Bradley." I call toward the door.

He's quick to turn. His eyes raised, he walks into the room. "What is it, Ms. Riles? You okay?"

I smile to reassure him. "Yes, Bradley. I'm fine."

I feel Jack tense next to me, but I ignore him. "I was wondering if you can grab something from my office for me?"

Bradley is already shaking his head. I knew he wouldn't like me asking him to leave me here with Jack, but I'm determined. "I have a packet on my desk. It's a manila folder with a sticker on the front that says Jack Felon."

Bradley looks at Jack and glares. "I don't think?—"

I cut him off. "It's okay, Bradley. You know Jack is not going to hurt me."

Bradley glares at Jack but finally nods his head. "Fine. I'll be right back."

He gives Jack a stern look and then turns on his heel and walks out the door. I can feel Jack's gaze centered on me, and now that we're alone, my confidence is shaken.

Jack's voice drops. "Okay honey, you got us alone. Now what?"

I lift my eyes to his, suck in a breath, and say the one thing that I haven't been able to stop thinking about. "I want you to kiss me."

His eyes darken with arousal, and he leans into me. "Fuck, honey, I'm not going to want to stop."

I look at the clock on the wall and then back to Jack. "Two minutes."

He puts his hands on each side of my face, tilts my head back, and looks at me. "You sure?" he asks huskily.

I try to nod, but he's holding me so tightly I can barely move my head.

"Words, Emily. I need to hear the words."

"Yes, I'm sure. I want you to kiss me," I tell him without hesitation.

He leans down and presses his lips to mine.

Instantly, I know I'm never going to be the same.

A warmth flows through my whole body. He pulls me from my chair and settles me on his lap.

His hard manhood presses against my hip, and I grind into him.

His arms are wrapped around me, and he holds me so tightly I can barely breathe.

His mouth fits over my lips, and when his tongue slides along mine, I whimper.

He pulls back and leans his forehead against mine.

We're both breathing heavily, and when he leans back to look at me, his eyes are dilated, his nostrils are flared, and he looks like a man on the edge.

His voice is husky. "Baby, if we don't stop now, I'm going to throw you over my shoulder and carry you out of here. "

Bradley's voice carries in the hall as he talks to another guard, letting us know he's almost back. I pull from Jack's arms and move back over to my chair. I lean over my desk, speechless.

"Breathe, honey. He's coming in."

I nod and start reading from the file again. I don't even know what I'm reading, but I keep talking until Bradley stops in front of us. He sets the folder down on the desk, and I look up him. "Thank you, Bradley."

"Sure thing, honey."

Jack growls next to me, and I tense. Surely he's not jealous of Bradley. I force a smile to my face. "We will just be a few more minutes."

Bradley looks between me and Jack. "Okay, I'll be right outside the door."

He waits for my nod and then walks out of the room. It's not until he's gone that I let out the breath I've been holding. Jack puts his hand on my thigh and squeezes.

“Em... how am I supposed to walk out of here and leave you?”

I turn in my seat to look at him. “Don’t do anything stupid, Jack. This is your chance to get out of here. I know you’re trying to figure out how to stay, but you can’t do that.”

He looks at me intently. “Then quit. Or I’m going to do what I have to do to stay in here with you, Emily.”

I slap my hand on the desk. “You can’t ruin your future?—”

He cuts me off and blurts, “I was sentenced to twenty years for killing a man. I’d say I’ve already ruined my future.”

I steel my voice. There’s no way I’m letting him throw away his second chance on me. I’m not sure who is more surprised when I blurt out, “You’re getting out of here, Jack. Don’t you dare fuck it up!”

He stands up and taps the desk. “Then quit.”

I stand up and put a hand on his arm. “I can’t just quit.”

He grits his teeth. “And I can’t just walk away and leave you here.”

Wanting to buy time, I nod my head. “Fine. I’ll talk to the warden this week about beefing up security.”

He growls, and I hold my hand up. I’m not sure what I’m thinking letting this man, this inmate, try to tell me what to do, but the truth is I am feeling uneasy about being here without him. “Jack, I’m not just quitting on these people.”

He nods. "Okay."

He gave in too easily. I may have only known him for six months, but I know that he gave in too easily. I tilt my head to the side. "Jack, you can't..."

He cups my chin in his hand. I should be worried about someone seeing us, but I'm not. He presses his thumb to my lip and gently strokes it side to side. "You want to stay working here, I'll make sure you're protected, but you call me if you need me. See you soon, Emily Riles."

He drops his hand and walks away without another glance. I almost call out to him, but I stop myself. No matter how much I want him, we're too different. Nothing can ever come of us, and that's the only reason I let him go.

I fall back into my seat and shake my head. Jack Felon is a murderer, a member of a motorcycle club, a tattoo artist... and the most dangerous man I've ever wanted.

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FELON

No matter how hard I try, I can't get Emily out of my head.

I'm thinking about her non-stop, and the longer I'm unable to see her, the shittier my mood gets.

My first day at Heat & Ink and I've managed to piss off anyone and everyone.

Alice has thrown her hands up at me, Gunner has already threatened to kick my ass, and I'm pretty sure Boss is ready to fire me.

"What the fuck, man? Pres said you wanted this job, but you're sure not acting like it. What's your problem?"

I ram my hand through my hair. This is my first day out, and my club offered to let me take a few weeks off, but I thought working would help me keep my mind off things. It hasn't helped at all. All I can think about is Emily and how she's at Jasper Prison... without me.

You can bet your ass that I have people on the inside watching her and protecting her, but it's not enough. No one is going to protect her like I can.

I look at the biker in my work area. "I need to make a phone call. Can you give me a minute?"

Boss holds his hand up. "Sure, but first tell me what the hell is going on."

I'm not used to explaining myself, but this is how the Guardians work. I have to remind myself that these are my brothers, and I need to lean on them. "Fine. My woman works at the prison. I have inmates watching her, but it's not enough."

Boss crosses his arms over his chest and levels me with a look. "So what do you need? What can we do?"

"Since I've been in, I've had some prospects watching her in the evenings, but I told them since I was out, they can stop and I'd take care of it."

Boss looks at the clock on the wall and back at me. "So what? Your first day at work and you didn't plan on working this late?"

I nod my head. "Yeah."

Boss nods. "Fine. I'll take care of it."

Surprised, I rear back. "What?"

He shrugs. "Dude, I'd be the same way about Lexi. I'll get some prospects over to the prison, and they'll tail her home until you come and relieve them."

For the first time all day, I let out a breath of relief. I trust Boss, but I also know how important this is. "Are you sure? I can make a call."

Boss shakes his head. "Go in there and finish the tatt, Felon. I'm going to take care of it. I just need her name."

"Emily Riles."

Boss nods. "Emily Riles. I got it. She'll be protected until you get there. Now quit

worrying and get to work.”

I nod and walk back into my room. It feels as if a weight has been lifted from my shoulders.

I’m not sure what I’m thinking, but I panicked for a minute.

On the inside, it was a good idea to let people know she was mine and to be protected.

But outside the prison, I’m not so sure.

The Exiled Guardians try and stay clean, but we have enemies, and those enemies wouldn’t think twice about going after my woman.

As I walk back into my work room, Miller raises his head from the back of the chair. “Everything okay?”

He’s a millionaire. Not that you’d know it by looking at him right now.

His shirt and jacket, which are worth probably two grand, are lying over a chair in the corner.

His arms and back are already covered in tattoos, and today was his appointment for his chest piece.

“Yeah, I’m good. I just had to rearrange things.

I know you want to get this piece done.”

Miller has a thing. He won’t let just anyone do his tats. I’m the only one that has ever

put art on him, and we started this chest piece right before I got put in prison. I was surprised that he was my very first appointment, but maybe I shouldn't be.

He lays his head back on the cushion, and I must take too long to get started because he looks at me again. "You sure you're okay, Felon?"

I grimace at the name. It's my family name, but it rings different now that I'm actually a felon. "Yeah, I'm okay."

He leans up on his elbow. "You sure? You're different."

I shrug as I wipe off some of my equipment to get another color set up. "Yeah, I just have my mind elsewhere." Shit. I probably shouldn't tell him that, but it's the truth. I can't stop thinking of Emily.

He sighs. "I'm sorry, man. You want to reschedule?"

My eyebrows lift in surprise, but there's no way I'm taking him up on his offer. Mostly because I've had a feeling about something, and I wanted to ask him about it. I slide my chair over next to him. "Miller, can I ask you something?"

He grunts as he leans back in his chair again. "Sure."

"I only served a year of my twenty years."

He opens one eye. "Is that a question?"

I shake my head. "I talked to my club because I thought for sure it was them that got me out early, but Pres said it wasn't. They tried and couldn't pull it off."

His eyes are closed now, but he's paying attention. "Pull what off?"

I have my tattoo gun in hand and am ready to get started, but I'm stalling so I can ask. "Did you have anything to do with me getting out nineteen years early, Miller?"

As soon as I say it, I realize how absurd it sounds, but I can't figure out what happened or why I'm out now. Miller is quiet, and I'm about to start my tattoo gun when he finally starts talking. "You did the right thing, Felon."

I set the tattoo gun down. "What?"

He groans like he doesn't even want to have this conversation. "I said you did the right thing... saving that kid like you did. You shouldn't have been in there in the first place."

Stunned, my mouth falls open. "So you did get me out early?"

He shrugs like it's not a big deal. "What? Did you think I was going to wait nineteen more years to get my tattoo finished? No way."

All I can do is sit here, shaking my head. "So what... how?" I stutter.

I'm not sure how he did it, but instantly he's shaking his head.

"It's not for you to worry about. You're out, and I'm working to get it expunged from your record."

"Miller..." I start, overwhelmed. There's no way I can repay him for this.

He's acting like it's not a big deal what he did.

But he made it to where I only had to serve one year of a twenty year sentence.

And now he's talking like it's possible to get this off my record.

It's too much, but it's also everything I'd dreamed of.

Miller groans and finally looks at me, face on. "Look, let's not make a big deal out of this. I needed to get my tattoo finished, so I pulled some strings..."

I choke on the words. "Pulled some strings... it's more than?—"

He cuts me off. "Look, seriously, you didn't deserve to be in there, so I took care of it."

I nod. "Fuck, okay, thank you... I mean, I know that doesn't even begin to cover it, but?—"

He blows out a breath like he's frustrated. "Shit, man. Forget it. You're welcome. You sure you want to do this now?"

At that moment, Boss knocks on my open door. "Sorry to interrupt. I took care of that issue. They have eyes on her, and they've been instructed to stick with her until you get there."

I let out a breath. "Thanks."

He nods and turns on his heel as Miller chuckles. "Oh. Woman troubles. I get that."

"Miller, you don't even know the half of it."

He laughs, leans back, and closes his eyes.

I pick up the tattoo gun again and get to work. The quicker I work, the faster I get to

Emily.

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EMILY

I blow out a breath as I walk out of the bookstore.

Work today was... off. That's the only way I know how to describe it.

I knew it would be different without Jack there.

A part of me was waiting for him to walk into my office because he'd done something foolish and gotten himself put back in.

Another part of me walked around with my head on a swivel.

I didn't realize how much comfort it brought me knowing that Jack was at the prison.

My individual sessions were okay, and nothing happened out of the ordinary.

But the group session went off the rails.

I tried to convince myself it was all in my head, but at the end of the session, one of the newer inmates walked over to talk to me and tried to intimidate me.

His name is Richard, and he's in for armed robbery and a list of other things.

He wanted private sessions with me, and then he made comments about what he'd like to do with me in those sessions.

Bradley, the guard, was about to intervene when another inmate, someone I know that is friendly with Jack, came in and practically dragged Richard out of the room.

“Sorry, Ms. Riles. It won’t happen again. ”

I was holding folders to my chest and trying to catch my breath when Bradley walked up to me. “Emily, are you okay? I’m so sorry. I should have realized everyone didn’t walk out. I wasn’t quick enough, I?—”

I held my hand up to calm him even though I was feeling rattled. “Bradley, I’m fine. It’s okay.”

Bradley was shaking his head, and it was obvious he was not happy with the turn of events. “I shouldn’t have left the room. I thought?—”

He stopped talking abruptly, and I looked at him curiously. “You thought what?”

He gritted his teeth. “I thought that Jack had this under control. I thought they’d leave you alone.”

I refused to have a conversation about Jack with Bradley. Not that I don’t trust him, but I don’t want to get him into the middle of anything.

“I’m fine, Bradley, I promise.”

I hugged the older man, and then he walked me to my office.

When I left work, I didn’t want to go straight home to an empty house.

I saw the two bikers waiting in the parking lot of the prison. I noticed the club name on their jackets, and I recognized it as the same one that Jack is a member of.

I was in the bookstore for over an hour, and now as I stand outside on the sidewalk, I see the same two guys parked just down the block.

I sit on a bench because it's obvious these guys are following me, and I'm not sure I want them to follow me home. As I sit here and think, I can't stop my thoughts from going to Jack.

Maybe he was right; maybe I'm not as safe at the prison as I thought I was, but I'm not going to quit. Nope, I'm going to stay because I know I can make a difference there. But I am going to make sure I make some changes so that I'm protected.

I pull my phone from my purse just as I hear another motorcycle come down the road. I don't even have to see him to know it's Jack. It's like my body is on high alert; my nipples pebble and my breath hitches.

I sit up straighter and watch as he passes by me and parks his bike next to his friends. They talk for a second, and one of the men I don't know points right at me. Jack looks at me, and I swear I can feel his gaze sweep down my body.

I'm holding my breath as he fist bumps the other two and then walks down the sidewalk toward me.

The other two start up their bikes and drive away as Jack comes to stand in front of me. "How you doing, honey?"

His voice is gruff, and he seems anxious as he waits for my response. It's on the tip of my tongue to tell him about the guy at the prison, but I don't say a word. Instead of answering him, I ask my own question. "Are your friends following me?"

He points at the empty seat next to me. "Can I sit down?"

I nod, and he sits next to me. He doesn't sit close, and I'm not sure how I feel about that. I don't want there to be distance between us, but I also don't trust myself with him either.

He sits down and turns to the side so he's facing me. I feel my body heat under his scrutiny, and I stutter out the words, "Are you going to answer me?"

He blows out a breath. "Yes, sorry about that. I was late getting off work."

None of this makes sense. What does he mean, he was late getting off work? But before I can ask him, he starts talking. "I found out how I got out early."

I perk up at that. There have been a few rumors going around the prison, but I've made a point to ignore all of it. "How?"

He seems surprised as he shakes his head. "You're not going to believe this. Before I went in, I started a tattoo on someone, and I didn't get it finished..."

My mouth drops open, and he nods his head. "Yeah, he wanted me out to get it finished. I'm the only one that has done his tattoos, and he refused to go to someone else." Jack shrugs his shoulders. "Plus, he believes I didn't deserve to be in there?—"

I nod my head in agreement. "I agree."

That seems to stun him. "You do?"

Working as a counselor at the prison, I come across all types of men.

Some of them say they were innocent, some actually were innocent, and some are proud and show no remorse for what they did.

Jack was never sorry for what he did, and most likely if in the same position, he would do it again.

But to a lot of people, he was justified in his actions.

“Yeah, Jack. You saved that kid’s life. Who knows what that man would have done to her? ”

He scrunches up his nose like he doesn’t want to think about it. I hold my hands in my lap. “So talk to me. Why are your friends following me?”

He avoids my question again. “Did they scare you?”

I shake my head. “No, not when I knew they were from your club.”

He blows out a breath. “Good, good. They won’t bother you.”

I blurt out a laugh. “But why? Why are they following me, Jack?”

He searches my eyes. “Because I was late getting off work.”

I throw my hands up. “Are we going to talk in code all night or what? Why are you having them follow me?”

He runs his hand through his hair. “Because I need to know you’re okay, and I couldn’t be here, so I asked them to stay with you until I could get here.”

Suddenly, a thought comes back to me. “Wait. Have they been following me? This wasn’t the first time, was it?”

He leans back in his seat and stares at me. “No, from the first day I met you, I had

someone following you outside of work.”

My mouth falls open. How did I not realize someone was following me all this time?

But I know the answer. Jack made me feel safe.

Even when he was in prison and I was in my home, I felt safe.

Now that I thought he was out of my life, I finally started paying attention to my surroundings.

“I need to learn self-defense,” I blurt out.

He sits up a little taller. “Why? Did something happen today?”

I look away from him because I don’t want to tell him about the guy after the counseling session. “Nothing I can’t handle, but I’m realizing that maybe I need to be more aware of my surroundings and I need to be able to take care of myself.”

Jack nods. “I’ll teach you.”

I point at him. “You’ll teach me?”

He nods assertively. “Who else would teach you?” He juts his thumb in his chest and claims, “I’ll do it so I’ll know you can protect yourself.”

I nod and look up and down the street. There are people passing by, and I see the looks from them.

I know they’re curious, and I’m sure they’re wondering why Jack would be sitting with me.

I still have my work clothes on, and I look even more prim and proper sitting next to him.

I'm not sure what Jack sees in me, but he's obviously attracted to me. Why else would he have me followed?

"So..." I start, unsure how to start. I hesitate and then pull my shoulders back. I might as well ask him or I might never know. "Why are you following me, Jack?"

He shrugs. "I told you I would see you soon."

I nod. "Yeah, you did. But... what is happening? Between us, I mean?"

He blows out a breath and looks like he's about to say something he doesn't want to say. "Nothing can come of us, Emily."

I turn in my seat and look at him pointedly. "Nothing?"

He's staring at my lips, and I'm wondering if he's thinking about that kiss we shared. It was good. Heck, it was everything, but I do wish we had more time. It was over too quickly, and I would love to know what it's like to kiss him when we can take our time.

He must see the desire on my face. He doesn't want to let me down, so he does it easily. "Nothing, honey. I don't fit in your world."

I jut my chin at him defiantly. "Since when do you care what people think about you?"

He chuckles softly. "Honey, I don't give a fuck what people think about me, but I'm not going to ruin your name." He points to where we're sitting. "I mean, look at us

right now. Everyone that walks by is looking at us like they're trying to figure out if they need to save you or not."

I lean toward him and touch him for the first time since he sat down. "I don't need saving from you, Jack."

I had hoped he would reach for me or lean toward me or something, but he does none of those things. He sits, holding himself tightly. I pull my hand away and stand up. "I'm going home now, so you're off duty tonight."

He stands up, towering over me, and just smirks.

"Are you going to follow me home?"

He nods.

I want to scream in frustration. I want to beg him to kiss me, right here and now, but I don't do it. My hands fist at my sides, and I walk away from Jack toward my car. I drive across town, and I can't help myself. I keep looking in the rearview mirror to see if Jack is behind me.

As I'm driving, I try to tell myself that Jack is right.

Nothing can come of us. We are too different.

And he only mentioned my world, but I'm sure he's thinking about his own, too.

There's no way he's going to want me in his world.

But as I pull into the driveway, I know I'm not going to be able to stay away from him. No matter how much he thinks I should.

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FELON

I follow behind Emily, and it's like I'm having an internal battle with myself.

It took everything inside me to keep my hands off her.

When I get to her house, I know I'll sit outside, wondering what she's doing inside.

This won't be the first time that she's consumed my every thought, but this will be the first time since I'm no longer behind bars.

I park at the curb on the road and watch as Emily parks her car and gets out.

I grip the handlebars even harder as she walks up her sidewalk.

I almost call out her name, but before I do, she stops and turns toward me.

Even from here, I can see the indecision on her face.

I get off my bike and stand next to it as she walks down her driveway toward me.

She puts a hand on her hip and stops a few feet away. "So how was your first day at work?"

Of all the things I imagined, this was not what I thought she would say. "Uh, it was good."

She nods. “Okay, I didn’t ask, and I was wondering.”

I nod, watching her closely.

She points north. “Isn’t your club in Whiskey Run?”

I grunt and nod.

She tilts her head. “That’s like thirty minutes from here.”

I nod, wondering where she’s going with this. “Yep, it is.”

There’s the slamming of a screen door, and I look at Emily’s neighbor that is standing in his yard staring at us. I gesture to Emily. “You should probably go inside before the neighbors call the police.”

She scrunches her pretty nose up. “Call the police? Why would they call the police?”

I widen my stance and cross my arms over my chest. I’m not going to say it again. It’s obvious how different we are, and I’m sure her neighbors don’t want me in their neighborhood.

She sucks in a breath and blows it out slowly. “Jack?”

By the tone of her voice, I know she’s about to ask me something, and she’s nervous about it.

She takes a step toward me. “Well, first of all, I don’t care what my neighbors think, or anyone else, for that matter. And second, would you come in and eat dinner with me?”

I open my mouth, prepared to say no, but the way she's looking at me has me changing my mind. "You sure you want me to come in for dinner?"

She nods her head. "Yes, I'm sure."

I gesture up her driveway. "I'll follow you."

She turns and slowly walks toward her house. She stops and waves at her neighbor. "Hey, Allen, how's it going?"

The neighbor smiles at Emily and then gives me a dirty look. I'm waiting on him to ask if I'm bothering her when Emily continues. She points at me over her shoulder. "This is my friend, Jack. Jack, this is my friend and neighbor, Allen."

The older man glares up and down at me. I wait for the threat or something hateful, but he just nods his head.

"Well, any friend of Emily's is a friend of mine.

" He walks to the fence and holds his hand out.

I'm surprised to say the least, but I stride to the fence and put my hand in his.

To his credit, he doesn't stare at my tattoos.

He nods his head. "Well, I'll let you young people get to it. "

He turns to go but then stops. "Hey, so those other two gentlemen on bikes, they your friends?"

I almost laugh. This is probably the first time the prospects have been called

gentlemen. “Yeah, they’re my friends.” And because I like this guy, I gesture toward Emily. “I worry about her working at the prison, and I have them keep an eye out for her when I can’t.”

As soon as I say it, I know I’ve said too much.

All this time I’m telling myself, I’m telling Emily and everyone else that I’m no good for her and then I pretty much let her neighbor think we’re together.

Before I can take it back, Allen is nodding his head.

“Good, good. If they need backup, just let me know.” He points at his chest. “Retired Marine.”

I give him a nod. “Thank you for your service.”

He walks up to his porch, and I follow Emily into her house. I look around her living room, and it’s exactly how I pictured it. It’s feminine and cozy, everything Emily. She slides off her shoes by the door and walks farther into the house. “Do you like spaghetti?”

“Honey, it’s been so long since I’ve had a home cooked meal, I’ll eat anything.”

She looks at me sadly, and I hate that I put that look on her face. “Hey, don’t do that. I don’t want you to feel sorry for me.”

She sucks in a breath and then walks over to the kitchen. “Okay, so I already have sauce in the freezer. It will only take me fifteen minutes.”

I slide off my cut and lay it on the back of the couch then walk to the island in her kitchen. “I’m sorry.”

She's pulling pans out and working on the meal but looks at me in confusion. "What are you sorry for?"

I walk around the island. I should keep my space from her, but I can't just stand here while she works. I don't answer her question because I have a lot to be sorry for. "Put me to work. What can I do?"

She looks at me like she's trying to read my mind or something and then seems to give up. She points to the freezer. "Can you get the garlic bread out and put it on the pan?"

I do what she asks, and we work side by side. It's all very domestic, and I'm waiting for the unease to hit. This has never been my thing, but right now I can feel myself enjoying it, and even though I should keep myself guarded, I don't want to.

"So tell me about the piece you did today."

My eyes raise. "The piece?"

She laughs. "Yeah, I looked up the slang. That's what it's called when you do a tattoo, right?"

I nod, feeling pleased that she wants to try and learn more about what I do.

So for the next little bit, while we work side by side, I tell her about the tattoo I did for Miller.

She hangs on every word I say, and before I realize it, we're laughing, talking, and smiling at each other as if we could actually have a future together.

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EMILY

“What are you sorry for?”

We’re halfway through dinner, and I can’t stop myself from asking him again. He never answered me before.

He wipes his mouth with his napkin and then puts a hand to his belly. “This was so good, Emily. Thank you for dinner.”

I try not to show my disappointment. I guess he’s not going to answer me. “You’re welcome. You know, anytime, I’ll cook for you. Or we can cook together. You helped a lot.”

He sits back in his chair and stares at me. I fidget in my seat under his scrutiny. When he finally opens his mouth, I hold on to the edge of my seat, waiting for his words. “The reason I said I was sorry is because I shouldn’t have let your neighbor think we were together.”

I open my mouth and then close it. “Oh, uh, is that what you were going to say earlier? You’re sorry for that?”

He nods his head. I lay my hand on the top of the table, next to my plate. I trace a mark in the wood with my finger. He leans forward and covers my hand with his.

The warmth of his hold has me holding steady waiting to see what he’s going to do next. “Emily, you don’t know how much I wish things could be different. I wish I

was different. But I'm not the man that you need."

I turn my hand over and grip on to him because I can feel him withdrawing. "You don't know what I need, Jack."

He pulls his hand from mine. "Felon. People call me Felon."

I lean back in my chair and cross my arms over my chest. "I'm not going to call you that, Jack."

He shrugs. "It's what I am."

I shrug as if it means nothing. "It's not who you are, though. It doesn't define you."

He doesn't believe me, and I know I'm about to lose him when he stands up and grabs our empty dishes. I try to stop him. "I can get those."

He ignores me and carries the dishes to the sink. I finish clearing the table and come to help him as he loads the dishwasher. He seems deep in thought, so I continue wiping off the counter, letting him work out whatever it is he needs to work out.

I am not ready for him to leave, but it's not like I can beg him to stay.

He is drying his hands off, still avoiding me, and I lean my back against the counter beside him.

He tenses, and it gives me a little boost of confidence that I can affect him like that.

He grips the edge of the counter until his knuckles turn white.

He's going to run. I know him well enough to know that.

But I can't let him do that yet. I put my hand on his forearm. "Jack, what's your plan here? You say we can't be together but what? You're going to keep watching me and protecting me? How long do you plan on doing that?"

He blinks as if there's no question. "Forever."

I blurt out a gasp. "Forever? That's crazy talk, Jack. You're not going to watch me forever."

He just stares at me, and I shake my head. "Okay, why? Why are you doing this?"

His voice is husky and filled with emotion. "Just because I can't have you doesn't mean I won't protect you."

I slide over toward him until I can feel his warmth at my side. "But you can have me."

His eyes darken, his nose flares, and he sucks in a harsh breath. "Emily..."

He says my name like a prayer, and there's a brief flare of hope in his eyes, and then it's gone. "I can't have you. No matter how much I want you."

He's sincere as he says it. He really truly believes that there can't be anything between us, but I refuse to just give up. "Okay, so here's a question. You and your club are just going to watch me?"

He nods.

I cross my arms over my chest. "And what's going to happen when I bring a man home? Are you?—"

He growls, interrupting me, and I can't stop the smile from forming on my lips. "Yeah, you're just going to stand outside my window to protect me? Are you going to be okay with what happens inside? What about when I get pregnant and have kids?"

"Stop." He grunts. "Stop talking."

He's on the verge of losing it, and I move so I'm standing in front of him. I put my hands at his waist and lean into him. This is not me. It's not who I am, but the thought of just letting him walk out of here is making me do things I'd never do. "Kiss me."

His hands go to each side of my face, and I think he's going to do it, but he just stares at me, devouring me with his eyes.

I bring my own hands up and cover his. "Jack, if you're not going to let us be together, then give me this. One night, that's all I'm asking for."

He croaks, "One night."

I can't tell if it's a question or what it is, so I nod my head. "Yes, give me this. Please, Jack."

I can see the instant that he lets himself give in. The pained look on his face transforms into a look of possession, and he lifts me up into his arms. My legs circle his waist as his lips crash onto mine. This kiss is nothing like the last one.

There is no fear of getting caught or thoughts of making it quick. He takes his time, stroking his tongue along my lips until I open to him.

He tilts my head, taking my mouth in a kiss that I feel through my whole body. He pulls back gruffly. "Bed?"

I try to pry myself out of his arms, but he's not letting me go. I laugh. "Are you planning on carrying me?"

He nuzzles his beard along my neck. "Yes."

"Ahh," I moan. "Through the living room. Down the hall. Second door on the right."

He's on the move before I get it all out. He kicks my bedroom door open with his boot and steps into the room. He doesn't look anywhere but at me as he sets me an arm's length away from him. I'm unsteady on my feet, and he holds on to me until I'm balanced and then lets me go.

"Are you scared of me?" he asks.

I put a hand on my hip. "If I was, you wouldn't have been invited into my house, Jack."

He lifts his hands and then lowers them. "And you're sure about this? I don't have anything to offer you, Emily. No tomorrows."

I want to beg, plead, and convince him that we can be together, but he's not going to listen, and right now, I just need to know what it feels like to be with him. I can worry about the future later.

Without second-guessing myself, I lift my shirt over my head and toss it across the room to the chair. His eyes go round as he watches me put my hand in each side of my waistband and then pull my dress pants down my hips. As I step out of them, Jack takes a step toward me.

His hands go to my waist, and his fingers grip me tightly. "No regrets."

I let my hands trail up his chest, and then I loop them around his neck. “No regrets.”

He pulls me to him, flush against his body.

His hands are everywhere, and when he undoes my bra, I suck in a breath. As soon as he exposes me, he cups me with his big hands. I arch my body, needing to be closer to him.

He leans over me, kissing my neck, and when he sucks my erect nipple into his mouth, I almost come apart. He moves to my other breast, kneading and suckling me, and I know that after tonight, I’m not ever going to be the same.

His hands dip into the front of my panties, and he cups me. My hips jerk as he works his finger between my wet, swollen folds.

I’m gripping his shirt. “Jack, please,” I beg him.

He releases me long enough so he can remove his shirt, and then his hands are back on me, and he pulls me against him.

My hands go to his waist, and I undo the button and then unzip him. He groans and then pulls down his pants and underwear while kicking off his boots, all in one swoop.

His movements are rushed, and the moment we’re skin to skin, his manhood pressing against my belly, I groan, barely able to hold back. There’s no turning back now. I want this more than ever.

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FELON

I turn her until the backs of her knees are against the bed, and then I gently lay her onto it. Everything inside me is screaming to take her, here and now. There's nothing I want more than to make her mine, but she's different. I know I should take it slow for her.

I'm hovering over her, looking down into her beautiful eyes. She looks happy, but I have to ask. "You okay?"

She nods, and I kiss down her body.

She moans, whimpers, and jerks as my lips touch her skin.

As I kiss her belly, she jerks her head up. "Jack... what are you..."

I kiss her mound and press an arm over her hips to hold her down. I raise my head to look at her. "Honey, I've dreamt of having you since the first day I met you. If you're giving yourself to me, I want all of you."

"But..." she starts. "You don't have to, you know, I mean..."

I kiss her soft belly. "I want to. Let me, Emily, please?"

She gives me a nod, and I don't hesitate.

I remove her panties and then dive back between her thighs.

I swipe my tongue along her slick core, and her hips buck.

She moans as I circle her clit with my tongue.

I'm relentless, and as her orgasm hits, her body locks up.

She tenses around me, but I don't stop until she's riding the wave of her explosion.

I kiss back up her body and she smiles at me, satisfied.

Her legs widen, allowing my body to fit between her thighs. My cock is throbbing, wanting to be inside her, but I hold myself back. "Emily, last chance."

She looks at me under hooded eyes. "Quit asking me if I'm sure or if I want this." She pulls me onto her until my weight is heavy on her. "I want you, Jack Felon."

I brush her hair off her face. I want this more than anything, and there are parts of me that wish it could be more than one night, but I can't do that to her. I won't.

"I'm clean," I tell her.

She nods. "Me too. And I'm on the pill."

Jealousy rages inside me, but she squashes it with her confession. "I have irregular periods, and my doctor put me on it."

I feel as if I'm holding my breath. "I want to be inside you... bare."

She slides her hand down my stomach, and when she wraps it around my girth, she kisses me until we're both breathless. "I want you inside me, Jack."

I wrap my hand around my girth and position it at her core. She wraps her legs around me, and slowly I enter her.

She has me in a vise, and when she clenches on to me, I reach between us to stroke my finger over her swollen clit.

She opens for me, taking me deeper, and when I'm bottomed out, I have to suck in a breath and hold it to stop from shooting my seed deep inside her.

I let out a strangled breath. She's looking up at me, and I see the love shining from her eyes. I should feel guilty, but I don't. I let her love roll through me until I'm unable to hold back. I pull out and then thrust back inside her. Over and over, I take her.

Her eyes are closed, and I slow my pace. "Emily."

Her big green orbs open, and she stares up at me. "Jack... don't stop."

I slowly lower myself into her. "Eyes on me, Em. I need you to look at me when I'm inside you. I need you to know that it's me you're with."

Her smile fills her whole face. "Oh, I know exactly who I'm with, Jack Felon."

As I pummel my hips, our eyes locked on each other, it feels hotter and more intense than anything I've ever felt before.

I grunt as I try to hold back. I don't want this to be over. I want it to last, but every muscle is pulled tight, and I'm barely able to hold on.

"I'm going to come," I warn her.

She plants her feet on the bed and lifts her hips to meet me. Every move is erratic, and I pump into her over and over until we're both coming, and it feels like my body is shattering and then coming back together.

Emily is panting, and I pull out and then lie down on the bed next to her. In the past, I would already have my pants on and be halfway out the door, but with her, I'm looking for reasons to stay.

She turns and lies on her side to look at me. "Jack."

I reach over and push the hair off her face, and because I can't help myself, I lean over and kiss her forehead. "Yeah, honey?"

She smiles at me as she stretches, and I can't take my eyes off her. "That was worth the wait."

"The wait?"

She nods. "Yeah, because I wanted you the first time I saw you too. I wanted you when I shouldn't have and it broke all the rules."

She leans toward me, pressing her bare breasts to my chest. "It's not breaking any rules anymore."

I don't want to burst her bubble, but this feels forbidden. Even though she is everything I could ever want, I know it's not right.

I hold her to me and lay my head down on the pillow. She snuggles into me, and I soak it in, trying to commit it all to memory.

We lie here for a while, and when her breathing starts to level out, I ask her quietly,

“So why the self-defense classes?”

She tenses instantly, and I know there’s something she’s not telling me. “Emily.”

She presses her head against my chest. “It’s nothing.”

I put a hand on her chin and tip her head up to look at me. “Emily, don’t lie to me. Something happened.”

She rolls her eyes and blows out a breath. “It’s not a big deal.”

I can feel the anger rolling through me. One day. I’ve been out of the prison for a little over twenty-four hours, and already something has happened. “What. Happened?”

She sits up, pulling out of my arms and wrapping the sheet around her. “Hey, don’t do this.”

I climb out of bed and pace back and forth in her tiny bedroom. My head fills with thoughts. All the what ifs and should haves come to the forefront. I turn to her. “Stand up.”

My voice is filled with anger, and I hold my hand out to her, softening my tone. “Emily, baby, I’m not mad at you. Stand up… please?”

She smiles and shakes her head. “I don’t have any clothes on.”

I lean over and kiss her softly. I’m not sure where this side of me is coming from. I’ve never done anything softly, but the thought of spooking her makes me nuts. I reach for my shirt and pull it over her body and then put my underwear back on. “There. Now stand up.”

She does as I ask and stands up next to me, tugging on the hem of the too big shirt. My voice cracks with emotion. “You look good wearing my shirt.”

She preens up at me and I grab both her wrists firmly, getting down to business. “Now, one thing to remember is that even if you’re smaller and weaker than your opponent, you can get out of any hold.”

She blinks up at me. “Wait. What? You’re giving me a self-defense lesson... now?”

I release one wrist and cup her chin. “Yes. I need to know you’re safe, Emily.”

She must hear the sincerity in my voice because she nods her head and pulls her shoulders back. “Okay, I’m ready.”

I go through the movements. I show her different holds and how to break them. We work for over an hour, and by the time she’s proven to me that she can do it, we’re both huffing and puffing. I sit down on the edge of the bed and pull her onto my lap. She struggles. “I’m all sweaty.”

I nuzzle my chin against her neck. “I like you sweaty.”

She finally leans into me, and I turn her so she’s straddling my lap. I’m holding on to her, not ready to leave but knowing I should. “Do you trust me, Em?”

I may not be looking at her, but I’m sure she’s rolling her eyes. “Yes, I trust you.”

I pull back to search her face. “Then tell me what happened today.”

She bites onto her lower lip. “It was nothing. It’s some new guy. It was after a group session, but nothing happened. One of your guys came in and stopped it. I’m fine.”

My blood starts to boil, and Emily tightens her arms around me. “I’ve already decided I’m going to talk to the warden about increasing security. I’m fine.” She takes my hand and puts it over her heart. “I’m fine, Jack. I promise.”

All I see is red. I know she’s fine. She’s right here in my arms, and I know she’s okay, but just knowing that someone thought they had the right to touch her makes me crazy. “I need to go.”

She jerks back. “Go? Where are you going? Jack?—”

I slam my lips to hers. I may not be able to say it, but hopefully the kiss will tell her everything I’m feeling. When I pull away, I look into her eyes. “I need to go.”

She opens her mouth and closes it.

I kiss her again and then pull back. “I’m sorry... I gotta go.”

I kiss her again, fighting the urge to tell her I love her. Then I grab my clothes and walk out of her bedroom. By the time I get to the front door, I pick up my cut and put it on.

“Jack,” Emily calls.

I turn to look at her, and she’s standing at the edge of her living room with wide eyes. She’s tugging at the shirt she’s wearing. “Your shirt.”

I look at her from head to toe, devouring the sight of her. “Keep it.”

I open the door, giving her a pointed look. “Lock this,” I tell her and then walk out.

As I walk down the porch, I open my phone and start dialing. I may not have a future

with Emily, but I'm still going to protect her.

EMILY

The prison is abuzz when I walk in the next morning. Normally, I'd stop and chat with a few people, but today I'm not in the mood. I walk past everyone, and once I get through security, I set my purse and tote bag down in my office and fall back into my chair.

I try to shake off my mood, but I can't stop thinking about last night with Jack.

I haven't seen him since he left. When I walked out of my house this morning, his two friends were sitting on the corner, and they followed me to work. I guess they've given up on trying to hide in plain sight.

I'm disappointed. Jack said he had to go last night, but I had hoped to see him again. Now I'm left wondering if he got what he wanted and he's done with me.

Knock. Knock.

The sound on the open door has me sitting up, and I'm embarrassed that the warden has caught me daydreaming.

I stand up. "Sir. Good morning."

He comes to stand fully in my office. "Hey, Emily. I just wanted to pop in and let you know that the group sessions and individual sessions are on hold today. I know you have some paperwork you could probably catch up on, but if you want to take that home with you, you can."

My mouth falls open. I'm not sure what's going on. "Uh, what happened? I don't understand."

The warden crosses his arms over his chest. "You should have come to me yesterday about the incident."

My mouth drops. "The incident?"

He nods. "Yeah, safety is my number one priority here, and I'm sorry that you were not protected yesterday. I know Bradley does everything he can, but I'm getting more help."

I open my mouth. "It wasn't Bradley's fault, he..."

The warden nods his head and interrupts me. "Yeah, I know. But after everything, we're pausing therapy until we have more security in place."

I can't believe he's making such a big deal out of this. Yesterday was not that serious. I hold my hands up. "Warden, seriously, yesterday was not a big deal."

His eyes widen, and he clasps his hands together in front of him. "Richard Biggs is in the infirmary."

"What?"

He nods. "Yeah, I thought you heard. Last night he was beaten so badly he'll be in the infirmary for a few weeks."

He's about to walk out of my office. "Who... who did it?"

He gives me a knowing look, letting me know that he's probably heard about Jack's

announcement and knows about his devotion toward me. “James Kelly. He has some kind of affiliation with the Exiled Guardians.”

I suck in a gasp. No. “Uhhhh—” I stutter.

The warden nods, “Yeah, but all the witnesses say it was self-defense.”

My hands fist at my sides. What was Jack thinking? If he had something to do with this, he’s going to get himself right back in here. I grab my tote bag. “Yeah, uh, if you don’t care, I think I would like to work from home.”

He nods his head, and I swear he looks worried. “Of course, of course, take as much time as you need. If you need a few days off, just let me know.”

He has definitely heard about Jack’s declaration of protection. For the most part the Exiled Guardians do good things, but they’re not somebody you want to mess with.

To my surprise, the warden walks me to my car and waves as I drive away.

The Exiled Guardians prospects are nowhere to be seen, so they must have figured I was going to be here for the day.

I drive straight home. I spend the morning and most of the afternoon staring at my computer screen, and it’s midday when I hear the motorcycle outside.

I run out barefoot, excited to see Jack, but I’m surprised when it’s not him but someone from his club. I stop next to the bike. “Where’s Jack?”

He grips the handlebars. “Sorry. We just heard you got off work early. He sent me right over.”

I grumble, “Where is he?”

He strokes his beard. “At Heat now he’s over me.

He told me what I wanted to hear to get into my pants.

He didn’t come see me because he regrets what happened between us.

I groan and smack the steering wheel as I try to push out all these ideas stirring in my head.

When I see the sign for Heat & Ink, I tense up.

As soon as I pull into the gravel parking lot, I force myself to get out and put one foot in front of the other.

When the bell rings as I enter, I hold in a breath and look around.

The place is filled with drawings and colors.

The woman at the front says hello. She looks me up and down but not in a judgmental way.

More curious. “Hey. What can I do for you?”

I peek down the hallway, but I don’t see anyone. “I’m here to see Jack.”

Her eyes widen. “Felon?”

I gulp and nod. “Yes.”

She crosses her arms over her chest. “So you’re the one that’s got his panties in a bunch.”

I blurt out, “What?”

She laughs and nods. “Yeah, I’ve never seen a big burly biker get all twisted like he is. You must be Emily.”

I’m shocked that she knows my name. Has Jack been talking about me? I move closer to her desk. “Yeah, I’m Emily.” I squint at her. “Who are you?”

I notice the cut she’s wearing and that it has the Exiled Guardians logo on it.

“I’m Alice.”

I blurt out the first thing that pops in my head. “Are you a cherry?”

Alice busts out laughing. “Oh my God, I can see why he likes you. No, I’m not a cherry, and just so you know, don’t go calling people out like that. Some might be okay with it, but you call an ol’ lady or someone like me a cherry and you’re going to be in a fight.”

I know my eyebrows raise to my hairline. “What do you mean, someone like you?”

She tilts her head as if she’s thinking about it. “I’m family.”

When I just look at her, she continues. “My dad was president of the Texas chapter. When he passed, I came here.”

“Oh,” I say, still not understanding but deciding not to push it. “So is Jack here?”

I know he is, because I saw his bike out front.

She nods. “Yeah, but he’s in the middle of a piece.”

“A piece,” I repeat.

She smirks, but I don’t feel like she’s making fun of me. “Yeah, a tattoo.”

I nod. I knew what she was talking about, but I’m trying to hide my disappointment.

“He’ll probably be another hour or two.”

“Oh,” I say, not wanting to leave until I talk to him but also feeling weird about sitting here.

She leans across her desk. “I was about to head out and go to the clubhouse. You wanna come? Felon will be along after he’s done.”

I scrunch my nose up. “The clubhouse?”

She nods. “Yeah.”

This is not like me at all. I’m not the type to just do things on the fly. I need to think about things and examine every side of it before I do anything. I’m about to tell her no when she comes around the desk and stands next to me. “Look, I know Felon. And he wants to be with you, but...”

Her voice trails off, and I pull my shoulders back. “But what?”

She crosses her arms over her chest. “Let me guess. He thinks you won’t fit into his world. He’s literally a felon and he says you deserve better.”

My mouth drops open. “How... how do you know that?”

She rolls her eyes. “It’s not hard to figure out.

He’s constantly worried about you, wanting to protect you.

Hell, he has half the club on high alert looking out for your ass.

He’s told everyone that you’re off limits, but when I asked when he was going to bring you around, he said he wasn’t. He said you’re too good for his world.”

A hurt like I’ve never felt before comes over me. Is that what he thinks about me? He thinks I’m too good for him? He’s crazy if so, because he’s one of the best men I’ve ever met. My silence has Alice leaning toward me. “So... are you too good for us?”

I jut my chin at her. “No, of course not. And yes, let’s go to your clubhouse and wait on Jack.”

I’m not sure which of us is more surprised, but Alice doesn’t hesitate. She grabs her purse and gently pushes me toward the door. We’re almost out when I hear a man call Alice’s name.

“Where you going?”

She rolls her eyes and looks at the tattoo-covered, bearded man. “Out.”

He growls, and I swear it vibrates the walls. “Alice.”

She stops with one hand on the door. I look between the two of them, and I can feel the air thicken. Alice shakes her head. “What do you care, Gunner?”

His jaw tightens, and I freeze. Gunner is not someone that I would want to mess with, but Alice doesn't seem scared at all. He stalks toward us, and while I tense up, second guessing my life right now, Alice just laughs. "Stop before you scare Emily."

That seems to draw Gunner's attention because he looks at me for the first time. "You Felon's?"

I scrunch my nose up because I don't understand. It's like he's talking a foreign language or something. "Huh?"

He gestures down the hall. "You Felon's ol' lady?"

My eyes about pop out of my head. "Uh, no, uh, we're uh, friends," I stutter.

His face is grim. "Friends."

Alice laughs, and it almost sounds maniacal. "Yeah, friends. You know the concept. It's like you and me, pal. We're friends."

She pushes the door open, and Gunner says her name again. "Alice."

She stomps her foot and glares at him. "The clubhouse, Gunner. We're going to the clubhouse."

She walks out then, and I follow behind her. She gets into her car, and I don't even think about it. I get in next to her. "Uh, what was that?"

"Nothing," Alice says, her voice laced with frustration.

I softly whistle into the car. "If you say so, but that guy is... wow. How long have you two been?—"

She cuts me off with a glare. “We’re not together.”

I look out the window, and Gunner is standing outside of Heat & Ink with his hands on his hips, glaring in our direction. “Uh, does he know you’re not together?”

She grunts. “Let’s forget about him. Tell me about you and Felon.”

I huff out a breath. “There’s nothing to tell.”

Alice laughs as she drives down the road. “Right. I don’t believe you.”

I look out the window and think about everything.

I’m not sure what I’m thinking. I’m on my way to a motorcycle club with a woman I just met, all to chase down a man that says we can’t be together.

I’m either making the biggest mistake of my life or I’m about to get what I want. Hopefully, it’s the latter.

FELON

I've been on edge since I left Emily's house last night. I thought I would feel better once I got the call from the prison that the asshole had been dealt with, but I'm still at odds with everything.

I fucked up last night. I shouldn't have stayed for dinner, and I shouldn't have touched Emily. I wanted her before, but now that I've had her, there's no turning back. There's no way I can stay away from her, even knowing that she deserves more than anything I can offer her.

I pause on the tattoo I'm working on and sit up, stretching my back. I've been working all day, taking appointments and even filling time with walk-ins because I wanted to stay busy. Hell, I'm going to work myself to death to try and keep my distance from the woman that is filling my dreams.

"Almost done," I tell the client. I set down my gun and grab the supplies to clean it up and put on the ink sac.

I'm just finishing when my phone dings.

The client is inspecting his tattoo in the mirror, and I glance at my phone.

It's a text from Alice. I open it and clutch the phone in a death grip.

Staring back at me is a picture of Alice and Emily, and by looking at their surroundings, they are at the clubhouse.

My friends, my brothers are in the background, and they all seem happy and having a good time.

I pocket my phone. “Get out.”

The client looks at me, surprised. “What? But I need to pay?—”

I cut him off. “It’s free. Get out. I gotta go.”

I hustle him through the building. Gunner’s light is off, so I know he’s gone. Boss and Lexi were off today, so I know I’m here alone. As soon as I get the guy out the front door, I lock up, stride to my bike, and get on.

I get to the clubhouse in record time, and I feel like I’m about to suffocate. Emily is at the club, my club. These guys have good intentions, and they’re good guys, but they’re also a little rough around the edges. Emily doesn’t belong here... especially without me.

I park my bike, and as I push through the double doors of the clubhouse, it takes me just a second to find Emily in the mass of tattoos, leather, and bikers.

I thought seeing her would calm me, but my heart races even harder.

She’s standing behind the bar, pouring drinks, laughing and cutting up with the men around her.

I don’t stop until I’ve muscled my way up to her, and in front of everyone, I demand, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

It’s not until the words are out of my mouth that I think about how awful they sound.

Seeing the hurt on Emily's face feels like a punch in the gut.

She recovers quickly, though. "I'm hanging out with my new friend, Alice.

" I look over at Alice, and she's looking at me like she's about to kick my ass.

Emily holds up the bottle she's holding. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm making Rooster here a slippery nipple."

I glare at Rooster. Of course, he can't just drink a Jack and Coke or something easy. He's always getting people to make him mixed drinks. "Rooster." I grunt at him.

He shrugs, acting all innocent. "What? She said she bartended in college. She's the only one here that knows how to make a drink that doesn't taste like pure ass."

I look back to Emily, and she's avoiding my gaze. I know I fucked up, and hell, I've done it more than once with her. I walk around the bar. "Emily."

She ignores me and keeps pouring drinks. I can feel all eyes on us, and I move in front of Emily. "Em, baby, I'm sorry."

There's a gasp behind me, and I'm sure it's because none of these fuckers have heard those words on my lips before.

She tilts her head and looks up at me. "I've heard that from you before, Jack Felon, and I wasn't impressed then. What exactly are you sorry for this time?"

When I pause, she puts a hand on her hip. "I mean, are you sorry for fucking me and then ghosting me?" There's a collective gasp from everyone behind me, and I know I'm going to hear about this shit later, but Emily continues. "Or are you sorry for disrespecting me in front of your friends or?"

I cut her off. "I'm sorry for all of it."

She laughs. "Fine, whatever. I'm in the middle of something."

I blow out a breath. My hands are fisted at my sides because it's killing me not to touch her. "Let me make it up to you."

Her eyes sparkle, and she doesn't have to say a word because I can see she's already forgiven me. "How exactly do you plan on doing that?"

I've been hard since I first laid eyes on her in here, but my cock stretches as she flirts with me. "I have ideas."

She steps up next to me and finishes the drink she was working on and sets it down in front of Rooster. "All right, guys, I'll be back."

"No." A few of them moan, and she laughs. "Don't worry, I'll be back." She looks up at me. "Right?"

I put my hands at her waist. "You're going to be busy for the rest of the night, but yeah, you'll definitely be back."

Before she can stop me, I pick her up and throw her over my shoulder. The guys all cheer as I stalk through the clubhouse, down the hallway and kick my bedroom door open with my boot. It's not until I'm inside that I realize my mistake.

"Shit," I mutter.

I freeze as I look around my room.

I'm about to turn around when Emily struggles to get out of my arms. She stands

stiffly in front of me and looks up at me with a worried glance. “So help me, Jack Felon, if I turn around and there’s a half-naked woman on your bed, I’m outta here.”

I look behind her, and a part of me thinks that she’s going to freak out even more when she sees what’s behind her. “There’s not a naked woman behind you, and just so we’re clear, you’re the only naked woman I want to see.”

She puts her hands at my waist. “Okay, well, you’re freaking me out here. What is it?”

I put my hands on her shoulders and hold her to me. “Maybe we should go somewhere?—”

She cuts me off. “Jack, what is it?”

When I don’t answer her, she shakes her head. “Trust me, it can’t be as bad as I’m thinking.”

I take a deep breath. “What are you thinking?”

She bites her lip. “Well, let’s see, posters of naked women.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m not fourteen.”

She laughs. “Okay, well, I dunno, but the way you’re acting is freaking me out, so I’m going to turn around and look.”

My silence doesn’t reassure her any, but she starts to turn around, and I stop her. “Look, all I’m asking is when you see it, don’t run out of here.”

Her eyes get big, and I keep talking. “I mean, let me explain.”

She looks at me for a full twenty seconds and then slowly releases me and turns around.

I try to look at my room through her eyes.

The bed is queen sized and takes up the majority of the space.

The dresser in the corner is a dark wood, and the full-length mirror is opposite us.

I stare at her as she looks at all my secrets.

Her hand goes to her mouth, and she stares at the room in awe.

I circle around and look at her, feeling panicked. Is she going to run? I can't blame her if she does. "Em, listen to me."

She points at the wall behind me. "Jack..."

I clench my eyes shut, ready for her to freak out. When she says nothing, I open my eyes, surprised that she's not upset, she's in awe. "Jack, you have pictures of me on your wall."

She slides around me and walks over to the dresser.

She's taking it all in, and as she moves around the room, I look at the images.

There are pictures of her at work. Some of them are grainy because I paid people to take them off the security cameras at the prison.

There's a few of her working in her garden because I had one of the cherries take her picture for me.

The walls, dresser, and nightstand are full of framed images of her.

“Emily, let me explain. I know this looks bad.”

She turns and looks up at me. “You like me.”

Stunned, I suck in a breath. That’s what she gets from this? I blurt out, “I more than fuckin’ like you, Emily Riles. You’re a part of me. I think about you every day all day. Hell, the sun doesn’t shine for me until I get to see your smile each day.”

She walks over and tilts her head back to look at me.

“But you said we can’t be together. You said last night could only be that...

one night.” She shakes her head like she doesn’t believe what she’s seeing.

“You acted like... I meant nothing to you, like walking away from me was the easiest thing you’ve ever done. ”

I move away from her before I can touch her. “It wasn’t.”

She opens her mouth and then closes it. She throws an arm up. “So what about now? You still sticking with one night and no future?”

I hesitate. Slowly, I’m coming to terms with the fact that I can’t just let her go, but that doesn’t mean we can just be together. I shake my head slowly. “Emily...”

She must hear it in my voice because she huffs out a breath. “This was stupid. I don’t know why I thought I could talk any sense into you.” She walks to the door. “Can you take me to my car, Jack?”

“Emily, listen to me. We should talk.”

She blows out a breath, and she sounds completely defeated. “I don’t want to sit here and listen to you talk about why we can’t be together. I’d like to go.”

I want to tell her no. I want to lock her here in my bedroom and never let her go, but I would never do that. No matter how much I want to. “Okay, come on, I’ll take you.”

I open the door, and as she steps out, I look at the room, and for the first time, I regret every picture I have hanging of her here. I’m sure this has freaked her out.

I take her out the back way, and we walk around the building in silence. We walk up to my bike, and I sit down, sliding to the front so she can get on behind me.

She points at my bike. “I’m not getting on that.”

I hang my head. “Emily, get on.”

She bites her lip and shakes her head. “Jack, I’ve never been on a bike before.”

“Do you trust me, Em?”

She stomps her foot and then climbs onto the back of my bike. She’s mumbling under her breath, but I hear everything she says. “You keep asking me that. I think it’s obvious I trust you. You’re the one that should have to answer that question, bud.”

I smile, and it’s good she’s behind me because I don’t think she’d want to see me smirking. I turn to the side to look at her. “Put your arms around my waist.”

She does it grudgingly. Her hold is light, and I have to tell her to grip me harder. “Tighter, Em.”

She wraps her arms around me, pressing her breasts against my back. I put my hands behind me, grip her thighs, and pull her closer to me.

With one hand on her hip, I give her instructions. “Hold on to me and lean when I lean.”

She grips me tighter, and I start my bike. The roar of the engine just intensifies everything, and I tell her again to hold on and pull out of the lot. I hold on to her thigh, and I swear she burrows her body into me. If I could bottle this moment to relive over and over, I would do it.

For the first time, I wish the ride to Heat & Ink was longer. As I pull into the parking lot, next to Emily’s car, dread sets in. I don’t want tonight to end. Not like this.

As soon as I park, Emily lifts her head off my back. “Thanks, Jack.” She is about to leave and then stops and turns back to me. “Oh, yeah, thanks for looking out for me, but Jack, you can’t do what you did. If anyone knew you had anything to do with it, you’ll end up right back in prison.”

I turn my bike off and stand up. “No one is messing with you, Emily.”

She wants to argue with me, but she nods her head. “Okay, well, I appreciate you, but I don’t want you to get in trouble because of me.”

“Emily—” I start, but she’s shaking her head.

“Nope. It’s fine. I’m going to go.”

“Stay,” I command. I step toward her. “I mean...” I point at the building behind us. “Stay, let me give you a tattoo.”

She looks at Heat & Ink. “What?”

I jut my chin at her. In my head, I’ve thought about tattooing her before, but I never thought it would be possible. But right now, I don’t want to let her go. “Let me mark you. You said you wanted a tattoo but didn’t know what to get.”

She crosses her arms over her chest. “I still don’t know what I would get.”

“I know what I would give you.”

That makes her curious. She takes a step toward me. “You know what tattoo I should get?”

I nod. Hell, I know exactly what I want to put on her.

She tilts her head. “What?”

I hold a hand out to her. “Trust me?”

“Really? You going there... again?”

I reach for her this time. “Let me give you a tattoo.”

She nods and puts her hand in mine, and I let out a breath. Maybe, just maybe, I can make this right.

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EMILY

I should march right out of here.

I should walk away and not turn back.

Jack has been upfront and honest this whole time. He said nothing could come of us, and I should have believed him.

But even knowing that, I can't bring myself to do it.

It's not just an attraction. It's so much more. And no matter what I want to do, I can't fight it. I can't just walk away from him.

So now here I sit, waiting for him to stick me with a hundred needles like some lovesick fool.

"Is it going to hurt?" I ask him.

"Not too bad."

I grimace. I hate pain. "Okay."

He lifts the tattoo gun. "Do you want to know what I'm putting on you?"

I lay back. "Nope."

I'm half afraid I'm going to chicken out, so I close my eyes and let him do his worst.

"Shirt off."

I open one eye to look at him. "Excuse me?"

He laughs. "Shirt off. I'm going to tattoo your rib cage."

I roll my eyes at that one. "You mean my roll of fat."

He squeezes my thigh. "Don't say that. You're perfect."

I lift my shirt up to expose my rib cage, but that's not enough for him.

"All the way off."

I grit my teeth and pull my shirt off over my head and then lean back. He starts cleaning the area, and my traitorous nipples pebble from his touch. There's no way my bra is hiding my reaction, and I try to make up excuses for it. "It's cold here."

As soon as I say it, I slam my mouth shut. He sees right through me. He knows what his touch does to me. There's no hiding it.

His voice is soothing. "The sound is going to bother you more than anything."

I lie back. "Go ahead. I'm fine."

At least I'll have something to remember him by since he's determined we can't be together. I flinch at the sound of the gun coming on, and there's a sting at my side. I clench my eyes shut and sit tensely.

“Breathe, baby,” Jack tells me.

I take in a deep breath and let it out slowly. It helps, but I don’t open my eyes because I don’t want to see it.

I breathe through it, and my side seems to numb with each passing minute.

I’m not sure how long I sit here, but it doesn’t seem long before he turns the tattoo gun off. “All set.”

He avoids my gaze, and it kills me not to look down and see what he did. I watch as he cleans up his equipment and puts his things away, soaking up my last minutes with him.

I reluctantly put on my shirt. “Okay, well, I’m going to go.”

He looks at me, and it’s obvious he has something to say. I’m hoping he stops me, begs me to stay, and then tells me he loves me, but he does none of those things. “Let me lock up.”

I nod and walk to the front of the shop.

We go out, and he walks me to my car. Nothing is said in the short distance, and even though my head is filled with all kinds of things, I don’t say any of them.

He opens my door, and I sit down. He leans over, and I hold my breath, waiting for something... anything from him. “Drive safe.”

I nod, not trusting myself to say anything.

He shuts my door, and I waste no time starting my car and pulling away.

I get down the block when I see the single headlight behind me. I wipe at the stupid tear that escaped my eye and keep looking in the rearview mirror. As I drive across town and the bike behind me makes every turn I make, I know it's him. He must be making sure I get home okay.

I suck back the tears. I can't cry now. I'll wait until I get home and he's gone and then I'll let my emotions go.

I pull down my road, and he follows me. I pull into my driveway, and he surprises me by pulling his bike in beside me instead of parking at the street.

I get out of my car as he turns his bike off. "Thanks for making sure I get home," I tell him.

I walk up the steps and when I get to the door, he's behind me.

I let out a breath. "Jack... I can't do this."

He takes the keys from my hand and unlocks my door. "Come on, we need to talk."

He opens my door, but my feet stay planted where they're at. "Jack, you don't get it. I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear you say we can't be together and?—"

He points his thumb over his shoulder. "Emily, get in the house."

I put my hands on my hips. "No. I already have to think about last night and what happened between us every time I walk into my bedroom. I don't need you filling my house with more memories that I'm not going to be able to forget."

He grunts, picks me up over his shoulder, and carries me inside. He kicks the door closed, flips the lock, and then strides down the hallway to my bedroom. As soon as

my feet hit the floor, I'm on him. "Are you kidding me right now? You think I'm going to sleep with you again?"

I pace across the room to put some distance between us. "I would be a fool to let you fuck me again. I'll give it to you, you never lied to me. You said it would be one time, and I should have believed you instead of getting my hopes up."

"Emily—"

But I don't let him say anything else. Maybe it's because I really don't want to hear the rejection yet again.

"No, Jack, it's my turn to talk. You're a fool, do you know that?"

I lo—like you... a lot. It's obvious we could be good together, but you're so damn stubborn that you can't see what's right in front of you?—"

He stalks toward me, and I hold my hand up to stop him, but there's no slowing him down. He puts his hands on each side of my face and forces me to look at him. The intensity in his gaze devours me. "I love you, Emily."

My mouth falls open. Did he just say what I thought he said. "What?" I croak.

His hands circle around my neck. "I shouldn't be here with you... I shouldn't?—"

I smack his chest. "Don't you dare ruin this moment, Jack Felon. You just told me you loved me, and now you're going to push me away and?—"

He leans down, pressing his lips to mine. His mouth covers mine, and I get lost in the kiss. When he pulls away, I'm breathless, searching his eyes for an explanation. His thumb brushes across my lower lip. "You going to listen to me, Em?"

I blink. “If I don’t, are you going to kiss me again?”

He chuckles. “I love you, Emily Riles, and even though I know you can do better, that you deserve more than me, I can’t walk away from you.”

I put my arms around his waist and smash my body against his. “I don’t want you to, Jack. I wish... I wish you could see yourself the way I see you. You’re a good man, the best man, and I don’t want you to walk away from me.”

He puts his hands on my cheek and pulls my face up to look at him. “I want us to be together.”

I’m smiling like a fool. “Me too.”

He strokes my cheek with his finger. “I don’t think you understand.”

I laugh. “You love me, that’s all I need to know.”

“I want you to have my babies.”

My mouth drops open, and he smiles. “I want you to marry me.”

I snap my mouth closed, and all I can do is stare at him, speechless.

He leans down. “Say something. Anything.”

I point at my chest. “You want to marry me?”

He nods. “More than anything.”

I put my hand around his neck and pull him down toward me. “You can’t change

your mind, Jack. You can't tell me all this and then change your mind. If you love me, you love me."

He reaches for the hem of my shirt and pulls it up my body. I let him because right now, I want to feel him against me more than anything.

His hand strokes under my rib cage. "Did you look at your tattoo?"

I shake my head, and he smiles at me. "It says always, Em. Always. Because no matter what, I will always love you. You will always be mine, and I will always be yours."

I gasp and look down my body. In black cursive font, it says always, and there is a red heart beside it.

Overwhelmed with emotion, I throw my arms around him. "I love you, Jack. I love you so much."

His voice is gruff. "I thought I freaked you out with all the pictures. I thought?—"

I gasp and look up at him. "You thought that freaked me out? No, the fact that you felt that way about me and then were just going to let me go... that is what freaked me out."

"Life with me is not going to be easy."

I laugh. "Haha, I didn't think it would be." I point to myself. "Did you think I was going to be easy to live with? If we're going to do this, there are things I'm going to want."

I'm watching him closely, but he doesn't even flinch at the idea of it. "I'll give you

anything you want.”

I cross my arms over my chest and jut my chin at him. “Okay, anything, huh? What about kids?”

He shakes his head. “Kids, huh? What about marriage?”

My mouth drops open. “Marriage? You really want to marry me?”

He puts a hand to his chest, right over his heart. “That’s not even a question, Em. We’re getting married. We’re having kids together.”

I lean into him. “Kids? I say we wait a few years for that.”

He kisses my forehead. “Whenever you want, as long as we’re together, I don’t care when.”

I pat his chest. “I’m going to be your ol’ lady.”

He chuckles, kissing the top of my head. It’s like he can’t stop touching me. “The club already knows you as my ol’ lady.”

I sigh contently and then reach for the buckle of his belt. I undo it and his pants and reach inside. As soon as I wrap my hand around his erection, he hisses a breath.

He picks me up in his arms and lays me back on the bed. We both undress, and we’re a tangle of arms and legs as we lie together. His hand slides between my legs, and I open my thighs to him. “I’m wet... for you.”

He brings his hand up, sucks a finger into his mouth, and moans.

When he presses his lips to mine, I whimper at the taste of myself on him. “Jack,” I mutter.

He smiles against my mouth. “Em, I’m done talking.”

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FELON

She pushes me to my back and comes up to straddle me. My cock rests at the crevice of her ass. I'm so hard for her, but I want this to last. I push her hips away from me, trying to hold back, but she's not having it. She leans up, fitting her hand around my girth.

"You're big, Jack. Too big. I was worried that first time if you'd fit or break me in two."

I swear my cock grows bigger. "We fit together just fine, Em."

She smiles at me and nods, but that's not enough. I grunt. "It's almost like we fit together perfectly."

She strokes my cock. "Almost like you were made just for me."

She holds on to me as she lowers herself down my body.

She kisses the tip of my cock, and I grip the bed covers and hiss. "Fuck."

When she opens her mouth, taking me in, I can't look away from her. She smiles up at me with my cock in her mouth.

"Em." I start, trying to pull her back up, but she shakes her head.

She takes me deep, and when I hit the back of her throat, I pump my hips a little. She

moans, taking me deeper.

“Fuck, you take me so good,” I tell her.

Over and over, she bobs up and down on me, and when I feel as if I’m about to explode and can’t take anymore, I pull her up across my body.

She doesn’t hesitate and positions me at her entrance. Slowly, she lowers herself on me and stretches around me.

“Argh!” I moan.

Her pussy tightens around me. My hands go to her waist, and my fingers dig into her skin. She smiles at me, and when she starts to move, it’s my undoing.

She gyrates front to back, side to side, and it’s all too much. “Em, honey,” I plead with her.

But she’s relentless. She’s moving her hips, taking me deeper, and I reach between us, putting my finger on her clit. She jerks on contact, and I’m relentless because when I come, I want her to come with me.

Her back arches, and I lean up, suckling her, and it puts her over the edge. It’s like my cock is in a vise as she clamps on to me, riding her orgasm to completion.

I flip her to her back and pummel my hips, driving into her over and over until I shoot my seed deep inside her.

“Mine,” I claim her.

She looks at me under hooded eyes. “Yours.”

I push the hair off her face and kiss her, wanting to show her how much she means to me. When I'm breathless and my cock starts to stir alive again, I pull back and whisper, "Always."

She loops her arms around my neck. "Always, Jack. Always."

I cradle her to me. Life is not going to be perfect, but with her by my side, it's going to be close.

"I love you, Emily soon to be Felon."

I wait for her to blanch at the name or maybe even reconsider, but she does none of those things. She beams up at me. "I love you too, Jack Felon."

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EMILY

Six Months Later

“Emily! I’m home.” Jack hollers as he walks into the house.

I’m standing in the bedroom, half naked, and I start pulling on clothes. Panic sets in, and I barely have time to calm myself before Jack is walking into the room.

He’s smiling ear to ear, which he’s been doing a lot lately, but one look at me and his smile disappears. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

I keep putting clothes on. “Nothing. I’m good. You good? We’re going to be late.”

He comes to stop next to me. “Emily... what are you not telling me?”

I go to my tiptoes and kiss his cheek. “Nothing. We don’t want to be late.”

I walk out of the bedroom and toward the kitchen. I fully expect him to stay in the bedroom to get ready so I’m surprised when he follows me through the house.

I try to ignore him, but he’s not having it. He stands next to me, pulling me into his arms. “Do you not want to go?”

I force a smile to my face. “We have to go. It’s Alice’s birthday, and she’ll come and find me if we don’t show up.”

He growls, and I pat him on the chest. “Stop. You know you love Alice.”

“Uh, yeah, I don’t love that she took you to a bar in Jasper to pick up men.”

I let out a laugh. “I wasn’t there to pick up men, I was her wing woman. I was trying to help her meet someone.”

He blurts out a laugh. “Yeah, you saw how that went. Gunner whooped the guy’s ass and then destroyed the bar.”

I nod, remembering it. “Yeah, it didn’t go well. What’s up with him and Alice anyway? Alice says they’re not together, but you wouldn’t know it by the way Gunner acts about her.”

Jack just shakes his head and holds his hands up. “I don’t know anything.”

I roll my eyes because of course he has an idea, but he’s just not one to gossip.

“Emily.”

I put some distance between us and sit down on the couch to put on my shoes. “Hmmm.”

He comes to sit down on the coffee table in front of me. He has me caged in between his thighs. “Talk to me. Something happen at work?”

I shake my head. “We both know if something happened you would already know about it, Jack. You have a bodyguard assigned to me and she never leaves my side.”

He shrugs. “Fine. Talk to me.”

I look down at my hands. “Talk to you about what?”

He puts a finger on my chin and lifts it so I have to look at him. “Talk to me about what’s bothering you.”

“Nothing,” I lie.

He moves to the seat next to me and then gently pulls me into his lap. I go easily without hesitation. I’m used to Jack pulling me into his lap, carrying me around and every other way he manhandles me.

Even as I burrow into him, I’m telling him we need to go. “We’re going to be late.”

“We will get there sooner if you tell me what’s on your mind.”

I clear my throat. “Okay, well, remember after we got married we decided that we would wait a few years before we had kids?”

He looks at me curiously. “Yes.”

I nod and swallow. “Right, well, maybe we should talk about this later.”

“Emily.” He says my name as he holds me tighter. “Talk to me. What is it? Did you change your mind?”

My eyes widen. I didn’t exactly change my mind on purpose, but it is what it is. “Well, actually, what do you think of having a kid sooner?”

He nods and kisses my cheek. “Let’s do it.”

This was too easy. I grab him and shake my head. “Jack, I don’t think you get it. Uh...”

He tenses and searches my face. “Wait... are you saying... are you pregnant?”

I bite my lower lip and since I'm unable to answer him, I nod my head.

I stare at him, eyes wide, wondering how he is going to react to the news. We talked about traveling. We've talked about a lot of things, and all of those included waiting a few years to have kids. Jack's face goes from pure excitement to worry. "Are you okay with this?"

I'm trying to rein it in. I'm excited, but I'm also scared. We had plans, and this was not part of our plan. Instead of answering him, I ask him hesitantly, "Are you okay with this?"

He wraps his arm around my waist and holds on to me. "I'm going to have to be honest with you, Emily."

I hold my breath. Good or bad, I want the truth. "'That's what I want.'"

"I knew from the first moment I met you I wanted to have kids with you, and I know the timing is off from what you had planned..." I'm looking at him wide-eyed and worried as he continues.

"But this is exactly what I want, Em. I want a family with you, and I'm going to be right by your side the whole time. "

I just stare at him, trying to process it all, but he continues. "Talk to me, honey, because you're freaking me out a little bit."

He's still looking at me the same way he always does. I don't know why I thought this would be any different or why this would change how he feels about me. Before I can say anything, he asks, "Are you having second thoughts? About me? About us?"

"What? No!" I exclaim.

He cups my face in his hands. “Do you want to have kids with me?”

I nod with assurance. “More than anything.”

As if he can’t hold back anymore, he presses his lips to mine in a kiss full of promises. When he pulls away, he is smiling happily. “I love you so much, Em.”

I nod. “I love you too. And I’m happy. I just didn’t want you to feel...”

He kisses my cheeks. “Feel what?”

I shrug, feeling ridiculous. “I dunno, like I’d trapped you.”

As soon as I say the words, I know how crazy it sounds. “Trapped me?” he exclaims. “Honey, I stalked you. I couldn’t stay away from you and you think you trapped me?”

The tears start to flow, and I’m wiping them away as fast as they fall. Jack’s mouth drops. “Emily, stop, no crying.”

I start to laugh then. “We have to go or we’re going to be late.”

“We can skip it.”

I pull back to look at him. “We can’t skip it.”

He holds me to him, burying his face in my neck. “I just want to be with you.”

I laugh, still wiping tears. “Me too. Let’s go, husband.”

He helps me finish putting shoes on and then stands up, holding me. I watch as he grabs the keys to my car off the key rack and I move up next to him. “What are you

doing?”

He wiggles his eyebrows at me. “Did you change your mind? Want to stay here and celebrate?”

I grab at the keys in his hand. “No, I mean, why did you grab my car keys? We’ll go on the bike.”

He puts a hand at my belly. “Em, you’re pregnant.”

I grab the keys to his bike off the wall. “Yeah, and we’d better ride while we can.”

He shakes his head. He doesn’t like it, but I know he’s not going to tell me no.

He sighs, shaking his head. “Whatever you want, baby.”

I laugh and lean into him. “Are you going to be overprotective the next eight months?” Before he can answer, I’m nodding my head. “Of course you are.”

He laughs with me. “You love me just the way I am.”

I kiss him. “You’re right, I do.”

It took a lot of convincing, but finally Jack realized that I didn’t care about his past. All I care about is his future. Well, our future.

He grabs my hand. “Let’s go, Em. The sooner we go, the sooner we get back to celebrate.”

I fall into step beside him. “I like the sound of that.”

As I get onto the back of his bike and we ride across town, I can’t help but be grateful

for everything that I have in my life. Marrying Jack was the best thing I've ever done. I never dreamed I would feel this level of happiness.

I tighten my arms around his waist and press my body against his. This, him, our baby, it's everything I've ever needed, and I know the best is yet to come.