



Pickle (Ghost Born MC #9)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: There's not much I won't do for my sister and my niece. I'm wrapped around their little fingers, and I'm not even ashamed of it.

So when my niece calls me and alerts me that something is up, I'm on the road before my brother-in-law can even call and ask for my assistance.

While my brother-in-law and the other founding members of the Ghost Born MC work on finding the man stalking my sister, I vow to protect them. And to help me keep her and my neice safe, I'm hiring Thyrie Brandon.

Thyrie is a spitfire. A woman with no filter on her mouth, she's after my own heart. And with military background, I know she's the perfect fit to protect the two most precious people in my world.

And if I fall head over boots and nearly lose my mind in my obsession with her... well, who can blame me?

Ride with the men of Ghost Born MC in the second installment of this series by Layne Daniels and T.O. Smith.

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Pickle

“Thyrie... You didn’t. Not again.” The shocked voice from the booth behind me is far too deep and masculine for its pearl-clutching tone. That catches my attention.

Typically, I’m a mind-my-business sort. Especially since minding someone else’s business got me thrown into jail for a stint. Not that I wouldn’t do the same thing all over again to protect my sister when her douchebag boyfriend laid hands on her.

Lucky for me, the man I sent to look out for her while I served my time fell in love with her. For her sake, he made sure the douchebag disappeared. That meant there’d been no victim to testify about the beatdown I’d given him. Which indirectly saved me from a couple years of hard time.

All that to say, under normal circumstances, I’d tune out the conversation happening behind me. I’ve got to get materials ordered for the upcoming projects booked with Redemption Build, the construction company my brother-in-law owns and whose office I manage.

Before going to jail, working in an office wouldn’t have ever been on my radar.

But taking care of the business end of things for Arlo frees up his time to take care of my sister and my niece, Teeny.

Considering everything I owe the man, taking an administrative part of the business off his shoulders is the least I can, and have, done to thank him.

“Oh, please. The first thing he said in the morning, after asking which door led to the ‘pissar,’ was that I was a liar. He deserved everything that happened after that.” The woman’s voice is untroubled by her companion’s dramatic reaction, and more than anything, that keeps my interest piqued.

I’d clocked the drop-dead beauty and the guy with her as a couple based on their casual ease with one another.

Out of respect for the guy she’s here with, I’ve been studiously ignoring my attraction to her siren-sensual appearance.

But the bickering between them makes it clear they’re not actually together.

I find myself pressing against the vinyl of the booth at my back to better hear their conversation.

If they’re not a couple, that changes things.

“He called you a liar? About what?” Even dripping with incredulity, the man’s voice is deep enough to sound like a growl.

“Get this, he said wearing makeup is basically lying about how I really look. Like it’s my fault he’s stupid enough to believe chicks have silver glitter eyelids?”

I choke back the laugh caused by her indignant answer, pretending to cough so they don’t realize I’m eavesdropping.

Whoever the guy was, he’s an idiot. Makeup or not, the woman’s a stunner.

If he’d been lucky enough to go home with her, he should have been worshipping at her feet, not critiquing.

I don't care who he is, there's no man alive who can match her beauty.

"That still doesn't explain why I got a call first thing this morning cancelling the contract." There's a heavy sigh before he continues. "And anyway, haven't I begged you to stop fucking clients? It always ends in disaster."

"Twice. Two times, Silas. That's not always . That's not even usually. That's rarely. Anomaly. Infrequently. Besides, the Johnstone job wasn't gonna be worth it, anyway. He doesn't need protection, he needs a social coordinator and a babysitter. I am neither."

"Still, Thyrie, you broke his coccyx. Was that really necessary?"

"Not my fault he landed on his ass when I pushed him out the door. He's just lucky I was gracious enough to make sure Jimmy was already there to play driver when I kicked his ass out.

" There isn't a lick of regret in her words, and as an opinionated outsider to the situation, I'm thinking she's justified.

I'm also curiouser and curiouser as their conversation goes on. Protection? Guarding? What kinda business are they in? The brief glimpse I caught of her walking by, she looked too slender and graceful to be a bodyguard. Then again, bulk doesn't always equal might.

My phone vibrates on the table next to the laptop that's gone to sleep from my inactivity.

I've been so distracted by the soap opera behind me I've gotten no work done.

I flip over the cell and glance at the screen, intending to clear the call.

But when the FaceTime request lights up the screen with a silly pic of my favorite girl, even the spicy drama behind me gets shelved.

I click the accept button and brace myself.

“Unca Pickle!” Teeny’s eardrum shattering screech blasts through my AirPods.

“Teeny-tot! What’s sweet, parakeet?”

“Unca Pickle, Daddy said a swear!” Her little whisper is still loud enough to raise the dead.

“Uh-oh, is Mommy mad at him?” My sister Frankie’s determined to raise her daughter in a better way than we came up.

I know Arlo, who is her daddy even if DNA would say otherwise, feels the same.

Letting Teeny hear curse words is really unusual.

Arlo might be an officer in the mother chapter of Ghost Born MC, and our club might not always be completely lawful, but the similarity to our childhood begins and ends there.

“Yeah, but she said one, too! You gotta come give them both time outs.” Inescapable logic from a three-year old.

“Um, where is Mommy, Teeny?” It’s unusual to see my niece without my sister hovering over her shoulder, but I know both Arlo and Frankie have been teaching her how to use the phone on her own.

“They is in their room. Daddy is puttin’ stuff in a bag, and Mommy’s calling him a

dummy.”

Now, I’m really concerned. My sister’s the sweetest soul I’ve ever known, and Arlo treats her as if she’s a deity to be worshipped. Whatever’s going on can’t be good.

“Can you put the phone on speaker, Teeny? Do you know how to do that?”

Her little face nods in the camera, and I see her pop the headphone out of her ear. Almost immediately I hear my sister’s agitated response to something her husband must have said.

“We’re not going to stay with Hiram, Arlo. You’re being ridiculous. It’s perfectly safe here!” And that’s my cue to pack up the shit on the table and get my ass moving.

Whatever’s going on, if it’s serious enough Arlo thinks Frankie and Teeny shouldn’t be there, then it’s serious enough to get our chapter on standby. I’m unaware of anything the mother chapter’s got going on out there in Darrow, and as the prez of the TK chapter here, I sure shit should be.

On my way out of the coffee shop, I throw a last glance over my shoulder and commit to memory as many details about the table behind me as I can.

Thyrie. Silas. Protection-slash-personal-security company of some sort.

It’s not much to go on, but I know just the dude to ask for help tracking her down once this shit’s taken care of.

I’m pretty sure this Thyrie chick’s the woman of my dreams. And yeah, that’s a wild thought to have based on a couple glances and one overheard conversation.

But if this life has taught me anything, it’s that the only way to live is kickstand up.

Ready to charge forward and take advantage of everything thrown my way.

Fate doesn't hand out second chances to those who don't work for them. I've had my fair share of rebounds and do-overs and fought to make the most of every one of them. So putting in some work to track down a missed connection like this is a no-brainer. I'm already positive she's worth the effort.

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CHAPTER TWO

Thyrie Brandon

Look, I don't think it's arrogant to say I'm good at a lot of things.

Because it's true. I am. But what I'm absolutely balls out amazing at, is situational awareness.

So yeah, I clocked the hottie sitting alone at the table behind Silas and my booth.

And the way he not-as-subtly-as-he-thought eavesdropped on the conversation my best friend and business partner and I were having? Yeah, caught that, too.

"He gone or just stepped out?" Silas asks.

Proving, for the billionth time, how our wavelengths are perfectly matched.

Which is how we've come to save each other's lives more times than either of us can count and how we know we'll never be more than best friends.

Being battle buddies prepared us for friendship.

And friendship prepared us for becoming family.

Silas is as close as a sibling, the only one I've got.

“Gone. Took his laptop and pre-bussed his table like a gentleman.” I chuckle, rushing through the gamut of mental pictures I’d clocked when we’d passed the rough-looking biker’s table on the way in.

Something about picturing the eavesdropping stranger in a tux and tails has my grumpiness from last night’s disappointing sexcapade fading.

I don’t just sleep with men willy-nilly, and I’d known taking Bryan Johnstone to bed was a bad idea before I’d done it.

Thirty-six hours into the contract with the jerk Johnstone, and I’d already decided our firm would bow out once we identified and retained a secondary company to replace ours.

While Bryan’s estimation of his security needs were overly inflated, they weren’t completely manufactured.

The guy was an ass, no mistaking it, but my dry-spell had hit critical levels, and what he offered seemed good enough to satisfy the itch. Mediocre sex is like pizza. Even when it’s only mid, it’s still good.

“Who’s stepping in to take on Johnstone?” Silas asks.

Now that our listeny-loo is gone, we can get into the real crux of the convo.

Of course, we’d never publicly discuss anything that could put a client at risk.

But this? Bryan Johnstone’s just an overgrown manchild with more money than sense.

His only real threat is the risk of society discovering what a prickasaurus he is behind

his public-facing facade.

“The Purcel Group,” I admit.

“You hate Levi Purcel.”

My chest will always puff with pride when Silas laughs.

All the shit we’ve been through, survived, endured is only a tip of a fucked-up iceberg my best friend has gone through.

Seeing him smile and find fun in silly shit, like my rivalry with Levi Purcel, gives me hope that one day we can both get past the barriers of pasts and each find happiness.

“Yeah. What can I say? I’m a benevolent goddess. I have taketh from Purcel often enough. This time, I giveth.” I wait for Silas to wipe the tears of laughter from his eyes before I continue. “Giveth headaches, earaches, and pride-aches. I am such an absolute giver. Truly.”

Even I can’t keep the serious expression on my face, especially knowing Silas isn’t harboring any anger at me for costing Sentrify, our company, a valuable contract.

We’ve only been in business for about four years—young by industry standards.

Still, I can’t bring myself to regret sending a problematic client to a problematic man from my past.

“I don’t blame you, but we do need to replace Johnstone’s case. We’ve got subcontractors lined up, so we ought to make use of that.”

“Since we’re committed to paying them either way, it’ll be much better to line up a

principal for them to guard,” I agree. I hate this part of being a business owner.

Running numbers, scheduling things, managing human and material resources.

It all sucks, but the alternative is being the face of the company.

Early on, we learned wooing prospective clients isn’t my forte.

My looks give clients the wrong idea about the services we offer, and my lack of filter when it comes to their often ridiculous priorities created a lot of problems in our early days.

Letting Silas handle the peopling just makes sense.

“Don’t worry, I know exactly the alternate project for the subs.

You remember that older couple who asked us to arrange an escort team for them to transport their art and valuables to their grandchildren in advance of selling their estate and moving into a senior living community?

” That’s Silas, always three steps ahead.

I’d forgotten all about Valerie and Hank Ronson.

Their short detail is exactly what we need to fill the hours freed up by losing Johnstone.

Bonus being, some of the grandkids live down the coast in SoCal, so delivering their inheritance means being able to escape the rainy spring that’s a hallmark of the Pacific Northwest.

“Sweet! You’ll call and let them know we have time for their trip this week?”

” Inexplicably, the image of the man from earlier comes back to me, and I realize this trip will make it less likely I’ll be able to arrange a accidental-on-purpose run in with him anytime soon.

Shame, really. He had an ass that filled his worn out denims so well my fingers actually ached to grab onto it while being pounded into the mattress.

“We? Nice try. You’re sitting this one out, Romeo-ette.

The last thing we need is that grandson Ms. Ronson’s already convinced would be perfect to set you up with actually seeing how right his nana is about your looks.

We don’t need any more client scandals. Besides, you can work on the quarterly taxes.

” Silas smirks, and I realize he’s actually still pissed about the whole broken-coccyx-client thing.

“Fine. I know when I’m beat. At least, bring back some of that salsa I like from that little bodega in San Francisco. Yeah?” It won’t be the same as actually being there, but I guess I deserve being stuck behind.

Besides, now I’ve got time to track down the hottie from earlier without Silas around to clam jam me.

I sigh dramatically, as though being stuck here while he gets to jaunt down the coast is a real let down.

What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him, and if I play my cards right, it could make

Thyrie a very, very happy girl.

CHAPTER THREE

Pickle

The trip to Darrow usually takes about an hour and a half.

Today I make it in an hour flat. Fear will light a fire under a man's ass like nothing else.

I think I spent more time pulling my truck out of the garage, doublechecking that Teeny's car seat is still properly installed, and gassing up than I actually did on the road.

"Hiram, settle down for a second." Shaw meets me at the front door of the Darrow clubhouse with a hand braced on my chest. It takes every bit of patience I can muster not to push past him and storm upstairs to the family wing where I know I'll find my sister and niece.

"Tell me my baby sister and Teeny are safe, then tell me what the fuck is going on that my perfect girl is scared and her mother is shouting." In all her life, I think Frankie's probably yelled fewer times than I've been arrested.

And for all my rap sheet might make me look like a lawless brute, I've managed to contain enough of my criminal behavior to occasions where it was warranted.

"Of course, they're safe. Watch yourself. Arlo won't appreciate your disrespect. To be clear, I don't, either." Shaw's growl is a rasp over my already flayed nerves.

“They’re all I’ve got. Nothing matters more than their wellbeing. Nothing.” The family I’ve been gifted in Ghost Born means everything, but without Frankie and that little girl, absolutely nothing remains.

“Teeny’s with Konrad, Blu and Grey. They’re keeping her busy while Arlo and Frankie sort their shit.” Shaw’s confidence that Teeny’s okay settles me some. I know Konrad and his boyfriend and girlfriend will look after my niece while I figure out the details with the adults.

“Club shit?” I’m not sure what I’ll do if something our club is into has put my girls in harm’s way. Put a stop to it, naturally. But if the Darrow chapter’s into fuckery that they haven’t looped the Lexen chapter into, I’ll be knocking heads together, too.

Shaw shakes his head no, and that’s all I need to know before finding Arlo and Frankie to get the rest of the info. I feel Shaw at my back as I stride through the front of the compound, and I know the others are likely hanging around the place, too.

I stomp upstairs, my boots loud enough to announce my presence long in advance of my arrival anywhere.

If my time staying at the clubhouse in Darrow before some of us branched out to open a chapter in Lexen taught me anything, it’s to make a loud entry around here.

Quiet arrivals inevitably result in hearing or worse, far worse, walking in on, things nobody needs to.

The brothers who founded Ghost Born may not have ever adopted the club candy mentality outsiders commonly expect, but they fuck. A lot. Every single one of them is in their own committed relationship. They and their partners all lived in or near the compound.

When I'd first gotten out of jail and Arlo convinced me to crash here while I got back on my feet, I'd had to learn real quick that being too quiet around here would catch me an earful when the brothers of my newly adopted family decided to take their partners to poundtopia.

Which they all did. All. The. Fuckin'. Time.

Made my celibacy as a result of incarceration and recent release from custody a real bitch to endure.

At least, it had until I accidentally walked in on Arlo and my sister.

That had the dual effect of sending my libido right back into hiding and convincing me Shaw and Konrad's idea of branching the club into a new city was a good one.

Arlo met me at the door to their suite, a duffel bag already slung over his shoulder.

He didn't look at all surprised to see me, but the intense frown on his face didn't ease up.

In fact, he didn't speak at all, just tossed the glittery purple bag he'd been holding at me while heaving the duffel from his shoulder to mine.

Still wordless, he turned and strode across the living area of their rooms and grabbed my sister by the waist, hauling her over the now bagless shoulder.

"Hy's here to get you. You see? Even without knowing what the fuck is happening, he knew to come. You're going. Teeny's going. I want you both clear of this shit, so I can handle it."

"I don't want to go! You can't make me." Frankie's voice is muffled against Arlo's

back, but even so, I can hear the frustration in it.

I silently turn, following him back down the hallway I'd just come from then all the way to my truck out front. I jog ahead of him to open the door, and he gently sets her inside, taking the time to buckle her into the seat before shutting the door and bracing himself against it.

"Some asshole father at Teeny's preschool has been hassling Frankie. She didn't mention it at first because she was afraid of causing trouble." His furious scowl makes it clear my sister is probably justified in her worry.

"How serious is it?" It's unlike my brother-in-law to overreact, but also, how much of a menace can one pre-k tot's dad actually be?

"Widower. First wife divorced him then disappeared while a protection order was in place. Second wife, the mom of the kid at Teeny's school, died under suspicious circs. That serious." He doesn't need to say more.

I nod and turn to go into the house to gather up Teeny. Once she's loaded into the truck, my sister won't budge. Konrad and Grey meet me at the door, Teeny sitting on Grey's slender shoulder like a champion after a race.

"Unca Pickle! We going to your house like Daddy said?" She reaches for me, lunging my way from high atop Grey's shoulder. I catch her easily, her little three-year-old body the sort of fragile sturdiness only small children have.

"Yup. We're out the door, dinosaur." I force levity into my tone, because nothing and no one is allowed to dim my niece's light.

Shaw, his wife LeeLee, and Blu quietly slip past to load more bags into my truck, the amount of luggage making it clear Arlo intends for them to stay with me for a week

or two at least. I get Teeny buckled into the car seat I keep in my truck for her and her alone while Arlo says his goodbyes to Frankie.

Whatever he's whispering to her has her arguments dying, and the two lock lips in a kiss that has me turning my attention back to Teeny to keep her distracted.

"I trust you with my life, brother," Arlo rumbles in my ear when we hug farewell. He doesn't need to say it. I already understand.

"I trusted you with mine, first," I respond.

It's an old joke between us. When I'd been locked up, staring down the barrel of hard time for assaulting a police officer, Arlo had been my cellie. Once he'd heard why I'd beat the shit of a cop, the guy who'd laid hands on my pregnant sister, Arlo agreed to look out for her when he got out.

"I'll keep them both safe," I vow.

In fact, I've already got an idea for a protection detail I can hire to ensure both Frankie and Teeny are safe every second they're in Lexen with me.

Not that I can't protect them well enough at our clubhouse.

But this could be the perfect excuse to track down Thyrie, through her company, and insert myself in her world.

Yeah, I think, metaphorically patting myself on the back, I'm a fuckin' genius. I step into the cab of the truck and set off for home, bringing my best two girls with me on my mission to find and lock down a sass-mouth goddess of my own.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Thyrie

It's boring in the office with Silas gone.

The rubber ball bouncing against the wall closest to the door and back into my hand can only keep me entertained for so long.

Should I be working on the quarterly taxes?

Duh. Am I? No. Also duh. It's been two days of solitude since he and the guys we subcontracted, guys we frequently work with and know, left to travel with the Ronsons, and I'm over it.

Yeah, I get it. This is penance for sleeping with a client. Again. But shit, a girl's got needs. In retrospect, I should have just handled myself by myself. But alas, I'm a short-sighted bitch when dick is on the menu. Sue me.

More annoying is, I've gone back to the diner every day since Sexy Nosy Biker Dude was there.

No dice. Lexen's not a huge city by any stretch, but apparently, it's big enough to keep me from innocently bumping into the guy soon enough for my liking.

Much more of this string of bad luck, and this girl's gonna have to actually put in real effort to go looking for him.

Before I can bust out a pen and paper to start making a list of possible ways to track him down, a buzz on the outer door of our offices catches my attention. I mentally shelve the hunt for my biker hottie and head to the reception area.

Duty over booty prevails once again.

“Hi, how can I—” The words stall in my throat.

Standing just inside the door is the man himself.

And he’s not alone. He’s got a cute little girl perched on his hip who looks just like him and a gorgeous woman standing at his side, her hand cradling the kid’s back.

Great. I’ve been fantasizing for days about a married father. New low, Thyrie. New low.

“I’m looking to hire a body woman to guard my sister and niece while they stay with me for a few weeks. Any chance you’re available?”

His words sink through my thick skull, and relief washes through me like a tidal wave. Not that I allow myself to resume drooling over the guy. I learned my lesson for real this time.

Just because the woman and kid he’s with right now aren’t his wife and daughter, it doesn’t mean he isn’t married.

I shouldn’t be lusting after guys whose relationship status I have no clue about.

I’m sticking to the straight and narrow from here on out.

To that end, I force purity into my thoughts and focus on the business that brought

them here.

“Possibly I can. Let’s go into my office and talk details.

” I wait until the trio pass me before striding to the front door of the office and flipping the lock.

Walk-ins are uncommon, but obviously not impossible.

With just me here this afternoon, I don’t want anyone wandering in off the street while I discuss the security needs of a potential client.

For the next two hours, the man, whose name I learned is Hiram, detailed their needs.

A short time into the meeting, the woman he’d introduced as Frankie, carried her daughter over to the sofa against the wall and settled her down for a nap.

Once the kid was asleep, both Hiram and Frankie opened up with more specifics about the dangers that brought them to me.

“We’ve got the tech end of things handled,” he explained and didn’t shy away from the details when I insisted on having them. As I’d suspected, he’s exactly the rough-looking biker I’d envisioned him to be. He’s president of a local MC that’s only recently been identified here in Lexen.

Before Ghost Born MC showed up, it was pretty much just the Savage Dreams club in town. Silas and I never had much call to cross paths with its members, so though I’m aware of them in a general sense, I don’t have a lot of background.

“So this is definitely not turf conflict between you guys and SDMC?” Much as I’d be

loathe to turn down protecting an innocent woman, I'm even less inclined to embroil Sentrify in an inter-club beef.

"Hundred percent sure. Frankie and Teeny live in Darrow with my brother-in-law where our mother charter is. He sent her here for safety while they deal with things there."

"Misguided, adorable jackass," Frankie mumbles from her slouch in the chair beside her brother. I get the feeling she's said the same thing a lot.

"You don't think the threat is significant?" It might seem like an innocuous question, but I've learned the hard way how much harder things are when the protectee doesn't think my presence is necessary.

"Oh no. I get why 'Lo sent Teeny and me away. He's an overprotective lug, but I don't want Teeny in the crossfire, and it's a dad at her preschool.

" Her lip curls in obvious disgust, and my concerns subside.

The woman across from me may be annoyed at having to leave her husband and home for temporary security, but she's not objecting.

I meet her eyes, finding a resolute challenge in the warm depths.

She's well aware of what her husband and his motorcycle brothers will do, and she's resigned herself to feel no guilt for it.

Like recognizes like, and if there's anything I've learned in my years as a soldier and in the time since, it's that not all lungs deserve breath in them.

Respect flourishes between us as she finds the acceptance and promise I'm conveying

in my stare.

“I’ll protect you both,” I vow.

“I’ll provide guard duty. Surveillance twenty-four seven and security for everyone at our place. But I want, I need, someone in charge of physically standing between my girls and danger, so I can focus on taking out the trash.” Hiram’s low rasp drips with menace. “If it shows up here.”

I turn my attention to the man who’s been dominating my thoughts for the past few days.

Beard scruff lends masculinity to the lush bow of his lips, heavy brows furrow over dark hazel eyes I watched dance with mirth when he played with his niece.

The assorted facets of his personality I’ve seen have me hooked, even more now that I’ve properly met him.

After the fiasco of sleeping with Bryan fucking Johnstone, I should stand by my resolve to not get involved with a client ever again.

But even as the thought crosses my mind, I’m already rationalizing the ways Hiram Holt isn’t actually my client.

It’s a technicality, because Hiram is hiring Sentrify, but Frankie and Teeny are my protectees.

As far as I can figure it, that makes Frankie my client, and Hiram her very available brother. Silas will say I’m splitting hairs. But Silas isn’t here right now, is he?

CHAPTER FIVE

Pickle

T racking Thyrie had taken my brother, Malik, and his partner, Rurik, less time than it takes to find a takeout menu in my junk draw. They have more skills at finding information than is reasonable, and thankfully, Rurik knows more than anyone what it feels like to hunt down an obsession.

I'd expected it to take some maneuvering to convince Thyrie the job was real and not some fabricated bullshit.

Bringing Frankie and Teeny with me had been a calculated move on my part.

The two of them would have been safe back at the compound with the guys, but keeping her with me satisfied my concern that Thyrie would refuse the contract.

The not unanticipated bonus is, my sister and niece are irresistible. Even Ace's grouchy ass crumbles when Teeny flashes one of her schemy little grins at him. And Frankie's so intrinsically sweet it's impossible not to be friendly with her.

"Alright. I'm in. Let's get a service contract laid out." Thyrie's easy agreement gives me hope she's feeling the same magnetic pull I am. Sure, it could just be business on her end, but I'm choosing to believe the chemistry is hot enough between us that she's succumbing to it, too.

In no time at all, the terms are agreed upon, and Thyrie, Frankie, and I are signing the

contract for service.

My sister gives me a loaded look before going to sit on the sofa where Teeny's still curled in a ball, napping.

Frankie may be younger than me, but she's observant and knows me well enough to figure out I'm hung up on the girl sitting like a queen on a throne behind the massive polished-wood desk.

"You're staring," she stage whispers on her way past me.

Thyrie's lips tilt into a satisfied little smirk, and I know she heard Frankie as she passed.

"Sure am," I confirm, meeting Thyrie's dark eyes with mine.

"And?" Her brow lifts imperiously, cementing the image of her as a regal queen. It steals my breath and makes my chest, and regions lower, tighten with appreciation for her beauty.

"Not apologizing for something I'll be doing a lot of." Might as well begin as I intend to carry on.

"Bold of you," she quips, returning my stare with one of her own. Her eyes trace the muscles I know are visible through the thin cotton of my T-shirt. Her open appreciation of my body stirs my blood, sending a lick of arousal hot through me to settle in my cock.

I shift in my seat to give extra room to my swelling shaft, and her eyes follow the movement. A knowing satisfaction sparkles in her grin, and I realize this woman is exactly the handful I expected after overhearing the conversation in the coffeeshop.

“You need a few hours to pack a bag, so you can stay at the clubhouse ‘til Franks and Teens can go home?” The nickname for my sister makes Thyrie snort a giggle-laugh that’s more adorable than her badass appearance prepared me for.

“Nope. Bag stays packed and ready in my trunk, and I can grab all the equipment I’ll need from the safe room, if you and the girls don’t mind waiting here in my office for a few minutes.

” She stands with a fluid grace that speaks to what Rurik confirmed from the background information he pulled.

Military background and ongoing experience as an owner and operator of a personal protection firm, Thyrie Brandon is the whole package.

The woman is all leashed power and a capacity for violence, tucked into a petite frame, and her lithe muscles are easy to miss at first glance.

She’s nothing like used to picture my dream girl would be.

Before I gave up on the whole picket fence two point five kids dream, I always thought I’d wind up with a girl like Frankie.

Not because of any creepy brother-sister vibes.

More, I expected to wind up with someone soft and sweet because she’s the best woman I know, so I just assumed when I met my soulmate she’d be the same.

I should have guessed I’d stumble into someone who would light my soul on fire.

Like every other unforeseen twist my life has taken, my future wouldn’t be the way I’d thought.

“You have a safe room in your offices?” I find myself unable to bite my tongue and keep the questions at bay. I want to know everything about her. Everything.

“Given the nature of the business, we’d be fools not to, don’t you think?” Her answer reminds me she has a business partner, who’s also her best friend. Rurik’s info seems to point to the man being a solely platonic colleague she’s known for an eternity.

Thyrie can’t know how deep a dive I’ve already taken into her background, and really, I’d prefer to learn about her from her.

I suppose I ought to feel some sort of guilt over nosing into her life without her knowledge.

I don’t. Though my feelings for this woman are already too strong to ignore, Teeny and my sister’s safety isn’t something I’d ever risk.

“You sure you don’t need to discuss taking this job with your partner? Silas Brandsell, right?” Just because Rurik’s info Rurik made it seem as if things are platonic between the two of them, it doesn’t mean I don’t intend to pry.

The bewitching woman tosses a wink over her shoulder as she saunters through a door hidden beside a bookcase. Yeah, there’s nothing meek about this girl, and for the thousandth time since I overheard the two of them, I’m looking forward to every challenge she presents.

“His ignorance is my bliss, Mr. Holt. And I sure hope you can deliver.”

CHAPTER SIX

Thyrie

I haven't had this much fun in as long as I can remember.

The Ghost Born clubhouse is nothing like I thought it would be, and all I can think is how TV gets it way wrong.

Not that I got to see much of the clubhouse.

After brief introduction to all the guys, Hiram whisked us upstairs to his suite of rooms.

Don't get me wrong... The men who make up the Lexen part of the club are every bit as mouthwateringly gorgeous as any Hollywood version.

But that's where the similarities stop. Unlike TV motorcycle clubs, there are no bawdy, half-naked club girls flitting around knuckle-dragging Neanderthal men.

No drunken brawls or drugged-up assholery.

"Whatcha looking for, pretty girl?"

I thought I'd met all the guys over the few days I've been guarding Frankie and Teeny. This one, with the unexpectedly deep, rumble, yet playful voice is new.

“Mine,” Hiram growls from behind me, startling me enough I nearly drop the bottles of water I’d gone to the kitchen to grab for my charges.

No, playing nursemaid isn’t in the job description.

Still, Frankie is the sweetest, and yet most boring, client I’ve ever had, so taking the chance to wander the clubhouse to fetch whatever she and the kiddo need is a good break.

“You can’t claim a whole person, Hy,” the stranger teases. He’s got an adorable dimple that three weeks ago would definitely have had a way bigger impact on me than it does today. Today, I’m focused on the crush I can’t shake and the possessive way Hiram watches me whenever we’re in the same room.

“Just did. Now, find somewhere else to be, Malachi. And stop flirting with the girls. If I don’t kick your ass first, you know damn well Arlo will.” As menacing as Hiram’s threat is, the tone makes it clear he’s not really angry at his flirtatious brother.

“In this economy?” Malachi tosses out the non sequitur out as if it’s the most logical response possible, and the absurdity of it makes me laugh. A slight shake of Hiram’s head catches my attention, and he soundlessly mouths the word ‘no.’

“Um, nice to meet you. Malachi? I’m Thyrie. I’m here to protect this one’s sister and Teeny for a little while.” Normally, I’d be far more circumspect with information, but Hiram made it clear there was no need for secrecy.

“Oh, yeah. Forgot. Sorry, Hy.” An adorable blush tinges his cheeks pink, taking the entire interaction from amusing to confusing in a heartbeat.

“All good, brother. You know that.” Hiram claps his MC brother on the shoulder as

the enormous man passes by on his way out of the kitchen. There's definitely something going on there, but I'm pretty sure it's none of my business.

"Don't mind Malachi," Hiram says softly. "He's a good guy. Got his bell rung while in the military a while back, but he's solid when it counts."

It's sweet of Hiram to offer an explanation.

None of my business, but sweet. However, I guess it serves the purpose of letting me know, if a situation arises, I can rely on the guy to be a help instead of a hindrance.

Hiram's been like that since we met, providing me what I need to effectively do my job, though it'll likely be unnecessary.

I mean, what are the chances the Darrow boys fail to deal with the threat?

Even more, what are the chances the dude actually figures out where Arlo stashed his wife and daughter.

Least plausible is, the guy shows up and slips past Hiram.

So yeah, I'm well aware my presence is mostly window dressing.

I get it. Frankie and Teeny deserve to be shadowed by another woman.

It frees up her brother to take the role of surveillance without the weirdness of having a man, who isn't her husband, stuck to her like glue.

"Got it. Should I be prepared for any other guys I haven't met popping up?" I ask.

Hiram's eyes narrow, and a muscle ticks in his jaw.

Oooh, he doesn't like me asking about other men.

Jealousy is usually a red flag I steer way clear of, and unease tickles along the edge of the chemistry that always simmers when we're together.

Dominance in the bedroom is hot, but a man getting all weird and territorial anywhere else in my life is a hard pass.

Breath stalls in my chest as I wait for him to speak.

"You've met them all, I think. They all know you're with me to protect Frankie and Teens. None of them have been hassling you about being around, have they? Some of them..." He trails off, the hard glint in his eyes softening a bit.

"Some of them, what?" I prompt.

"Aren't great with people. Especially new ones. You'll tell me if anyone is an asshole, yeah?" His demand diffuses the tension building inside me, the worry that I'd misjudged him and somehow found myself attracted to a mouth-breathing misogynist.

"Everyone's been super nice." I assure him. "Even what's his name...the Russian guy, the one who's with Malik?"

That guy's a little on the scary side, if I'm honest. There's an intensity in his eyes I'd normally find unsettling enough to avoid like the plague.

He's smaller than his partner, physically, but one glimpse into the duo's dynamic is all it takes to see a level of obsessed devotion I'd be terrified to have directed at me.

Malik glows under it though, and that makes it impossible to hold on to my

misgivings about the guy.

“That’s Rurik. He’s not MC, but he’s...adjacent. Of a sort. If you run into trouble, and I’m not here, find them.”

“You going somewhere?” I ask. Hiram’s been a little skimpy on the details of what’s going on in the search for Mitchell Vance, the suspiciously widowed creeper who’d been hitting on Frankie for weeks. I get it, really I do.

The Ghost Born MC clubhouse might not be the stuff of Hollywood stereotype, but I’m not foolish enough to expect they’re as innocent as it seems. Just because the guys have all been nice to me since I got here, it doesn’t blind me to the aura of leashed violence palpable in the air.

Between that and the lust that chokes me whenever I’m near Hiram, it’s a wonder I’m managing to get any oxygen to my brain at all.

“Definitely not going anywhere, Spitfire. But it pays to make sure you know who to go to if an emergency arises.” When Hiram calls me Spitfire, it feels as if he really sees me.

Sees me and isn’t intimidated the way lots of guys are.

I never realized feeling seen would be such a turn on. But it is. It so is.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Pickle

“ Y eah, nope. Don’t like that idea.” Thyrie’s adamant head shake punctuates her confusing comment.

She’s so capable and independent it takes longer than it probably should for her meaning to sink in.

She’s not upset at my suggestion she could get help from one of the brothers.

She doesn’t want me to be away from her.

The past few days, I’ve been battling an internal war to keep from pulling her into my arms and making her mine.

Mark my words, I will be doing that. Just not while she’s busy watching over her charges.

Do I want to kick my ass for hiring her to watch over Frank and Teens?

Fuck, yeah, I do. She’s a consummate professional, taking their safety as seriously as though my sister is the Hope Diamond.

I knew I wanted to dick down Thyrie ’til she couldn’t walk straight even before we officially met.

But watching how thorough she is in her duty, especially considering it's to protect my family, I can't help but fall even harder for her.

"I don't plan on it. Face it, you're stuck with me, Spitfire."

"Guess that means you can carry these upstairs for me, since that's where I'm headed.

" She hands me the bottles of water before diving back into the industrial-size fridge.

With as many big ass men as we have around here, the thing's always loaded to the max with everything any of us could want.

Including the lemon pudding I'd learned is Thyrie's favorite.

"Behind the pasta salad Nolan's got chilling for dinner tonight. I hid the bowl so Malachi would keep his hands off it," I say.

"How'd you guess that's what I'm looking for?" she asks over her shoulder, still shuffling around the inside of the fridge.

"I pay attention," I state simply. Because I do.

I want to know everything about her. I want to be the one providing for her every wish, even the ones that haven't yet fully formed in her brain.

I've been soaking in each detail like a plant arching into the sun's path through a garden.

Fuck, that's some sappy shit. Good thing I'm capable of keeping my inside thoughts inside, unlike some of the loudmouths around here.

“Ah, a voyeur,” she quips, her lush lips quirking into a smile sultry enough to have my neglected cock thickening down the leg of my jeans.

It’s been impossible to keep the unruly thing contained since I laid eyes on her.

At this point, I’m relying on tight athletic boxers and untucked shirts to keep from embarrassing myself around everyone in the house.

“For you? Without shame or denial. That a problem?” I know it’s not. She likes my eyes on her. She gets a little smile when she notices me staring and a wiggle in her hips when I’m walking down the hallway behind her.

“Ever gonna make a move, or just watch the whole time I’m here?” That’s a pout if I’ve ever seen one.

“Waiting on the green light, Spitfire. You just say the word, and I’ll show you how much watching has prepared me to please you in ways you can’t even imagine.”

“Confident. I like that. Prove it.” She lifts her chin in challenge, giving me exactly the right angle to lean in and capture her lips under mine.

Thyrie takes my kiss and meets it with her own.

Our tongues tangle, moving from the sweet recess of her mouth back into mine in a smooth dance that has blood thundering into my dick from every vein in my body.

Her hands wrap around my neck while mine go to her hips, boosting her up onto the kitchen counter.

I step between her parted knees, pressing my groin into the heated cradle where her thighs meet.

I know she can feel exactly how hard she makes me.

I want her to know. My right hand coasts along her waist, searching for the hem of her fitted T-shirt.

The need to feel her skin under my fingertips is quickly becoming as necessary as breathing.

Warm silk over toned muscle greets me as I finally wiggle under the edge of her shirt.

Thyrie arches her body into me when I skim my hand up her back to the clasp of her bra strap.

“This okay?” I tear myself away from her mouth long enough to ask for consent. If Thyrie’s not ready, I’ll slow things down and spend more time convincing her that she’s meant to be mine. Wooing her. Fuck. More sappy shit. I swear, the woman melts my brain and turns my thoughts to mush.

“Very.” She gasps, her enjoyment obvious as she presses her breasts into my chest. Tight nipples poke into the space between my pecs, her body slimmer than mine.

I’m not a big guy, my compact frame proving to be a benefit when it comes to being underestimated in fights. Opponents usually discover what I lack in size I easily make up for with sheer brutality and force.

Like recognizes like, and I can tell Thyrie’s used to being misjudged as being too delicate and small to be dangerous. She is fragile, but it’s fragile like a bomb, not a flower. It’s as much a turn on as everything else about her.

She pulls my shirt over my head and tosses it over my shoulder onto the floor.

I mirror her lead and do the same with hers.

There are other people in the house, but I couldn't care less.

Anybody coming into the kitchen from the dining room won't be able to see her through me.

And the tinted window above the sink means the man peeking around a tree at the fence-line can't see inside the building.

Wait. That ain't right. The man peeking around the tree?

That's a problem. My body turns to stone, the realization I've allowed myself to become so lost in the lust between Thyrie and me that I've neglected my guard duties.

I'm not sure who's out there, but it can't have been for too long.

My Spitfire turns my brains to mush, but even in the depths of lust, there's no way to turn off the situational awareness life has drilled into me.

"What's wrong?" Instantly alert, Thyrie freezes to assess the danger.

It isn't surprising she's so in tune with me.

While I come by my violence the old-fashioned way, as its victim in my youth and its master now, Thyrie's honed it as a craft in her adult life, first as a soldier, and now as a body for hire.

I know she's got skills and training to match mine.

"Don't look," I start. He probably can't see inside, but there's no reason to take

unnecessary risks.

“Wasn’t gonna. Detail the scene,” she interrupts. I nod in acknowledgment before dipping my head into the curve of her neck. On the chance the light behind us casts enough shadow through the window’s tint to give our position away, I don’t want to let on that he’s been spotted.

With my eyes searching the shadowy landscape beyond the porch lights, I murmur the details of what I can see into the petal soft skin below her ear.

“Stranger behind the tree closest to the garage. Can’t get a positive ID, but he’s clean shaven and wearing glasses.”

“You think it’s Mitchell?” she husks into my ear, her hand creeping to the pocket where my phone is and sliding it up between us.

“Betting so. Code’s seven-six-three-eight.” I don’t even blink at giving her the code to my phone. Shit, everything I have is already hers, even if she doesn’t know it.

I can feel her fingers moving between us to unlock the phone and open the calling app.

I lick a stripe up her neck to nibble at her earlobe and whisper the voice dial that will call Malik.

He and Rurik are upstairs working on something in their suite, and I know if I can get ahold of Malik, he’ll bring Rurik.

Those two are joined at the hip, Rurik so obsessed and Malik so needy it’s rare to see one without the other.

“Got a problem,” I grunt into the phone when Malik picks up and I explain what I’m seeing. Even the seriousness of the situation can’t douse the painfully heavy throb of my cock where I’m pressed against Thyrie’s pajama pants-covered pussy.

There’s nothing in the world I want to do more than finish making her mine, but duty to family and the club can’t wait. I think Thyrie understands. Fuck, I hope she understands.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Thyrie

A drenaline and arousal are dueling to the death in my adrenal system, right now.

It's a crime to put the brakes on the moment I've been waiting since Hiram and I met, but there's no help for it.

I was brought here to do a job, and I have to see it through.

Frankie and Teeny need me to protect them while Hiram and his MC brothers do... what they do.

I'm not bothered by the certainty that what they do will certainly be bloody and criminal.

After hearing the details of what Vance Mitchell is suspected of, and the disgusting comments he made to Frankie, I know he's scum.

He's earned the consequences he'll surely face, if indeed that's him prowling around out there.

If nothing else, stupidity has a price, and being foolish enough to stalk Frankie, not only knowing that her husband is a founding member of Ghost Born, but following her here?

That's like escaping the belly of one beast and running headlong into the belly of another.

I hear Hiram and Malik organizing themselves, so I listen with half an ear while allowing the rest of my focus to draw out the pleasure of finally having this man exactly where I've needed him for days.

Tiny rocks of my hips rub my desperate clit against the rock-solid ridge of his cock behind his jean's zipper.

His bulge is so big I can feel him, heavy and hard, against the swell of my stomach even with him pressed against my center.

I know when I finally get him inside me, I'll feel the stretch and burn of his thickness for days.

"Thyrie, Spitfire," he rumbles against my neck, the vibrations of his words sending shivers of arousal through me, "I'm going to carry you out of here, so if he can see us, he'll assume we're going to a bedroom. Then you go protect the girls while we flank and capture the motherfucker."

"Wilco," I confirm then chuckle at the confused look on his face when I pull back to prepare for him to lift me into his arms.

"Sorry. Old habits. Code for 'will comply' held over from our days in the service. Since it's usually me and Silas, and the freelancers we hire are always vets, I forget not everyone speaks camo-grunt like we do."

Mentioning Silas and my past in the military is usually where the rubber meets the road with guys.

Either they're intimidated by the skillset from my military career or by the relationship I have with my male bestie.

Regardless, I won't tolerate a partner who expects me to make myself smaller, so they can digest me more easily.

My breath catches as I wait to see how Hiram handles the reminder.

Yeah, this is a high-stress moment, so it's not the time to fall out if he surprises me by being as shitty as the men in my past. But it's also times like this when a person's true colors peek through.

I'd be a fool not to ready myself for the unexpected.

"Then after tonight, maybe, you can make me a dictionary, so I know what y'all are saying," he says. Zero snark or hostility. At every turn, my feelings for Hiram Holt are validated and amplified by the good man he is. Criminalistic motorcycle club presidency and all.

"Absolutely. Now, get your ass out there and catch a predator."

Hiram's chuckle at my silliness becomes a rumble grumble of need when my legs wrap around his waist and his steps bounce me on his still-hard cock.

"Consider it done. And consider this," his stride pauses to push me against the wall and grind himself against my needy center, "on pause until then."

Nolan, one of the men Hiram introduced me to when he first brought me to the clubhouse, is standing guard outside the room where Frankie and Teeny are staying.

He nods at Hiram and swings open the door as we approach.

Frankie watches her brother set me down just inside the room before he pushes the door closed behind me.

“What’s wrong?” she asks, quiet enough not to interrupt Teeny’s snuffly little kid snores on the bed next to her. The tablet playing Bluey’s theme song continues bopping along, but Frankie sets it down and carefully disentangles herself from the sleeping preschooler.

“Something happened?” Concern is obvious in her hushed question.

“There’s a man prowling around. Hiram spotted him through the kitchen window while I was getting water for you and the kiddo.” I don’t lie to clients about danger, even when I know it’ll scare her. Frankie’s an adult, and she has the right to know what’s happening in her own life.

“Is my brother—” She bites off the worry, a sob catching in her throat.

Hiram wasn’t wrong when he told me his sister was the sweetest woman alive. She’s impossibly softhearted. So much so, that it’s almost unbelievable to imagine her as the wife of a motorcycle club officer. Even her daughter’s got more sass than she does, and the kid’s three years old.

“I’m sure he’s fine. He’s got Malik and Rurik with him. Probably that Malachi guy, too, since he was around earlier,” I assure her.

Soft buzzing from her silenced phone on the bedside table catches her attention, and she tiptoe dashes over to it.

“Arlo, are you on the way here?” she cries. I can’t hear the other end of the conversation, but I assume he says yes. Her shoulders drop as the panicky tension releases at hearing from her husband.

Their conversation continues as I check the room to ensure it's secure.

The only point of entry is the bedroom door, and we're on the third floor.

I already know there's no likely way to scale the building to get through the window.

I go back to where Frankie paces while she talks to her husband.

The roles have flipped, and now, she's the one assuring him that she's safe and not to worry.

Once they're off the phone, I confirm with Frankie that he's on the way and will be here soon.

Knowing how far Darrow is from Lexen, I don't doubt the man is breaking land speed records to get here.

To keep her mind—and yeah, okay, mine, too—off what's undoubtedly happening somewhere on property, I turn on some mindless cooking competition reality show and sit down on the bed beside her.

A big part of me wants to be out there with Hiram and the other guys, making that dirtbag pay for what he's done, but I force myself to hold my position and guard Frankie and Teeny. No matter what, I'll keep them safe until her husband and Hiram give the all clear.

CHAPTER NINE

Pickle

“Get his legs, Shadow. Row, grab the rope.” My instructions are followed immediately, all of us working to get Vance Mitchell secured.

“Really a fuckin’ letdown how easy you made it to capture you, Shitbag,” Row grouses.

Once upon a time, Row had been Staff Sergeant Malachi Murphy, and tracking had been his specialty.

Until a roadside bomb, encountered during a humanitarian mission to assist digging clean water wells in a war-ravaged nation, rang his chimes and nearly killed him.

I never served, so I didn’t get the chance to see him in his prime, but even now, he naturally gravitates toward any task that has him solving puzzles or hunting down information. Mitchell being so easy to apprehend is clearly an affront to my road captain.

“Wha...?” The man being bound to the metal folding chair, in the special room we reserve for just such events, garbles through his own blood and spittle.

Look, I promised Arlo I wouldn’t deprive him of his husbandly right to take apart the guy piece by piece.

I did not, however, promise I wouldn't take my own pound of flesh from him. Frankie is my sister, after all.

"You picked the wrong one when you set your eyes on my sister, asshole. But never fear, you won't be making mistakes like this one ever again," I promise.

His eyes narrow, no doubt anticipating a scenario where he walks away from this with a beatdown and nothing more.

I smirk, knowing the reason he won't make this mistake again is because after tonight the only thing he'll be making is food for worms.

"Where's the sorry piece of shit who thought he could take my wife from me?" Arlo's normally quiet baritone thunders down the stairs and has me grinning with delight. Now that he's here, this can all end, and I can put all my attention where I really want it to be. On claiming Thyrie.

What follows is two hours of madness. Arlo, Row, Rurik and I take apart Vance Mitchell at the seams. Figuratively and literally.

When there's nothing left but cleanup, Arlo leaves to wash himself clean of the mess and get to his wife and daughter. I can't fault him, but it means one less set of hands to deal with the aftermath of what wound up being a very, very messy lesson taught here tonight.

Typically, I don't mind the role of club janitor, but tonight, everything in me focuses on getting upstairs to Thyrie before she decides the job is done and takes off. I know Arlo plans to bundle up his girls and get them home, so Teeny can wake up in her own bed tomorrow.

"Relax, brother. She's not gonna leave. And if she does, Malik's man can track her

down just like he did the last time,” Malachi teases.

“Track who down now?” Thyrie’s amused huff is a balm to my nerves, even as I panic at the sight we all make right now, surrounded by blood and gore.

This isn’t something a man wants his woman to see.

Especially not when the dead body we haven’t finished preparing for dumping lying right there in front of us all.

My spitfire isn’t fazed by the gory scene. She steps into the room and pulls the armored door closed behind her.

“How’d you get through the basement door? It’s coded,” Rurik challenges.

“You’re not the only one who knows tech,” she responds, her eyes never leaving mine.

“Besides, just because I haven’t entered your sacred spaces before now, it doesn’t mean I didn’t make it my business to know how to get in here if I needed to.

Can’t very well protect someone if I can’t get into every single place they might need protected in, now can I? ”

“Yeah, but there’s a no girls allowed rule,” Row pouts.

Thyrie has the good grace not to laugh at his childish complaining, though she does give my brother a sweet smile.

“Don’t worry, boys. I won’t make a habit of it,” she parries, finally looking around at the carnage. “But I figured I’d offer to lend a hand.”

“This one’s a keeper.” Malik quips. Rurik cuffs him at the back of his head, muttering something soft enough none of us can hear, but it has Malik’s ears turning bright red.

“Planning on it,” I say.

Thyrie crosses to the shelves of industrial cleaning agents and grabs what she needs to join in the cleanup without comment. It strikes me again how different she is than any woman I’ve ever known.

It’s more than just her confidence. Thyrie Brandon has competence and an inner core of strength that makes her a perfect match for me.

I don’t think there’s anything I do that she can’t readily throw in with and pull just as much weight as I do.

That kind of partnership is one I never expected, much less that I’d be lucky enough to find it.

Thyrie matches me, strength for strength, complementing my skills with her own, much like Malik and Rurik match each other. More than heating my blood, the realization she’s absolutely made for me lights my soul on fire.

“You’re staring,” she teases.

“I am,” I say. “Not sorry.”

“We’ll finish up down here,” Malik offers. “Why don’t you take Thyrie upstairs and get cleaned up? Leave your clothes in the burn bin, and we’ll see to them, too.”

“Thanks, man.” I don’t need to be told twice.

I trust my brothers will ensure no evidence is left behind, and I'm ready to get Thyrie alone, so I can show her what it'll be like to be claimed by the president of the Lexan Ghost Born MC.

I also don't want her taking off the bloody clothes she's wearing then showering with the rest of the guys when everything's done down here. Dipping out early just makes sense.

"Come on, Spitfire. I believe we've got some rudely interrupted business to get back to."

CHAPTER TEN

Thyrie

We're taking a risk by traipsing through the clubhouse to Hiram's suite without cleaning off all the evidence covering us.

Logic wrestles with the lizard brain, demanding I get this man horizontal so I can ride him immediately.

I have zero regard for the worries future me may have about being accessory to murder.

I just need the bliss of his body under mine.

"Shower fast. Together. We can make sure to get clean fast that way," he gruffs the instant he has the bathroom door shut behind us.

I tear my shirt over my head and toss it into a brown bag Hiram grabbed from the clean-up room downstairs before shucking my pants and socks.

Everything goes into the same bag, and I look over to watch Hiram disrobing just as quickly.

He hustles me under the shower spray the second all our clothes are sealed in the brown paper bag.

There's a moment, just as the water begins to rinse away the sticky drying blood from his hair and skin, that I wonder at the depravity of being this turned on while covered in a man's death.

Shouldn't I feel some sort of moral castigation?

Mitchell Vance's death is no tragedy, but does my disregard for his life mean am I just as bad?

"Are you scared of me now?" Hiram asks softly.

I look into his eyes and see a vulnerability there I'm not used to.

"No," I answer simply. Hiram's never given me reason to fear him. After watching him with his sister and niece for all these days, it's obvious everything he does is for his family and his club. And maybe, it's selfish of me to care more about the way he loves than the way he kills, but so be it.

"Would you rather shower alone?" It's a bit late for that question, but it's sweet of him to notice my hesitation and care enough to check in with me.

"No. Stay with me," I plead. Whatever existential bullshit is going on in my brain, I know it'll be worse if he leaves. Besides, the internal strife hasn't done anything to cool my lust.

"Good. Tilt your head back." Hiram guides the handheld showerhead to get my hair wet, then hangs it back up and dumps what has to be half the bottle of shampoo over my head. I giggle as he has to alternate between scrubbing and rinsing over and over again.

"Probably overdid that," he admits. It's charming and endearing and, it turns out, the

perfect bridge from the earlier violence to the desire building between us again.

His cock's been digging into my hip since the second we got into the shower, so I know he's not having the same moral questionings I am.

The way he's giving me space to work through my hangups without rushing or abandoning me is another surprise. Everything about the man's appearance, from his sleek Harley Davidson to his inked and pierced skin, screams bad boy, yet he's anything but when it comes to me.

"It's okay. At least, it's a two-in-one product," I laugh.

"Are you laughing at me, Spitfire?" he teases. He wrings the water from my hair and pushes it away from my face, before grabbing the bar soap from the hanging shower caddy.

"This okay for your skin, too?"

"Sure, for now, at least." I'll use my fancy soap later. Right now is about getting clean, so we get dirty. The good kind of dirty.

Once he's done washing my face and body, with an almost manic attention to detail and more clinical care than romance, I take my turn doing the same for him.

It's impossible not to trace the lines of his muscles or enjoy the mouthwatering buffet of his body, but I do my best. If a couple kisses and licks are exchanged between us along the way to getting clean, who can blame us?

Hiram grabs every towel from the cabinet below the sink and wraps us both up before leading me back into his bedroom and laying me down on his enormous bed. Water droplets from our wet hair and skin soak the comforter, but he doesn't seem to

care in the slightest.

“You know what they say about couples who kill together, Thyrie?” he asks.

“Tell me.” I want to hear him say it.

“The couple that kills together, stays together. You’re mine forever, Sweet Spitfire.” He tugs the towel from me and begins working his mouth down my body, kissing and biting everywhere he can reach.

“Then you’re mine,” I say, already knowing I want to keep him forever, too.

“Of course, I’m yours. Only yours. I’ll love you from now until I take my last breath. Even without glittery silver eyelids,” he promises.

And I believe him.

His hands are a little rough where he tugs and pulls at my limbs to arrange me on the bed the way he wants me.

It’s another reminder that, unlike the men I’ve gravitated toward in the past, Hiram’s the blue-collar type.

I already know I’m more likely to find him handling club business or messing around with his bike than working in the office overseeing the business end of Redemption Build.

“Stay like this. Don’t move,” he orders when he’s got my wrists crossed above my head. I humor him for now, knowing there’s zero chance I’ll hold such a passive position for long. The need to touch and taste Hiram is too great to keep me still.

He skates his palms down my sides until he reaches my thighs. It doesn't take much convincing for me to relax and let my legs drop open as he presses them wide enough to shoulder between them. Then he's face level with my pussy. My very wet, very needy pussy.

"I think she likes me," Hiram chuckles and dips a fingertip between my lower lips to slick around my juices. It's corny and breaks the seriousness that has crept in. Not that I don't want the seriousness. I very, very much want it. But this is nice, too.

"Guess you should introduce yourself properly then, yeah?" I counter.

Hiram huffs out a laugh, the puff of his air warm against my sensitive flesh. His tongue pokes between the lips of my sex, tracing around my clit and dipping low to slip over my opening with no discernable pattern.

"Writing up a contract for this pussy." He licks letters against me, speaking each word as he completes the spelling.

"You. Belong. To. Me. For. Ev. Er."

It's too much and nowhere near enough. I need more pressure or suction to make me come, and this is just a tease. But it's plenty enough to drive me out of my mind. My hips twist and shimmy against the bar of his forearm across my lower belly.

"Please, please, please!" I chant, the words slurring together into one garbled mantra on repeat.

"I am. So pleased. Thyrie, I knew I wanted you for myself when I heard you blasting that idiot who didn't deserve to be with you.

And here you are. In my bed. Mine. Forever.

” He prowls up my body until his cock is notched at my opening, and I brace myself.

He’s hard and heavy, and every inch of him splits me wide as he tunnels into me as deep as he can get.

“I love you, too.” I give him the words, telling a man I love him for the first time in my adult life. It’s the first time I finally believe I’ve found a man I can pledge myself to forever.

Because as he lines himself up and slides deeply in and out of my core, I know Hiram Holt is the kind of man who keeps what he loves, and he loves me.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 12:47 pm

Hiram

A few months later

“What’s up?” Thyrie’s hushed voice and the dim glow of her cell phone screen rouse me from my sleep. I hear the rapid cadence of a man on the other end of the phone but can’t make out the words.

“Okay. Make sure no one leaves. I’ll be there in...twenty.” The love of my life disconnects the phone and rolls to face me, unsurprised to see me as awake now as she is.

“Problem?” I ask.

“Cock up with the new client’s security detail. I knew that snotty prick would be a problem, but noooo. Silas swore we could keep a lid on the guy.” Nothing gets her swearing faster than a misbehaving, entitled client.

“The guy’s so bad Silas is calling reinforcements? Must be a real winner.” I mean, I love my girl, but being real here? There’s a damn good reason Silas is the forward-facing side of their business. Thyrie’s nowhere near as chill as he is with the clients. He’s a real asshole whisperer.

“I told him so. And if he thinks for a hot second I won’t rub it in that I was right, again ...

” She rolls away from me and strides to the dresser on her side of the room.

I do the same and grab clothes from my dresser.

There's zero chance she's going alone to meet up with a man, in the middle of the night, even if it is Silas.

Thyrie surprises me when she sidesteps around me to grab the first-aid kit from the bathroom and shoves it at me to carry. She rolls her eyes and smirks while twisting her long hair into a quick ponytail.

"Since you're coming with, be useful," she snarks without heat.

"Okay, but we have a kit in the truck?" I question.

"I don't want to waste time getting it out of the truck. We'll take the bike," she states, already ten steps ahead of my thought process. Maybe, other dudes would be pissed if their old lady just assumed she could use their motorcycle, but I'm not that guy.

Not only does she know everything of mine is hers, but Thyrie knows how to ride all on her own.

She's had a biker's license longer than we've been together.

Which makes my dick hard just thinking about the way she handled my custom chopper the first time she rode it solo to prove she knew how.

So if she wants to ride tonight, we ride.

Besides, the truck is parked in the garage with at least two bikes behind it.

She grabs the go-bag from the shelf by the door and unzips it, silently waiting for me to cram the first-aid kit inside. Then she spins on a heel and takes off down the hallway, her hustle making it plain whatever's gone down is serious.

“What’s goin’ on?” Malachi’s sleepy voice startles both of us as we pass the darkened kitchen.

“Shit-fuck-damn-balls, man! What the fuckin’ shit? Warn a girl!” Thyrie screeches.

“Don’t sleep. Where’re we going?” Malachi might say more, but I’m doubled over, laughing too hard to tell.

“We’re bailing out Silas. Emphasis on the we, being this guy and me,” Thyrie says.

“I’m coming. Maybe, you need backup. I got your six.” Malachi’s offer is kind, but I know him enough to understand he’s offering as much for himself as for us. Mal’s got demons riding him hard as a result of his time in the service and the injuries he sustained.

“Fine. But we’re not waiting.” She’s not being unkind, but where Silas is concerned, there’s no way Thyrie will let anything slow her down in getting to him.

I’ll ask her to brief me on what we’re heading into once we get our helmets on, are mic’d up and in motion.

Malachi can get the details then, too, since our helmet mics are synced.

“Spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch. Let’s ride.” He waves around an arm, showing off the tactical watch strapped to his wrist and uses his hand to cup his junk.

“I swear he says the weirdest shit. I haven’t heard that since basic,” Thyrie mumbles. I hear the laugh she chokes back.

Since learning as much about Mal’s history as is unclassified and shareable, she and my brother have gotten close.

I know Thyrie and Silas had a drastically different time in the service, but some things are universally true for anyone who's been deployed.

Ironically, this will be the first time Silas and Malachi meet, since one or the other of them has been busy and unavailable lately.

Thyrie climbs on the bike behind me, her tight little body curled around mine in a way I'll never not be turned on by. Through the headset, she gives me an address and fills me in on the situation.

"Silas says one of the new guys was scheduled for overnight duty with him. Instead, he was busy flirting with the client's wife while Silas secured the estate for the night.

Apparently, that led to the client leaving his bedroom to look for his wife and seeing Silas checking the alarm on a window in the dining room.

Dude grabbed a skillet from the stove and whacked him upside the head with it.

Si needs the butterfly bandages. Let's be so for real.

He actually needs stitches, which he'll refuse, and someone to cover for him and Chrisman, who is so fired there won't be a shop in the state that'll hire him when I get done. "

"Chrisman?" Malachi asks through the mic.

"The new guy. Idiot can't keep his dick in his pants, apparently. Flirting with a client. Who does that?" Thyrie grouches, which makes me chuckle.

"Shut. up. You're lucky you're driving right now," she snaps when my laughter shakes my shoulders enough she can feel it.

“It’s just—”

“Not. Another. Word,” she growls.

“What happened? I never know the inside jokes!” Malachi whines.

“There’s no joke, and Hiram’s not laughing!” she yells, the volume much higher through the helmets.

“You’re right, Spitfire. I’m not laughing. And there’s no joking when I tell you I’m glad the official no-fraternizing rule didn’t go into effect until after I claimed you. Because there’s absolutely zero chance I’d have let anything stand between us.”

“Even a skillet to the head?” she jokes back, finally letting go of the pinched skin at my waist where she’d snuck her hand under my cut to punish me for my laughter.

“Even then, Spitfire. Even then.”

The night speeds by around us, the night air a temporary cocoon encapsulating me in exactly the life I never dared dream of. One I’ll never surrender.