



# Property of Shotgun (Kings Of Anarchy MC: New York #1)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** When anarchy reigns, nothing is truly forbidden.

From the time they were kids in Brooklyn, Shotgun knew he was meant to follow Irish everywhere. But living in the shadow of the man who got everything he ever wanted has tested the limits of Shotgun's loyalty. So when Irish brutally meets his maker, Shotgun's devotion shatters once and for all.

Stepping up to fill his fallen brother's shoes, Shotgun accepts his new role as VP of the Kings of Anarchy MC. Then the first in a long line of betrayals begins as Shotgun finds himself drawn to Irish's overwhelmed widow. Jade is the one woman Shotgun always wanted but could never have, and he can't stand by and just watch as she and her children drown in their grief.

Heartache pulls Shotgun and Jade together quickly, their connection deepening as they cope with their shared loss. Soon neither can deny that beneath their sadness simmers the potential for a red-hot passion. But defying the Kings' code would be a costly mistake for both of them since Jade still belongs to Irish in the club's eyes.

As Shotgun wrestles with the decision to face the wrath of his brothers, chaos erupts, and the new VP finds himself face-to-face with a deadly shot at revenge. But surviving means facing the demands of outlaw justice. Will Shotgun finally claim Jade or will their forbidden love also find its way to an early grave?

Property Of Shotgun is a thrilling tale of loyalty and forbidden love. Grab your kutte and get ready for a heart-wrenching ride that will leave you breathless.

**Total Pages (Source):** 18

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

## PROLOGUE

### SHOTGUN

The metal bites into my raw, chafed skin as I naively try to jerk my wrists free from the rusty cuffs that bind them together, but it's no use. There's no breaking free. Grinding my molars, I slam the back of my head against the steel pile, sweat and blood dripping from my face as a guttural sound rips from the back of my throat. It echoes off the concrete walls, bouncing through the decrepit pipes until it fades, and the only thing I hear is the pitiful moan of the man I consider my brother. The one who gave me a safe place to land when I was a child and a seat at his table when I became a man.

It's the first sign of life he's shown since the cunts who captured us came in and took his eye out.

That was after they beat us both senselessly and took three of his fingers, testing our loyalty not only to our club but to each other.

"Irish," I croak, my eyes darting to the corner where he lies. Like me, he is shackled, but he can no longer hold himself upright. Every second that passes a little more life drains from him. "You gotta hang in there, man. Please."

Another groan sounds from him, and I try like hell to think of what I can do to keep him with me. To keep him fucking talking. I put myself in his shoes like I've done a million times before, and picture all the things he has to live for. His sons, Legend, and Killian, and the third that's on the way.

His wife.

My eyes involuntarily close as an image of Jade works its way into my mind. I don't make a habit of thinking about Irish's woman. Hell—I do everything in my power to keep my distance. On occasions where it can't be avoided, I don't even look at her.

People can say a lot of things about me, but they can't say I don't learn from my mistakes.

My fists ball, and I tug against the metal cuffs. The sharp pain reroutes my train of thought for a moment, and I focus back on the task at hand. But there's no way to keep Irish alive without bringing her up. She's the one thing that will keep him fighting.

"I'm begging you, man. Do not make me be the guy who tells Jade you're gone."

A gurgling sound rips from the back of his throat as he hangs his head. His long hair hangs in sheets around his face, all matted and covered in blood.

"Jade." Her name comes out as a whisper.

"Yeah, man," I rasp. "You gotta make it out of here for her. For your kids, and for the club. We didn't suffer through all of this not to come out and seek revenge."

That last sentence falls flat for me. I started to lose track of time after they took Irish's eye. It feels like we've been trapped here for days and every second that passes, I lose hope in the idea of us getting out of here alive.

"You're not stupid, so stop acting like you are," he growls. I watch as he rolls onto his side. Spitting blood, he lifts his head. Bile rises in my throat as I stare at his mangled face. All the plastic surgery in the world won't fix him, and if I, a grown

fucking man who has seen his fair of carnage, can't look at him—how the hell are his kids ever going to?

“One of us is going to die, and it's gonna be me.”

Swallowing the acid gurgling in my throat, I shake my head. I understand why he's come to the conclusion that one of us will live and the other will die—they've taken their jabs at me, but it's been clear they have a hard on for Irish. Out of the two of us, I'm the weakest link. They figure if they beat and torture him, I'll eventually cave and give them the intel they desire. But if the Kings don't come for us soon, they'll be nothing left of Irish. They'll have no choice but to kill me next.

However, what Irish is suggesting isn't something I've considered. These motherfuckers are more calculative and vindictive than I give them credit for. Maybe the plan has always been for one of us to watch the other die. The surviving brother becomes the messenger, sending a clear fucking message straight to the Kings.

If that's the case, the fallen brother can't be Irish. I'm the better choice. I got nothing to lose. No wife. No children. Nothing. No one will grieve me.

I return my focus to Irish.

“Jade—”

He cuts me off. “Stop mention Jade and look at me! They took my fucking eye, Shotgun. They slashed my face and chopped off my fingers. In a little while those cocksuckers will come in here and take some more from me. Even if I hang in until the club comes for us, the damage is already done. I'll never be the man Jade married. She'll never be able to look at me again. You think she wants to spend the rest of her life fucking a monster every night?” He spits again, but holds his head upright, forcing me to keep my eyes pinned to his face. It's almost as if he's daring me to turn

my head and prove him right. I don't know how long we remain like that, but when I finally blink, he lowers his head. "Brother, if your hands weren't tied behind your back, I would've begged you to put me out of my misery already."

He could've begged all he wanted, but I never would've done it. I'm not sure what that says about me. I call myself a loyal man, I've kept my mouth shut and watched these animals maim and tortured my best friend, protecting our club, and honoring the oath I took. But if he asked me to take his life, I wouldn't do it. I'd continue to watch him be tortured because I'm a selfish fuck and I know the guilt of taking his life would ultimately lead to me taking my own.

"The Kings will take care of Jade and the kids financially," he says gruffly, drawing my attention back to him. "It won't be enough. She'll need help on a daily basis and my mother is in no condition to help her, especially when the baby comes." He pauses, an unintelligible sound ripping from the back of his throat. "Boys are going to get older. They're going to need someone to teach them how to be men."

"Irish, c'mon man, let's not do this," I plead. "Biggie isn't goin?—"

"You're not listening to me," he roars, using every ounce of strength left in his body. "I'm not making it out of this, and I need you to tell me you understand what I'm saying." He peers at me with his one eye. "She's going to hate everything and everyone. The love she has for me will turn to hate, and the resentment she feels will become the force that guides her in all she does. She's going to blame the club. She's going to push you away. Now, you stand here today as a man loyal to your word and the patch on your back and I'm asking you to treat Jade with the same respect. That no matter how far or hard she pushes, you stick with her. You look out for her and those kids and treat them the same way you'd treat your own."

He has no idea what he's asking of me and confessing that I've been pining over his wife since we were sixteen years old while he's on his deathbed would make me an

even bigger piece of shit. It doesn't matter that I saw her first. Jade was his, and she always will be.

“Promise me,” he demands. “Promise me you'll take care of them. That you'll push Jade to move on when the time is right. Don't let her waste her years mourning a man who never deserved her in the first place.”

I swallow thickly, no part of me wants to make any promises—certainly not ones that pertain to Jade but denying a man when he's on the brink of death is just as inhumane as chopping pieces of his body.

“I'll look after them,” I say hoarsely. “You have my word.”

Dropping his head, a sigh escapes his lips. “That's good as gold.”

He wouldn't be saying that if he knew how many nights I've laid awake thinking of his wife, wishing she were mine and not his.

The steel door opens, and the masked man who appears to be in charge of this butchering enters the cellar, flocked by two of his minions who are also masked. Only a pussy fucking wears a mask.

Won't save them though.

I'll figure a way to hunt them and I'll take everything from them. This cocksucker and his cronies might think they have the upper hand now, but soon they'll learn no one fucks with the Kings.

“I gotta say I admire your loyalty,” he croons, making his way toward Irish.

“Fuck you,” I spit, hoping to derail his attention. I'm not even sure Irish is alive at

this point. He hasn't made much noise since he made me promise to take care of Jade and the kids.

Even so, I ain't going to stand by and watch them chop off another part of him. I can't fight with my hands, but I can use whatever strength I have to piss these fucks off with my words. "You're going to regret every fucking thing you've done when I find your family, and make you watch as I cut them up into pieces."

A sinister chuckle echoes throughout the damp room, and the masked leader turns to me.

"That's not very nice to say after I've spared you," he tsks. "And here I was about to grant you some good news." He takes another step toward me, then comes to an abrupt stop. I watch as he reaches behind him, pulling out the long, serrated knife he used to hack off Irish's fingers. He lifts it between us like it's a trophy, examining it carefully before swiping at a spot of blood that lingers along the sharp edge. "Seems Biggie has come through, and my superior has ordered for your immediate release."

I don't trust this motherfucker one bit.

"I promised him one living King, but I never specified whom I'd deliver." He turns to one of his minions. "Is he still alive?"

My gaze darts to where Irish lays, and I watch the black clad figure bend in front of him, touching his fingers to Irish's neck. He turns slightly and nods.

"There's a pulse."

The masked man's gaze flits back to me. "Quite impressive, wouldn't you say?"

"Leave him alone," I growl. "You need a body. Take mine."

He laughs wickedly. “That’s not your decision to make.”

“You have no fucking idea what a grave mistake you’re making. Nothing and no one in your circle will ever be safe after this. If you don’t kill me, I’m going to make it my life’s mission to come after you. And I’m going to make everyone you know and love suffer. Your wife. Your kids. Your fucking parents. No one will be off limits. So make the right choice, motherfucker. Choose me.”

Keeping his eyes trained to me, he orders his men to bring Irish over to us. They unchain him and lift him from the ground. Irish moans faintly and they drag his limp body toward us. I inwardly flinch when I get a glimpse of his face, but I don’t stare at him for too long. I don’t want the last memory of him to be like this.

The masked fuck glances from me back to Irish, and I feel my adrenaline spike. I tug my wrists, and oddly enough I don’t feel any pain. My wrists are raw and bloody, and I still fight with everything I got.

“Let him fucking go,” I roar, the metal cuffs clanking against the pipe as I continue to tug.

Then, before I can even blink, the masked cunt lifts his knife and drives it straight across Irish’s neck. Blood spurts from his jugular, and the two men holding him remove their hands from under his arms. A feral noise rips from the back of my throat as I watch my brother fall forward, his blood pooling around his lifeless body.

“You tell Biggie there is only one King of New York City, and it isn’t him. The next time he makes a move on the seaport, I’ll take more than just his vice president’s life.”

It’s a declaration of war.



But for me it's a warrant for his death.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

### ONE

“Fuck,” Guido mutters as the cage comes to slow stop. The sound of his voice has me focusing my blurry vision on the scene ahead of us. It’s not the dozen or so motorcycles that gives him pause, though. It’s the pregnant woman standing outside the clubhouse with the two prospects.

“Why is Jade here?” I rasp, turning my head to glance at Guido.

His fingers tighten around the steering wheel, and he shakes his head. “As soon as we got word you and Irish had been taken hostage, Biggie put the club on lockdown. He sent Jersey up to Syracuse to get Annie from college, and Taxi took Jade and the boys over. Cook’s old lady is here and so is Bella. I asked her to bring some supplies from the hospital. She’ll patch your wrists up.”

It makes perfect sense that Biggie would put the club on lockdown given the circumstances, but I don’t think anyone expected her to be outside when we rolled up. Irish’s body is in the back of the cage rolled up in a fucking tarp.

Guido tips his chin toward the windshield. “Looks like Biggie is trying to get her to go inside.”

My gaze cuts back to the windshield and I watch as our president makes his way toward Jade. I can’t make out what he or she says, but I see her shake her head before her eyes cut to the cage. Everything in me ceases in that moment, and my mind recalls Irish’s desperate pleas to me. Before I can even process what I’m doing, I reach for the handle on the passenger door. I make my way out of the truck, my

bruised body protesting in agony the moment my boots touch the asphalt.

As soon as Jade spots me, she breaks away from Biggie and the rest of the club, charging straight for me. But something makes her stop in her tracks, and I watch idly as her eyes rake over me, taking in all my injuries, and the blood that stains my clothes—some of it mine, some of it her husband's.

Her throat visibly bobs with a swallow.

“Where is he?” she shrieks, her eyes bouncing from me to the cage behind me. “Is he hurt?” Sensing she's about to break for the back of the truck I step in front of her, blocking her path.

“Don't,” I rasp.

Her gaze flits to mine, and those pretty brown eyes fill with tears. The only person who has ever been able to read me other than Irish, is her. I don't need to say the words for her to know he's dead. It's written all over my miserable face.

“No,” she rasps as her eyes go wide. “No, no, no. He can't be.”

“Sweetheart,” Biggie drawls, but she pays him no mind as she keeps her eyes pinned to me. This is exactly what I feared. That hopeless look in her eyes—I never wanted to see it.

“He's gone, isn't he?” She asks me.

When I don't answer she steps forward, her fingers curling around my leather kutte. “For fuck's sake don't just stand there like a statue, Shotgun. Answer me.”

Staring into her eyes, listening to her speak, feeling her hands on my body—it's a

punch to the throat. I don't want to be the man who breaks her heart. I don't want to be the man who makes those pretty eyes go cold and dead.

The dam breaks and her lower lip trembles as the tears spill down her cheeks.

“You let them kill him? You fucking let them kill him!”

Every King will argue otherwise, but those words ring true. I kept my mouth shut, and for all the words I didn't say, they took another piece of the man she loved. Then when I finally spoke, they killed him. Slit his throat wide and deep. The image forever memorialized in my mind.

She releases my kutte, balling her fists before she pummels my chest. An anguished sob escapes the back of her throat. It's a sound that will live rent free inside of my head for the rest of my life. Her knees start to buckle, and I reach for hips, ignoring the pain that bites at my raw wrists as I hold her steady.

“How could you?” she cries, her body trembling as another sob racks through her. “How could you let them kill him? After everything he did for you.” She sends a punch to the center of my chest. “After everything he gave you!”

Jade's seen it all, and just like she's been the gatekeeper of all Irish's secrets, she's been the keeper of mine as well. She knows my past and the fact that I'd be nothing but a strung-out prostitute's starving son if it weren't for Irish. He and his mom took me in, they gave me a purpose, and if it weren't for their generosity, I'd be nothing. Hell, I probably wouldn't have even made it to adulthood. Everything I have and everything I am, I attribute to mainly to Irish, including the colors on my back.

“I'm sorry, Jade,” I croak as she continues to beat at my chest. There isn't much power behind her punches, but my body is battered, making it feel like an iron fist is hammering away at me. I don't flinch. I don't move a muscle. I just take it, hoping

every blow she delivers takes away some of her pain. Deep down I know it won't. She's broken, never to be whole again, and that knowledge sends another dagger straight through my chest.

"Would trade places with him if I could," I rasp.

Her fists go still, and she pushes off me, swiping at her tears with the backs of her hands.

"Then do it," she dares, her tone pitched high. "Sacrifice your life for his. He'd do it for you. No questions asked." She spins around, her long, brown hair flapping over her shoulders. "He'd do it for any one of you. He'd do anything for that fucking patch. He'd leave me, and his kids for it. Tear our family apart and destroy our future for the Kings of Anarchy." Her shoulders shake as she sobs uncontrollably, her eyes darting to the back of the cage. "Oh, God...." She wails, lifting her hand to cover her mouth as her mind works overtime to make sense of everything. My frame tightens as I watch her closely, the urge to reach for her—to console her, rips through me. She drops her hand from her mouth, eyes blazing with fury and so much fucking hurt as she peers back at me. "That's what happened, isn't it? He didn't even fight for us, did he?"

I won't confirm or deny her suspicions. The less she knows the better. I don't know what happens from here. I don't think any of us do. All I know for certain is the Kings of Anarchy are at war, and aside from avenging Irish's death, my number one priority is to keep his family safe.

When no one answers her, she straightens to her full height and stalks toward the back of the cage. She lifts her hands, laying her palms flat against the back doors.

Hanging her head, she rasps, "Open it. I want to see him."

Biggie takes a step toward her, and for a second I think he might oblige. Panic surges through me and I blurt, “You don’t want to see him like that, Jade.”

She lifts her head and her grief-stricken eyes lock with mine. “Don’t tell me what I want, Shotgun. I need to see him. It won’t be real until I do.” She diverts her attention to Biggie. “Open the damn truck!”

I don’t think I’ve ever heard Jade talk out of line to Biggie or to any member of the Kings for that matter. She’s the picture-perfect old lady—always plays by the rules and never asks questions. When Irish became Vice President, she took on a more prominent role, making sure the clubhouse was always intact. The kitchen is fully stocked and the booze is always flowing. Rumor has it she’s the one responsible for the endless supply of condoms too. She’s the backbone we didn’t know we needed, and tonight we didn’t just fail Irish, we failed her.

“I can’t let you see him like that, sweetheart. He ain’t whole, and that should not be the last memory you have of him,” Biggie says.

Those words break her, they split her in two, and she crumbles to the floor before any of us can catch her. Biggie drops to his knees, trying to gather her in his arms, but she fights him, thrashing, slamming her hands against the asphalt.

“Sweetheart, you need to breathe,” Biggie says. “All this...it ain’t good for the baby.”

Her fists go still against my chest, and she pushes off me, swiping at her tears with the backs of her hands before she turns to Biggie.

“You know what’s not good for the baby? Not having a father,” she snaps.

Regret flashes over Biggie’s features and he swipes a hand over his face.

“I’m sorry, darlin’. That was a poor choice of words. I know you’re hurting?—”

“You don’t know shit,” she fires back. “I trusted you. He trusted all of you.” Her eyes flit back to me, and she pushes her hair away from her face. “I want to see him. I need to see him.”

One thing about Jade, she doesn’t quit. Not when she gets something in her head, and not on her man.

A vision of Irish pleading with me before they came in and slit his throat flashes before me, and I push it to the back of my head, forcing a swallow.

“He didn’t want you to see him,” I say hoarsely. “Not like that. What they did to him... the way they tortured him, it was inhumane.”

“Tell me,” she demands weakly.

“No.”

“I deserve to know. I’m his wife. The mother of his children,” she cries. “Doesn’t that count for anything?”

“It counts for everything,” Biggie replies, pressing a hand to her back. “We can’t erase what happened. Losing Irish will stick with all of us until we draw our last breaths, but I give you my word, right here, right now, you and your children will always be taken care of.”

Her beautiful face contorts in agony, and her hands fall to her rounded stomach as she weeps.

“I can’t do this... I can’t do life without him.”

Those are the last words she says before she's overcome by her grief, anything after that is intelligible. Biggie pulls her to her feet and wraps his arms around her tiny frame. She falls against him, and just cries.

She cries for the man she loved with every part of her being.

She cries for their children.

The two that will wake in the morning and wonder where their father is, and the one who has yet to be born that will never know him.

She cries and cries all through the night, mourning the only love she's ever known.

It's heartbreaking, and just when you think things can't get worse, they do.

They always fucking do.



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

TWO

JADE

I knew from the moment I first laid eyes on Duke Callahan, he'd break my heart, but I was a young, impressionable girl, and try as I might, I couldn't ignore his charms. I didn't know how it would happen, though.

I guess that impressionable girl grew to be a naïve woman.

Ignoring all the warnings was easy, especially in the early days of him becoming a member of the Kings of Anarchy and taking on the persona of Irish. There was something sexy about the lifestyle we were entering. The long motorcycle rides that always ended with us tangled between the sheets, and the clubhouse parties that often ran on for days. Anywhere we went, people stopped and stared at us.

I think mostly out of curiosity but there was a certain degree of fear too, and with fear came respect. Don't get me wrong, there were people who looked at us like we were the scum of the Earth, but they were in the minority. Most people bent over backwards when they saw anyone with a Kings of Anarchy patch, and I was one of the only women with a property patch, which resulted in me being viewed as a queen.

For example, there are women who get pulled over for blowing a light or disobeying speed limits—I've always been more the latter—but instead of flashing a smile or flirting with the cop to get out of the ticket, all I ever had to do was tell the officer I was on the way to meet my husband at the clubhouse. Occasionally the cop on duty would ask who my husband was, but usually all I had to do was drop a mention of the

Kings, and I'd be sent on my way.

That's when I realized half the cops in Brooklyn were on the Kings payroll but knowing that still didn't raise any red flags for me. Maybe it's true what they say... ignorance is bliss.

I mean we had a good life. We broke the chains of generational trauma and bought our first house before either of us turned twenty-one. It was right around the time the club opened their first legitimate business, Monty's Pork Store. It was originally owned by Guido's grandfather, and when the club took possession, they started laundering their money through it. Every Wednesday Irish would take the stacks of money in my underwear drawer and move them through Monty's.

Where the money came from never bothered me. I didn't ask questions. I didn't worry. My husband was out there doing his thing, providing for me and our kids, and every night he came home to me. He did the dishes, picked up after the boys, and topped off the night by fucking me just the way I liked it.

Even after the club opened Lipstick & Lace, and he was surrounded by whores who were more than happy to drop to their knees and suck his cock, he came home to me and fucked my mouth.

I never worried about him cheating on me. Not once in sixteen years.

Still there was always this feeling in the pit of my gut that it would all blow up. That I would eventually end up crying over him. He got locked up a few times, and that's when the feeling started to grow. It festered and metastasized inside me as Irish climbed the ranks of the club, and when he was elected Vice President, I couldn't ignore it anymore.

I had stuck by man through thick and thin, but him having such a powerful position,

knowing he was likely next in line for the throne, threw me. I voiced my concerns, and Irish did what he did best—he shoved money at me the problem. He thought buying me a fully loaded Escalade would somehow make all my worries disappear, and when they didn't, he went to plan B and distracted me with his cock.

Three weeks later, I learned I was pregnant again, and instead of worrying about my husband going to jail for life, I began to concern myself with vision boards of a nursery, and all things pink, thinking if I manifested it enough, God would give us a little girl after two perfect boys.

Irish entertained my excitement, and after our twenty-week sonogram where we learned we were having another boy, he softened the blow by buying us a brand-new five-bedroom house in Mill Basin, promising me we'd try for a girl soon after our third boy was born.

That's how Irish operated. He bought lavish things and made big promises. He never saved for a rainy day or worried about what ifs—he lived life in the fast lane, to hell with everything else.

And when it came down to his life or his club, he chose his club. He chose the Kings of Anarchy over me and the boys, and as much as I love him, I don't think I'll ever forgive him for it.

“Mommy, we say goodbye to Daddy, now?”

The sweet sound of my youngest son, Raiden's innocent voice pulls me out of my head, and I glance down at him, my heart breaking at the sight of him dressed in a black suit. I bought it two weeks ago at Nordstroms with his little brother's christening in mind. I'm only thirty-two weeks, so the christening is ways off, but I couldn't pass it up. I didn't get a dress shirt, though, so he's wearing a simple white T-shirt, and a fresh pair of Air Force One's.

I smooth a hand over his dark hair—long just like his daddy’s.

“Yeah, baby. Where’s Legend?” I ask, lacing my fingers with his. I smooth my free hand over my bump. The black dress I chose for the funeral is a little snug, but it was Irish’s favorite.

“With Uncle Shotty.”

My body goes still at that. I haven’t been able to look at Shotgun since the night he stepped out of the cage, and learned his life was spared. It hurts too much, and I feel horrible for even thinking that because Shotgun has always been such a big part of my life. He may have been Irish’s best friend, but he was mine too. He was the first friend I made when my grandma and I moved to Brooklyn, and if it weren’t for him, Irish and I would’ve never met.

He was there for everything.

All the milestones.

He was the best man at our wedding, and the first to visit me when I gave birth.

We made him Godfather to both our boys, and I just know Irish was planning on asking him to baptize our third.

He’s been part of our family long before he and Irish became brothers of the patch and I’ve got a lot of love for him.

No part of me wants him dead, but two men were taken in a vicious attack on the club, and only one came back alive. It’s going to take time for me to make peace with that.

Leading Raiden toward the door, I pause and slip my feet into my Louboutin's—another lavish gift from my dead husband. I wish he valued his life as much as he valued the designer labels he spoiled me with.

We make our way to the common area, and the room goes silent as soon we enter. Many members from neighboring chapters have come to pay their respects over the last few days, but I don't think I've ever seen so many Kings in one place at the same time. It's a little unnerving to be honest, and all I want to do is turn around and hide in Irish's room.

"Mommy," Raiden tugs at my hand, pulling my attention away from the sea of leather. "Who these people?"

"Daddy's brothers..." My voice trails as I glance around the room again. I try to put names to all the faces, but it's impossible. There's just too many. Needing an anchor, my gaze locks with Shotgun's, and my breath hitches slightly. Avoiding him helped me block out the injuries he sustained to his face, but there is no escaping them now. For every bruise, there is a stitched gash, making the tattoos that decorate his face hard to detect.

I stare at the one just under the corner of his right eye. A diamond with the number thirteen inside of it, marking Legend's birthday. Adjacent to it, under the corner of his left eye, the roman numerals read eight. He got that one the day after Raiden's birthday. I wonder where he'll ink the new baby's number.

He breaks our stare, and turns to Legend, murmuring something to my son before he returns his attention to me. I don't know what makes me walk toward him. Maybe it's the unease that swirls through my body, or perhaps it's my subconscious. Everyone here is mourning Irish, but the only person who feels anything close to what I'm feeling is him.

Reaching him, my gaze falls to his leather kutte, and I'm shocked to find the patch that once labeled my husband as the vice president, is sewn to it. The urge to trace my finger over it tugs at me, but I keep my hand firmly at my side.

My eyes fly up to meet his. "When did that happen?"

"This morning."

I know things move quickly around here, especially with the club in such a volatile state, but it still feels like another punch to the gut.

"Uncle Shotty it's time to say goodbye to Daddy," Raiden says, and once again our stare off is broken. He looks up at me. "We go in the car now?"

"Yeah, baby."

"Guido left to go get Irene from the home, and Skid brought your truck around," Shotgun says, diverting my gaze back to him. That's when I notice he's holding my key fob. I'm about to ask him if he plans on driving, but my eyes lock on the bandages circling his wrists, and I lose my train of thought. It doesn't take long for him to bring me back to focus, though. "If you're ready, I'll tell Biggie to round up the bikes, and we'll roll out."

"I don't know that I'll ever be ready," I whisper, my voice catching slightly.

Irish could've lived a full life, and I could've buried him when we were old and gray and I still wouldn't be ready to say goodbye. It doesn't help that I didn't even get to have a proper wake for him. No one would let me see him, and the morning after I learned of his death, Biggie told me he was sending his body to the crematory.

I raged at the audacity.

He was my husband. It should've been my decision to make.

But I suppose I should be grateful he asked if I wanted to keep his ashes.

I considered it too—but what happens when I die? I haven't given death much thought, but I do not want to be cremated, and it doesn't seem fair leaving our kids to deal with the responsibility of Irish's ashes.

I can't have him in life, but I can have him for eternity, and so with that in mind, I demanded the club by a double plot. Irish's ashes will be buried there today, and when it's my time, I'll be buried with them. Our boys won't have to fight over an urn. They'll be able to visit us whenever they want.

The baby decides to kick at that moment, and I press my hand to my bump. Tears brim in my eyes as I feel the life Irish and I created move inside of me.

At least I have them.

My sweet boys.

"Is everything okay?" Shotgun asks. "The baby?"

"He's kicking." His eyes zero in on my stomach but he doesn't say anything. I blow out a breath, internally pulling myself together. "I'm ready."

He stares at me for a moment, then jerks his head toward where Biggie sits at the bar. With a tip of his chin, he signals its time. Biggie alerts the crowd, and as Shotgun and I get the boys situated in my truck, the Kings of Anarchy straddle their Harleys. I stare out the windshield at all the bikes, and my heart hammers away when they roar to life, the sound deafening.

Biggie leads the convoy of New York Kings past the compound gates, and the hearse carrying Irish follows. Shotgun pulls my Escalade behind it, and the members from all the neighboring charters trail behind us. It's a sight I'll never forget.

A send off fit for a King.

Irish would proud.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

THREE

SHOTGUN

I feel like I'm suffocating, and while I want to blame it on the fact I'm driving Jade's truck and I don't remember the last time I was behind the wheel of anything, I can't be too sure. I sneak a glance in the rearview mirror, eyeing Legend as he stares mindlessly out the window. I'm worried about him. Raiden doesn't get what has happened, but being a little older, Legend understands more, and I get the sense he has questions he's too afraid to ask.

Questions I'll be tasked to answer when he's older.

Until then, I'm not sure how to proceed, and I don't feel comfortable discussing it with Jade. At least not yet. She only just started speaking to me after avoiding me like the plague. I get it, though. She wishes it were me being buried today and looking at my mug only stands as a reminder that she's not.

I probably should've given her the space she desires by letting one of the prospects drive her and the kids to the cemetery, but I selfishly wanted them close to me.

"Is this it?" she asks as the hearse rolls to a stop in front of us. I turn to her, watching as her fingers twist the hem of dress. It's a nervous habit of hers. If she weren't wearing a dress, she'd be tugging the sleeves of her shirt over her hands and twisting them. I used to tease her about it when we were younger.

That seems so long ago.

Clearing my throat, I glance out the window. Biggie dismounts from his bike, and signals for the rest of our chapter to do the same before they head for the back of the hearse to carry the casket containing Irish's remains to the plot we purchased yesterday.

I turn back to Jade. "Yeah, it's just up that hill."

My gaze darts to the designer heels she's wearing, and I frown. In the years since she and Irish married, her style has evolved. She went from being the girl who favored the latest pair of Jordans, vintage band tees, and baggie jeans with cuts in the knee that always rode low on her hips, to a woman who gets her hair blown out twice a week and wears six-inch heels and outfits that cost more than my rent. Both versions are beautiful, but I wish the practical girl from apartment B4 showed up today. The ground is soft from all the rain we had yesterday, and there's no way those heels are making it up that hill.

"What is it? Why are you looking at me like that?"

My eyes snap up to hers. "You don't happen to have another pair of shoes in your trunk, do you?"

Her brow furrows. "What's wrong with my shoes?"

"Nothing, aside from the fact you're not making it up that hill in those things."

She purses her lips, popping her seatbelt free. "Watch me."

Right. In doing my best to avoid spending any time alone with Jade, I forgot how fucking stubborn the woman is. Not looking to aggravate her on what will likely be the most emotional day of her life, I bite the inside of my cheek.

She opens the passenger door, and gets out, going right to the back seat to help Raiden out of his booster seat. I kill the engine on the truck and go to do the same with Legend, but the kid is quick to exit the truck on his own. I hit the lock button on the fob, and shove the keyring inside the inner pocket of my kutte.

“Is she going to fall or something with her shoes?” Legend asks as we round the back of the truck, walking side by side.

I glance down, laying my hand on his shoulder. His concern for mom is palpable. The kid just lost his dad, and he doesn’t understand why. It’s not unnatural for him to fear something is going to happen to his mother too.

“No, we won’t let her.” I give his shoulder a squeeze.

“How?” Legend asks.

My gaze cuts to Jade, as she quietly talks with Raiden.

“Well, we’ll just have to stick close and catch her if she starts to stumble.”

“But you’re bleeding, What if you’re not quick enough?” he asks, his big, brown eyes narrowing at the blood stains on the gauze circling my wrists.

It’s easy for me to ignore them. I’ve gotten used to the burning and stretching sensation, but every little movement makes the skin rip open under the bandages and I bleed. It’s more annoying than it is painful at this point because it’s prohibiting me from riding. But I get how the sight of my wrists could scare a little kid.

“That’s why I said we .” I crouch down to make myself eye level with him. “Remember what I told you back at the clubhouse when your mom was getting Raiden dressed?”

His tongue sneaks out and wets his lips as he nods. “I’m the man of the house now.”

“That’s right. Do you remember what else I said?”

“You promised to always be there for me and Raiden, and mom too. But on the days when you can’t, I need to step up and help mom out.” He pauses for a beat. “It’s like my football team. Sometimes we tap in other players on the team to make a play.”

“It’s exactly like that.”

“So we’re a team? You, me, Raiden, and Mommy?”

I swallow thickly, wondering what Irish would think of me infiltrating my way into his family. I want to believe this is what he had in mind when he asked me to look after them, but it still feels like I’m doing something wrong.

“Yeah, bud. Is that okay with you?”

He seems to give it some thought before holding up his pinky finger. “It is if you promise not to die like daddy did.”

Fuck.

I don’t know if that’s something Irish or I considered when he was knocking on death’s doorstep. Neither of us anticipated our brothers would elect me to take his place as vice president of the club. At least I sure as fuck didn’t. I suppose it’s fitting, though, as I’ve always been two steps behind Irish, standing in the shadows.

I’m not saying my new rank makes me more of a target, but the club is in a bad place. More blood will be shed—there’s no way around it. I don’t want to make a promise to the kid that I can’t keep.

I stare into his wide, expectant eyes, and against my better judgement, I wrap my pinky around his.

“Promise,” I rasp.

“Legend,” Jade calls. “Come hold Mommy’s hand.”

He gives my pinky a final tug, then releases it.

“Duty calls, kid,” I say as I straighten to my full height. He salutes me, then turns and rushes for his mom. I stare at the three of them for a beat. Jade in those ridiculous heels that are already sinking into the wet Earth, and the two boys—one dressed like a mini rapper going to an awards show, and the other in jeans, and his daddy’s kutte that is impossibly too big for him, the Kings Of Anarchy patch on his back. Then I turn my head and watch as my brothers lift the casket from the hearse.

Part of me wants to join them, but a bigger part knows my place is with his family.

Two steps behind, standing in the shadows.

Waiting to catch them if they fall.

The procession makes it way up the hill, pausing to give the guys a moment to situate the casket. As we all stand there waiting, Jade’s heels sink into the grass. If I wasn’t worried my wrists would split open entirely, I’d carry her the rest of the few feet.

Jersey pushes Irish’s mother’s wheelchair up to the grave site, and Jade goes to follow but her shoes get stuck as she tries to take a step. I’m about to bend down and pull the heels out of the mud when she releases Legend’s hand and takes the shoes off her feet. She doesn’t even bother to pick them up, she just takes her boys’ hands and marches the rest of the way up the hill barefoot.

“That woman is a force,” Guido says lowly from beside me. “Barefoot in a cemetery, burying her ol’ man. Makes me wish I had an ol’ lady that loved me half as much as she loved him.”

“Loves,” I correct, my jaw clenching.

He turns to face me, his brows drawn tight. “Huh?”

“Just because he’s dead don’t mean her love for him died with him.”

I grab her shoes and proceed to follow her up the hill. Guido parks Irene’s chair next to Jade, and I stand close behind as the traditional Catholic service begins—a nod to Irish’s mom, and the religion she tried so hard to instill in her son.

I try to follow along, but my eyes keep darting to Jade’s bare feet, all covered in dirt and grass clippings. Foolishly, I glance around the cemetery like a pair of women’s flats are going to miraculously drop from the fucking sky. Grinding my molars, my gaze lands on one of the prospects who looks to be playing with his fucking hands instead of paying attention to the priest.

“Skid,” I growl.

He doesn’t acknowledge me, so I call him again, this time a little louder which effectively causes Jade to turn and glare at me. Ignoring her, I stalk over to Skid, smacking my hand against his chest. He startles, lifting his hand to pull out an ear bud.

What a disrespectful little shit.

“Take off your shirt.”

“Come again?”

Gritting my teeth, I pluck at the cotton under his leather vest. “Your shirt. Take it the fuck off.”

“Brother, we’re at a funeral.”

“And you’ve got fucking Air Pods in your ears. Lose the shirt.”

He stares at me wide-eyed for a beat, then shrugs off his kutte. I grab it from him, waiting as he pulls the shirt over his head.

“Now what?”

I hand him back the kutte and take the shirt before I turn back to where Jade is standing, glaring at me.

“Are you done causing a scene?” she hisses.

Guido hit the nail on the head when he said she’s a force.

Holding her shoes in one hand, I use my other to shake out the shirt, laying it on top of the grass in front of her. My eyes take notice of the pale pink polish on her toes before I pop up and resume my position behind her. Heat creeps up the back of my neck as I feel the heavy weight of everyone’s stare.

She glances down at the shirt, then steps forward, placing her feet over it. Turning her head, her eyes find mine over her shoulder, and she whispers, “Thank you.”

But when the words hit my ears, it’s Irish’s voice I hear.

After the burial, the visiting chapters returned to our clubhouse, and some of the presidents sat down with Biggie, offering their assistance with the war. Some offered weaponry, others offered manpower. It was generous of them, but before we could take them up on any of it, we needed a plan of attack, and Biggie owed me a sit down.

The last few days have been chaotic, but now, with Irish laid to rest, and the other Kings on their way home, it was time to get down to business. The club couldn't stay on lockdown forever, and I was hungry for revenge.

"Hey, Shotgun, I'm heading out," Bella says, diverting my attention from the beer I just opened. Guido stands closely behind, his hands shoved in his pockets, eyes stuck on his boots.

Once upon a time their parents dated each other, and after they broke up, Guido and Bella remained friends. A couple of years ago, Bella became a trauma nurse, and every once in a while, when mayhem strikes, Guido calls on Bella. She's removed a bullet from Stacks and stitched almost every guy here. Us Kings have a soft spot for the girl.

"Club is still on lockdown."

Guido lifts his head, meeting my gaze. "She's got a shift at the hospital."

I nod. "I assume you're going to stick around there then."

"That's the plan."

Normally Bella would argue, but I think she's shaken up by Irish's death. She points to my left wrist. "Do you want me to change the bandages before I go? They look like they're starting to bleed again."



I glance at the gauze and shake my head. “I’ll be fine, babe. Appreciate you.”

“Okay, well, Jade went to put the boys to bed so I didn’t get to say goodbye. I told Guido, but it’s worth repeating—if she needs any help, I’m just a phone call away.”

“Thank you, Bells. I be sure to pass the message along.”

She turns to Guido. “Am I allowed to drive my car or am I riding on the back of your bike in my scrubs?”

“The wind don’t care what you wear when you ride it, babe,” Guido says as he removes one hand from his pocket and presses against Bella’s lower back. He tips his chin. “See you later.”

Lifting my beer, I tip the neck toward him before bringing it to my lips and taking a long swig. From the corner of my eye I spot Biggie walking toward me. He rounds the bar, tagging a bottle of bourbon from the shelf, then reaches for a glass.

“You want some?”

I shake my head. “I’m good with the beer.”

“Suit yourself.” He starts fixing his drink, dumping a handful of ice into the glass before he fills it generously.

“We need to talk.”

His eyes lift and lock with mine. “It’s been a long day.”

I lean forward, propping my forearms on top of the bar. “Every day is long when you’re at war. You put me at your left, in his chair after I watched him die. I need to

know where we go from here, Biggie.”

He stares at me for a beat, his nostrils flaring as he lifts his glass and takes a drink, nearly draining the contents of the glass in one gulp. He sets the glass down and eyes my wrist.

“We don’t go anywhere until you can throttle an engine without bleeding all over your Harley.” He sighs, swiping a hand over his face. “I know that ain’t what you want to hear, but it’s all I got to give right now. I have a meeting with the Mondestino brothers in the morning.”

Vito Mondestino is the head of the Campanello crime family, and his brother Bruno is a foreman at the Longshoreman’s Association. They were the ones seeking control of the Brooklyn Seaport, not us. But in Vito’s quest to expand his territory, he made a deal with the Kings. We supplied him with the weapons his organization used on a raid targeting the Albanians.

We scrub our guns before we deliver them to anyone so I’m not fucking sure how the Albanians tracked them back to us, but when Irish and I went to deliver a new batch to the docks, where Bruno was supposed to be there ready and waiting to collect, we were ambushed.

“I don’t trust the Mondestino brothers as far as I can throw them,” I share. “Our guns were clean, Biggie. There is no fucking way the Albanians could trace them back to us without someone in the Campanello family giving them the intel.”

“You think I don’t know that?” he asks, his tone gravely. “Do you have any idea what we’re looking at if that’s the case? We’re talking about taking out one of the most notorious crime families on the East Coast. I don’t got a problem doing it—but it needs to be executed perfectly, and it can’t be done before we drain them dry of everything they got. I’m anticipating tomorrow’s meeting will result in them giving

up the Albanians. The way I see it, they set us up so that we would do their dirty work and take them out.”

I give that some thought. “So the Italians use our guns to kill one of the Albanians’ top guys, and they retaliate by killing Irish.”

“Vito wants Fatmir out of the picture, and he knows a King’s death is always avenged. He cleared the path for us to take out his guy.”

“Fatmir is the leader?”

“Yeah. He’s the one I was negotiating with.”

“That’s not who killed Irish. I told you there were three guys.”

“But he’s the one who ordered the hit.”

I see where he’s going with this, but I feel it necessary to make myself perfectly clear. “You want to take out Fatmir.”

He raises an eyebrow. “Don’t you?”

“I want to take them all out. We don’t get to the masked cunts who killed Irish without Fatmir. They gotta be first, then we take out the rest, including the leader. But it don’t end there, Biggie. I want the fucking Mondestino’s too. Every fucking one of them.”

“Understood, but that’s going to take time. Mondestino played with me, now it’s my turn to play with him. We’re going to do his bidding for him and take out the Albanians just like he planned, all while planning our strike against him.”

Satisfied with that answer, I nod. “One more thing. I don’t care who puts hands on them. I know everyone here wants to avenge Irish’s death, and play their part, but I draw the last breath out of the three men who tortured us, and Fatmir is mine, and mine alone.”

“Then you better get those wrists healed, because I expect you to wreak havoc on those motherfuckers, and in the condition you’re in, you can’t even jerk your own cock.”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

FOUR

JADE

I never minded that Irish had a room at the clubhouse. All the guys did, and my husband was no exception.

In the earlier years, it was convenient after a night of partying. But after we started having kids, I didn't let loose all that much, and the nights I spent here were more about safety. I kept a drawer for myself, and one for the kids. They were mostly filled with the necessities, a couple of outfits, some underwear, and of course pajamas. I was big on pajamas, tops and bottoms always had to match, even if they wound up rolled into a ball on the floor. Same for bras and panties.

There were some toys in the closet too, and a crib in the corner from when Raiden was a baby. I wanted them to feel comfortable and have everything they needed when things got rough around here, and everything felt uncertain. Irish was happy to oblige, but as much as we tried to shield them, and make these lockdowns as normal as possible, things changed as Legend got older. I don't know if he could sense the tension or what, but he stopped buying our lies about the lockdowns being big slumber parties. It's true what they say—the kids succumbed to this lifestyle grow up faster than the kids whose parents make honest livings.

I pull the blanket up over both the boys, pressing my lips gently to Legend's forehead first, then I do the same to Raiden. They look so peaceful and innocent,

Pure.

Smoothing a hand down my silk maternity pajamas, my hand pauses on my bump as I head for the door, pausing to glance over my shoulder at my boys one more time before I exit the room and make my way to the common area.

I excused myself a couple of hours ago, after the brothers did a shot in honor of Irish. Faking pleasantries and taking the condolences offered by people I didn't know was exhausting. I just wanted to crawl into bed with my boys, and revel in the scent of Irish's cologne that still lingered on the sheets.

The boys struggled to fall asleep, which was surprising because it was such a long day. But they didn't have their daddy there to make an adventure of bedtime like he often did when we had to spend nights here, and I was a poor replacement.

I don't know how to be their mother and their father, but I do know I am not going to figure it out here, surrounded by the men who wear the same patch as he did.

The patch that stole him from us.

We need to be home, in our own house, finding a way to grieve while gathering the courage to move on.

I step out of the shadows, immediately spotting Biggie and Shotgun. A few other members loiter around the room, but they're the only ones at the bar. Drawing in a deep breath, I make my way over to them. I know better to interrupt, especially when they seem to be in deep conversation, so I pace myself.

Shotgun's voice grows louder, though, and it's impossible for me to ignore his words.

"...I know everyone here wants to avenge Irish's death, and play their part, but I draw the last breath out of the three men who tortured us, and Fatmir is mine, and mine alone."

I don't catch Biggie's reply. I'm too stuck on the name he dropped, wondering if that's who killed my husband.

"Jade, sweetheart," Biggie calls.

Startled, I blink at him wordlessly for a moment. Shotgun turns in his stool, but he just stares at me, his expression blank. "You need something? The boys?—"

I tear my eyes away from Shotgun and meet Biggie's gaze. "We're leaving. I have a doctor's appointment tomorrow, and Legend has school. We need to get back to our routines."

"Honey," he sighs. "It isn't safe."

"I understand the concern, so I will tolerate a prospect. You can have him tail me or stand guard at the house. Whatever you decide, I won't try to interfere, but I can't stay here. I will lose my mind, Biggie, and my kids can't afford to lose another parent. I'm asking for your grace."

My voice quivers at that last part. I'm not opposed to begging if that's what it takes.

He turns his attention to Shotgun which results in me doing the same. I can tell by the tight set of his jaw he doesn't like the idea.

"It can't be Skid," he says firmly, his eyes cutting to Biggie. "The kid can't even tie his fucking shoelaces." He turns back to me. "Just so we're clear, I don't like this."

That comes as no surprise to me. The man forced a brother to take his shirt off at my husband's funeral so I wouldn't stand barefoot in the dirt. It's also no surprise that my oldest has been clinging to him since he learned his dad died. Legend has always favored his Uncle Shotty, and I know he's going to need him, probably about as

much as Shotgun is going to need Legend to feel close to Irish. I'm not looking to take that away from either of them. I just need time.

"I didn't think you would." I tilt my head and study him, noting he looks as exhausted as I feel. "The boys will expect you to visit, especially Legend."

His Adam's apple bobs with a swallow. "Just say when and I'm there."

Typical of him to leave it up to me. I always thought he'd be the friend that camps out on the couch after Irish and I got married, but Shotgun never showed up without an invitation. He's like the family member that never wants to overstay his welcome, always keeping his distance until someone tells him it's okay to be an active participant in the family.

"Where's Dad, today?" The sonogram technician asks as she squirts the gel onto my belly. "When I saw your name on the schedule, I got excited. He always brings the office pastries from Alba. Tell him he owes me a cannoli next month."

Getting the kids out of the house this morning was brutal. Irish always made sure to take Legend to school, giving me a little extra time to get myself ready before I dropped Raiden at his preschool program. Of course I misjudged time, so everyone was late. After I left Raiden's school, I sat in my truck and cried for ten minutes.

I'm realizing now, those precious minutes would've been better spent preparing for my first sonogram appointment without my husband.

When I don't respond, the technician turns to face me, and her eyes go wide when they see the tears spilling down my cheeks.

"Oh my God. Did I say something wrong?"



Boy, did she ever.

I wipe away my tears. “My husband passed away unexpectedly.”

That sounds a lot better than saying my husband was killed by a guy named Fatmir. It didn’t make the news because the guy who brought you cannolis was a one percenter in a motorcycle club and they’re masterminds of keeping untimely murders under wraps.

A gasp flies past her lips, and she quickly lifts her hand to cover her mouth. “I’m so sorry Mrs. Callahan. Please forgive me.”

Shotgun: How’d it go at the doctor?

I stare at the text for a few moments, hating that it’s him texting me. My anger isn’t even rational. I mean it’s not like Irish ever texted me after a sonogram appointment. There was never a need, he was always there. He was also always the first to take the sonogram photos we got at the visit and add them to the previous ones on the side of the fridge.

That reminds me I didn’t add the new photo. Setting my phone on the counter, I walk into the living room and grab my oversized Louis Vuitton purse. The strip of photos is right on top of my wallet, and I feel a faint smile touch my lips when I see my unborn son.

“Eight more weeks,” I whisper, pressing my hand to my belly. He isn’t very active today, but that doesn’t alarm me. All my boys like to kick when I’m lying down. They’re generous like that.

I head back into the kitchen, tacking the sonogram photos on the fridge with the others, before doing another sweep around the room. All the dishes are done.

Legend's lunchbox is clean and ready for the next day. I didn't take out the garbage, or separate the recycling, but I'll do it tomorrow. There are three baskets of laundry waiting for me upstairs.

Swiping my phone from the counter, I close the lights in the kitchen and head for the stairs, but I pause at the door, making sure I set the alarm. Through the glass panels on the front door, I spot Fuckface. I wasn't paying attention to notice if he followed me from errand to errand, but I heard the distinct sound of his bike when I was cooking dinner. Come to think of it now, I probably should've sent him out a burger. If he's still there in the morning, I'll bring him out a cup of coffee.

I climb the stairs, phone still in my hand and another text from Shotgun comes through.

Shotgun: ?

Reaching the top of the landing, I swipe my thumbs over the screen and start to reply to his text.

It was horrible. The technician asked where Irish was, and I burst into tears.

Instead of sending all that, I delete every word.

Me: Everything looked good. Baby is right on track.

"You have to eat, Irene," I say gently to my mother-in-law. I'm not going to lie, I am not in the running to win any awards for best daughter-in-law. In fact, this might be my first visit to her since Irish and I found out I was pregnant. About three years ago, her MS really started to progress, and her mobility became almost non-existent. That's when we made the hard decision to put her in a home with round-the-clock care. It was a temporary fix. The plan was always to make the side apartment in our

house wheelchair accessible for her and hire a private nurse. Life just kept getting in the way. But Irish always carved out time to visit her twice a week.

“If you don’t like the food here anymore, I can stop and get you something before I visit.” I know she sometimes has difficulties swallowing, but there must be something I can get her to eat. In the two weeks since Irish’s funeral, she looks even thinner than she did then and that’s alarming.

Irene doesn’t say anything, and I don’t know if that’s because she physically can’t or if she’s too depressed to speak, so I just sit with her until it’s time to pick up the boys.

The next time I come, I’ll bring her some soup from the diner.

When I pull up to the house, Fuckface’s bike is parked on the street in front, and he’s pulling out the garbage pails from the side of the house. I park in the driveway and silently breathe a sigh of relief. One less thing for me to do.

“Why is he always here?” Legend asks, staring out the back passenger window.

“He’s just being helpful.”

“But all he does is stand outside our house.”

“That’s not true, he’s taking out the garbage right now, and yesterday he mowed the lawn.”

I’m sure he was trying to be helpful, but I don’t think the landscaper is going to be pleased when he comes for the weekly cut and sees the checkered pattern on the front lawn. From what I hear, Fuckface is a master at repairing vintage bikes, but that must be where his expertise with machinery ends.

“Do you think Uncle Shotty will come by soon?”

I stare at my boy from the rearview mirror. It’s the first time he’s asked to see anyone from the club specifically. Normally, I wouldn’t blink an eye, but he’s grieving his father, and I don’t want him to think everyone he cares about has just upped and vanished from his life.

Shotgun hasn’t texted or called since my doctor’s appointment, and I kind of like it that way. I may be on the struggle bus, but at least I’m moving at my own pace. If he called or came by, he’d see through the facade and do everything in his power to help wherever he could. It’s just in his nature. I need to learn how to do all the hard stuff on my own. If someone swoops in and picks up the broken pieces, I’ll never be the mom my kids need me to be.

I also think his energy is better served transitioning into his new role as vice president. As selfish as this may sound, I want revenge on my husband’s death, and deep down, I know Shotgun wants that just as badly as I do. He won’t quit until he gets it too. And that puts his life at risk. It makes him a target.

“I’m sure he’ll stop by to see you boys soon,” I finally say. “Let’s get you boys in the house. I’m too tired to cook tonight. How do we feel about pizza?”

Legend’s eyes find mine in the mirror. “Can we get sausage and pepperoni?”

“Whatever you want, baby.” My gaze flits to Raiden, and before he can object, I assure him we’ll get a plain cheese too.”

I barely have Raiden out of his booster seat when Fuckface rounds the truck, holding a kraft bag out to me.

“Shotgun dropped this off. He said it’s for Legend.”

I close my eyes as soon as the words leave his lips, already anticipating the tantrum.

“What about me?” Raiden cries. I don’t even have to look at him to know his lower lip is trembling. My eyes spring open, and I snatch the bag from Fuckface. I’m starting to understand the meaning behind his road name. If my kid wasn’t on the verge of a total meltdown, I might laugh at the expression that clouts his face. Clearly, the guy doesn’t have too much experience with kids. Hell, I bet he doesn’t have any siblings.

“Uncle didn’t get me a gift?”

“Uh... it’s for both of you,” Fuckface says. “I mean... I think.” His neck turns beat red as he combs his fingers through his hair. “Shit, I’m sorry Jade. I don’t even know what the fuck is in the bag.”

“It’s fine.” Taking Raiden’s hand in mine, I glance down at him as I give it a squeeze. “Fuck—” I stop myself before I can regard the man in front of me by his road name in front of my son. The last thing I need is for him to go to preschool talking about the mysterious uncle Fuckface that broke his heart. Turning my attention back to the prospect, I shake my head. “What’s your name?”

“Fuckface.”

I grit my teeth. Why Shotgun didn’t think Skid was a better option is beyond me. “Your real name. I can’t have my kids calling you Fuckface.”

“Oh, yeah. I guess that would be bad. They can call me Phil.”

Hmm. He looks like a Phil.

I look back at Raiden. “Phil is going to go to Target and buy you a surprise.”

Raiden's watery eyes go wide as he stares up at Fuckface. "You is?"

"Uh..." He looks at me, his eyes pleading with mine.

"You are."

"But—"

"No buts. Anything cars will do."

Without giving him room to argue, I march toward my front door. Once we're inside, I send the boys upstairs to wash up and I open the bag to find a brand-new cellphone, and a handwritten note.

Have the boys call me if they want. My number is the only one programed.

I stare at the poor penmanship, guilt tugging at me. I'd like to think it's because I sent Fuckface on a mission to buy Hot Wheels when the gift was actually for both boys, but realistically, I know that isn't it.

That's why I pull out my phone and shoot him a text.

Me: Thank you for the phone but you didn't have to do that.

Shotgun: Its better this way. They don't have to bother you if they want to call, and I don't have to haunt you when I want to hear their voices.

I purse my lips as I reread his message.

What he's really saying is—I see through your bullshit, Jade.

Well played, Shotgun. Well played.

The grief comes in waves. Most of the time I'm too busy to remember I'm a thirty-two-year-old widow. Then it hits me out of nowhere. Tonight it came when Raiden asked for a glass of milk before he went to bed. I was having Braxton Hicks contractions all day, which wasn't even the worst part—I had them with both my prior pregnancies. It was going downstairs only to find I forgot to buy a gallon of milk when I was out, that set me off.

It's only been three weeks, and I can honestly say I'm exhausted. I don't want to do any of this anymore. This isn't how it was supposed to be. Irish should be here. He should be holding me, trying to hide that sinful smirk of his, as he assures me it's just the hormones making me crazy.

Raiden went to bed without his milk, but I put in an Instacart order before I came up to take a shower, that way the boys can have cereal tomorrow. Problem fixed, right? I shouldn't be crying in the shower, trying like hell to remember what it feels to have my husband's arms around me. How am I supposed to go through the rest of my life without ever feeling his touch again?

The water streams over me and my stomach goes rock hard, another Braxton Hick contraction working its way through me. I press my hands to my belly, breathing through it just as I've been doing all day. Until this moment, I haven't allowed myself to think about what it will be like to give birth without Irish at my side.

Who is going to feed me ice chips, and rub my back as I labor?

Who will assure me that I'm doing a great job, and hold my legs while I push?

Who will cut the cord?

Who will dress Raiden and Legend in their Big Brother shirts and bring them to the hospital to meet their younger brother?

Suddenly it becomes too hard to breathe. I brace my hands against the tile wall, my vision blurring slightly as the pain becomes excruciating. I try to count back from ten, convincing myself it will pass, but when my vision clears, I see the blood dripping down the insides of my thighs. At first it doesn't register, and I blink three times, foolishly expecting it to be a figment of my imagination. But it's there, bright red blood all over my legs, swirling down the drain.

"Oh God, no," I cry. "Please don't do this."

I turn off the water, struggling to keep myself upright as I push open the shower door. In a poor attempt to contain the blood, I press my thighs together, but it doesn't do anything. By some miracle of God, I make my way out of the shower and grab the silk robe from the hook behind the door. I don't bother drying myself as I slip my arms through the sleeves, reciting all the things I need to do.

Call for Legend.

Get to the phone.

Call 9-1-1.

Save my baby.

My fingers fumble as I try to tie the robe. Another contraction slams into me, and this time my legs buckle from the pain. I try to catch myself, but my reflexes are compromised by the pain, and all I can do is brace my palms against the tile as I fall to my knees.



A feral groan rips from the back of my throat.

Call for Legend.

Get to the phone.

Call 9-1-1.

Save my baby.

The blood seeps through my robe as I crawl out of the bathroom, and I scratch the first thing from my list. I can't let my boy see me like this. He'll be terrified. I barely make it five feet, before I collapse, and roll onto my back, clutching my stomach. Sanctioning whatever strength I can muster, I crawl into my bedroom. I spot the phone charging on the nightstand.

Just a little more.

Five, maybe ten feet.

Please, God. Please.

I need to save my baby.

I don't know why I brought God into it. He's failed me every time, and he fails me now.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

FIVE

SHOTGUN

Hand to God, I don't know how the hell Irish put up with her. The woman is infuriating. She'd rather fucking have someone deliver her a gallon of milk, then ask anyone for help. Forget me—would it have fucking killed her to open her front door and ask Fuckface to go to the supermarket? She didn't have trouble sending him to Target when she thought I bought Legend something and forgot about Raiden.

I slam the loaf of bread on the conveyer belt a little too hard, earning me a look from the cashier.

“Sorry,” I mumble as I continue to unload the cart.

I don't even know if she needs these things. Nor do I know if the kids are allowed to eat half the snacks I picked out—all of which are probably loaded with sugar and those dyes everyone swears are poison, but when I called Fuckface to check in and he told me that all was good, except for the fact she had Instacarted a gallon of milk, I lost my fucking shit.

I grabbed the keys to the cage, and now here I am, grocery shopping at ten o'clock at night like I have a family of ten to feed.

“That'll be three hundred and sixty-three dollars.”

I stare at her for a beat. What the fuck did I buy?

Shaking my head, I reach into the back pocket of my jeans and hand her my credit card. My gaze falls to the groceries. Am I supposed to bag them myself?

I'm about to ask her just that when my cell phone rings. Biting back a curse, I retrieve it from my kutte. Without bothering to glance at the screen, I accept the call and lift the phone to my ear, propping it up with my shoulder as I start throwing all the groceries back in the wagon. I guess bags are a luxury Shoprite doesn't offer anymore.

"Hello?"

"Uncle Shotty?"

Instantly my body goes still, and I feel all the blood drain from my face. There is no good reason for Legend to be calling me at this hour, and I can hear the fear in his voice.

"Legend, what's wrong?"

"It's Mom," he mumbles, his voice quaking. "I heard her scream. It sounded like she was in pain. I know I'm supposed to be the man of the house now, but her bedroom door is shut and I'm too afraid to go inside. I knocked and she didn't answer."

The poor kid is rambling. Without asking the cashier to give my credit card back, I abandon the groceries and sprint for the door. She calls out for me, but I ignore her.

Fuck the card.

Fuck the groceries.

Fuck everything.

“Okay, listen to me, I want you to hang up the phone and go downstairs. I’m going to call Fuckface and you’re going to open the door for him. Then you’re going to go in your room until I get there. Can you do that for me?”

I hear the door creak in the background. “I’m scared,” he says. “What if she’s hurt? What if she’s dead?”

I close my eyes, hitting the locks on the cage. “She’s going to be fine.”

She has to be.

“I’m going to hang up now, but I’ll call you right back, okay?”

“Okay, I’m going down the stairs.”

“That’s a good boy. And Legend?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m on my way.”

I defied the speed limit, and blew every light, all while staying on the phone with Legend. After he let Fuckface in the house, he went in his room just like I instructed, but ten seconds later, Fuckface got on the phone, and because the guy doesn’t know how to act around kids, he blurted everything out for Legend to hear.

“It’s bad, man. She’s bleeding everywhere.”

Legend immediately became hysterical. I arrived at the house five minutes later and took my full first breath when I spotted the ambulance already in the driveway. Thankfully, Fuckface had enough sense to call 9-1-1.

As much as I wanted to ease Legend's fears, I needed to see Jade for myself. All I knew was that she was bleeding. I didn't know why or where she was bleeding from. I didn't know if it had anything to do with the baby.

I charged straight for her and Irish's bedroom, and when I caught sight of them lifting her onto the stretcher, I felt all the air leave my lungs. Fuckface wasn't exaggerating about the blood. The lush beige carpet looked like it had been a victim of a massacre, and the blood trailed from the spot where they were lifting her to the bathroom. The robe she was wearing, did a piss poor job of covering, and I noticed the blood only appeared to be dripping down her legs.

"How far along is she?" One of the paramedics shouted.

It took me a moment to realize he was talking to me. "I don't know... she isn't due for at least another month, maybe more." My gaze found her pale face. "Is she going to be okay?"

"We have to get her to the hospital. She's lost a lot of blood."

I didn't need them to tell me that. I needed them to answer my fucking question. They wheeled her out of the bedroom, and I followed along. Then I remembered the kids were with Fuckface. I knew they needed me, but Jade needed me too. I was torn.

In the end, I loaded the boys into Jade's Escalade and ordered Fuckface to follow me. On the way to the hospital, I called Biggie and told him what was going on. He and the rest of the club showed up a little while after, and we all sat in the waiting room, trying to occupy the kids, and assure them that their mom was going to be okay.

Whether any of us believed it, I'm not sure.

It's been well over an hour since they brought Jade in, and the only thing I've learned

is that Jade never changed her emergency contact information, making getting an update on her condition nearly impossible, and the only reason I know that is because Biggie tried sweet talking the lady at the reception desk.

I turn to Guido. “Try Bella again.”

I don’t know how much pull she has as a nurse, but at this point, she’s our only hope.

“Bro, I don’t know why you just don’t tell them you’re Irish. It’s not like they’re going to ask you for your fucking driver’s license,” he says as he pokes at the screen on his phone, putting the call on speaker. Bella’s voicemail message sounds. “She doesn’t keep the phone on when she’s working. You want me to call over to Lipstick and Lace and have Trigger send over some of the girls?”

“I might not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but even I can see he’s not in the mood to get a lap dance. I think we save the strippers for another night, or at the very least until we have an update on Jade,” Skid says.

“I wasn’t calling them so Shotgun could catch a blowjob in the on-call room, dick,” Guido volleys. His gaze darts back to me. “I figured they could take the kids back to the clubhouse. We don’t know how long we’re going to be here, and I think Legend is scared shitless. The little man needs a reprieve.”

I glance over at Legend who hasn’t left his brother’s side. He keeps staring at the doors the paramedics led his mother through. Guido isn’t wrong about him needing a break, but Jade would fucking kill us all if we left her kids in the care of a couple of strippers. That I’m sure of.

Suddenly the doors open, and I see Legend pop up out of his chair as two doctors approach us.

“Are one of your Mr. Callahan?”

“He is!” Legend blurts, pointing his finger at me.

“Look at that,” Guido mutters, elbowing me. “The kid has more balls than you.”

“Mr. Callahan, your wife suffered a placenta abruption. We had to perform an emergency c-section. She lost a lot of blood, so a transfusion was necessary. She’s lucky you got to her as quickly as you did, because things could’ve been a lot worse. She’s still sedated, and in recovery right now. Once she wakes, you’ll be able to see her.”

“And the baby?” I ask hoarsely.

“The baby is in the NICU. He appears to be having some difficulty breathing, but he’s in the best hands. I can have a nurse take you to see him, if you’d like.”

Before I can think better of it, or convince myself it’s not my place, I nod. I don’t think Irish nor Jade would want their premature son to be alone.

I feel a hand clamp down on my shoulder, and when I turn my head, I find Biggie standing there, nodding his head. “Go, I’ll take the boys to the cafeteria and get them some snacks. No strippers, I promise.”

My gaze darts back to Legend. “You good with me going to check on your brother?”

He nods. “Mom’s going to be okay, right?”

I glance back at the doctor, hopeful he’ll be able to give the boy some peace of mind.

“Your mom has a long road to recovery and will have to take it easy for the next few

weeks, but I think she'll be just fine."

He takes a deep breath, then looks back at me. "You did good, Legend. You knew your mom needed help, and you got it for her. You saved her life and your little brother's too."

I visited Legend and Raiden shortly after they were both born, so babies don't particularly scare me. I don't even mind holding them, but as I step foot inside the NICU and see Jade's baby for the first time, I hesitate. He's smaller than his brothers, not by a lot, but significantly, and there are a bunch of tiny wires taped to his chest. There's also an oxygen tube hooked up to his nose and something that looks like a soft cast is wrapped around his left arm.

"Would you like to hold him?" The nurse questions, forcing me to tear my gaze away from the baby to stare at her.

"Can I?"

"Of course. Skin to skin contact in preemies has many benefits for preemies. It can regulate a baby's heart rate, breathing, and blood sugar levels. It also helps reduce stress, and this little guy seems to have had his fair share of that tonight."

Skin to skin contact—what the hell is she talking about?

"You can take off your scrub shirt, and sit right there in that chair, I'll get a blanket, and the baby."

"You want me to take off my shirt?"

"I'm sorry, I just assumed you had done that with your other children. I read Mrs. Callahan's chart."



I almost forgot the only reason I'm here is because I came in under the false pretense that I'm Irish.

"It's fine... it's just he's smaller than the others, and the wires—what if they get tangled or I accidentally disconnect something? I don't want to hurt him."

She smiles softly at me. "I think you'll be just fine. I'll be close by."

I don't know why she has so much faith in me. Usually people look at me and think the worst. But rather than question it, I lean into it, and soon I find myself holding Jade's son against my chest.

"Hey, there little guy," I whisper, gently smoothing my tattooed fingers over the peach fuzz that coats his little head. It boggles my mind that a little over an hour ago he was inside Jade, and now he's tucked safely in my arms.

I remember the first time I met Legend, Jade joked about how she did all the work, only for the baby to come out looking exactly like Irish. That's not the case with this baby.

He's a spitting image of his mama.

From the shape of his nose to the shape of his lips.

But most of all, I think he has her fighting spirit.

"You gave us all a scare tonight," I say as my gaze latches onto his little hand that lays flat against the only spot on my chest that doesn't have any ink. I wish I had a marker. I'd trace his little hand, and tattoo it to that very spot, making sure I added his birthday to the center of it like I did with the tributes I have on my skin, honoring his brothers.

“He looks perfectly content,” the nurse comments. “And his stats are good. You’re doing great, dad.”

Dad.

The single word entices shame, reminding me I’m just a stand in. A brother who made a promise. But as I sit here holding Irish’s son I decide to ask for forgiveness later. I’m done sitting in the shadows. Jade needs help whether she likes it or not, and I’m done waiting for her to give me permission to step in.

I trace my fingers down the baby’s back, bending my head to touch my lips to the top of his head. “I hope you’re comfortable because you guys are stuck with me.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

SIX

JADE

My heart starts to race the second I open my eyes and stare up at the fluorescent lights. The last thing I recall is being in the shower, clutching my stomach, and seeing all the blood drip down my legs.

So much blood.

Too much.

I struggle to push the sheet off me, my hands immediately falling to my stomach. It looks just as it did before, but I can tell my baby is no longer inside of me. I can feel it.

“Easy.”

My gaze snaps in the direction of the gruff voice, and my eyes land on Shotgun. He sits in the corner of the hospital room, his hands braced on top of his spread thighs, exhaustion clouting his face. I don’t know why he’s here or how he found out I was in the hospital. I don’t even know how I got here. A million questions swirl around my muddled head, but the most important one manages to leave my lips.

“Where’s my baby? Please tell me my baby is okay.”

“He’s perfect,” he says, hoarsely. Pushing out of the chair, he comes to stand at my

side. “He’s in the NICU?—”

“The NICU?” I cry, tears immediately filling my eyes. “But you said he’s perfect.”

“He’s having some trouble breathing on his own, but they’re doing everything they can to help him. He’s going to be okay, Jade. He just needed a little more time inside of you, but he’ll catch up. Everything else is good. Ten fingers, ten toes. A strong heart.”

He extends his hand, his thumb brushing across my cheek, wiping away my tears. I close my eyes briefly, allowing myself a moment to revel in the comfort of his touch.

“He looks like you,” he rasps.

My eyes spring open and I stare at him for a beat, my mind reeling. I don’t ask him how he knows what my baby looks like. I don’t ask how he knows he’s having trouble breathing or why he’s even allowed to be in my room. We’ll get to all of that eventually. What I need to know now, is how he knew to come for me? I’m assuming Fuckface had something to do with it.

“How did you know I needed you?”

“Legend called me. He heard you scream but was too afraid to check on you himself.”

That breaks my heart, and I feel more tears slide down my cheeks. He must’ve been so scared. My poor boy. “Where is he now?”

“Biggie took him and Raiden back to the clubhouse. They’re good, Jade. They’re relieved their mom is okay and excited to meet their brother.”

Relief washes over me, and I drop my head back against the pillow. I want to see my baby. I want to hold him, and make sure he's okay, but my eyelids feel too heavy. My body too weak. My mind entirely too loud.

"I'm tired," I whisper.

"Then close your eyes and sleep. I'll be right here."

"No," I whisper. "Go stay with Killian. I don't want him to be alone."

"Killian," Shotgun murmurs.

"That's his name. Killian Duke Callahan. It means little warrior."

He reaches for my hand, lacing our fingers together. "It's perfect."

Twelve hours later, I was finally able to meet my son. They couldn't bring him to me, so I had to get clearance from my doctor before going to the NICU—something I wasn't familiar with.

With my other pregnancies, I delivered vaginally, but due to the placenta abruption, I needed a c-section. And let me just say that the people who think having a cesarean is taking the easy way out of birth, are fools. When I delivered naturally, I was up and about an hour after I gave birth. I remember placing my breakfast order as I swayed on my feet, rocking Legend back and forth in my arms.

This was nothing like that.

The recovery was so much worse. Getting out of bed for the first time was excruciating. It felt like someone had taken a hot brand to my stomach. I couldn't stand without someone's assistance, and I had a pain in my shoulder that was so

intense I thought I was having a heart attack. Come to learn, it was only gas.

Can you imagine? Who the fuck gets gas pains in their shoulder?

The mothers that are flayed open, that's who. It's a side effect from the anesthesia and fairly common from what I understand.

I took three steps before I dropped my ass into the wheelchair, and man, that hurt almost as much as getting up. But I was on a mission to see my baby. Shotgun wheeled me to the NICU, and that's when I learned he let everyone believe he was my husband and Killian's father.

"Why would you let them think that?"

"No one was giving me any information." He leaned down, pressing his lips close to my ear. "That's him over there. He's a little jaundice so he's got to stay under those lights."

My eyes moved to where he was looking, and I saw him.

My little warrior.

He was smaller than his brothers, and he had paper sunglasses taped over his eyes, and a bunch of wires attached to his little body. Shotgun wheeled me over to where he was, and for a moment, all I did was stare at him. Then I leaned forward, ignoring the burning sensation in my abdomen as I outstretched my hand and touched him for the first time.

"Dad's been doing a good job, but I think this boy is ready to have his Mommy hold him," the nurse said. I didn't correct her. In fact, the whole comment about Shotgun being his dad completely flew over my head. I was too consumed by my need to feel

him... to kiss him and nurture him. Nothing else mattered.

“Yes, please,” I whispered.

Shotgun locked the wheelchair and stepped aside, giving the nurse room to maneuver Killian into my arms. When I was pregnant with Raiden, I wondered how it would be possible for me to love him as much as I loved his brother. I quickly learned when he was born that the heart grows in an instant, and the moment Killian was nestled against my chest, it happened again. My heart grew to the point that I thought it might explode. And for the first time in three weeks, I didn’t feel so empty.

I don’t know how long I held him, but after a while I noticed my hospital gown was wet. My milk was starting to come in. Unsure if he’d be able to feed from me while being hooked up to all the equipment, I turned to the nurse for guidance. She said I could try and see if he’d latch but warned me that I shouldn’t get discouraged if he didn’t.

I was aware that Shotgun was close by, but I didn’t care. At least not in that moment. I just wanted to feel the connection with my son.

With the nurse’s help, I pulled my breast out from my gown, and guided Killian to my nipple. He didn’t latch or make any attempt to, and despite the nurse’s warning, I became emotional. In turn, Killian started to fuss. Not wanting to cause him any distress, I handed him back to the nurse and wiped away my tears.

That’s when Shotgun came back to stand behind me.

“Do you need a break?” he asked quietly.

As much as I didn’t want to leave my baby, I nodded, and asked the nurse if she could arrange for me to see a lactation consultant. If Killian wouldn’t latch, I’d have

to resort to pumping, and because my hormones were in disarray, that made me irrationally angry.

By the time Shotgun brought me back to my room, and helped me get back into bed, I was itching for a fight.

A half hour has passed, and he still hasn't taken the bait. The man clearly has the patience of a saint.

"Biggie texted me. He wants to know if you're feeling up to having the kids visit."

"Of course I want to see my kids," I retort, but as soon as the words leave my lips, I realize the last time Legend saw me, I was in bad condition.

I may be conscious and not lying in my own blood, but I definitely look rough. I need to make myself presentable for them. Take a shower and brush my hair. Be dressed in something that doesn't reveal my entire backside.

The problem with that is, I didn't anticipate going into premature labor, so I never packed a bag for the hospital.

"What's that look for?" Shotgun questions, pocketing his phone.

"I don't want them to see me like this. My hair is a mess, and I'm leaking all over the place."

That was probably too much information, but I can't take it back now. To Shotgun's credit, his eyes never waver from my face.

"Jade, they don't care what you look like. They just want to see that you're alive and well."



I don't know when he became the voice of reason, or how it's possible for him to know exactly what I need to hear, but he's talented in that regard. It'd be endearing if it wasn't so damn infuriating.

Worrying my lower lip between my teeth, I concede the pajamas aren't a necessity. "I'd still like to shower before they get here."

He nods. "You want me to swing by the house and grab you some clothes?"

The immediate response should be yes, but then he'd have to leave, and I don't know that I want him too.

God, I'm a fucking mess.

"My maternity pajamas are in the top dresser drawer. I'm going to need my nursing bras, and regular underwear too. I don't know if they're in the same drawer. If not, they might be in a bag in the closet."

His jaw goes slack for a split second, and I watch his throat bob as he swallows.

"Anything else?"

"You can grab whatever toiletries that are in the master bathroom too, and my brush is somewhere on the vanity. Oh, and I'm going to need my toothbrush. It's the black one."

Shotgun slaps his hands against his thighs before he pushes out of the chair.

"Toiletries, brush, and toothbrush. Got it." He shoves his hands into his pockets. "What about the boys? Can I just take anything from their closets?"

“Yes, but if you can find the Big Brother shirts I bought, that would be great. Oh, and I did start to put some things in my diaper bag.” I don’t know that I’ll be able to dress Killian while he’s in the NICU, but there’s the blanket I used when all the boys were born that I could probably place in the incubator with him. “It’s in the nursery, on top of the glider.”

“The glider?”

“It’s like a rocking chair.”

“Okay.” He takes a deep breath. “I don’t know how long it’s going to take me to find all this shit, but I’ll be back as soon as I can. Do you want me to bring you anything to eat?”

I shake my head. That would only delay him longer.

“No, that’s enough.”

“Mommy!” Raiden cheers as he runs past Biggie who holds the door open with one hand, and a bouquet of flowers in the other. He bends down, handing the flowers to Legend, who takes them but makes no move to fully enter the hospital room.

“Easy, buddy,” Shotgun says, as he catches him by the waist and throws him over his shoulder, effectively halting him from body slamming himself on top of the bed. “Mommy’s belly is still sore from where they took Killian out.” He tickles his sides, causing a fleet of giggles to burst free. The sound so sweet. “How’s it feel to be a big brother?”

My gaze cuts back to where Legend stands. “I’m so happy to see you boys.” I hold out my hand, silently encouraging him to come closer. “I missed you both so much.”

Shotgun gently deposits Raiden on the foot of my bed before walking over to Legend.

“She’s okay, Legend. I promise.” He holds up his pinky, and I watch as my son slowly lifts his and winds it around Shotgun’s. Then his eyes come to mine, and he drops his hand to his side. I wink at him, and a tear falls from the corner of my eye. He comes to the side of the bed and pushes the flowers toward me.

“We got these for you.”

Thumbing away the stray tear, I smile widely. “They’re beautiful, but you know what I could really use right now?” He sets the flowers on the rolling table next to my bed before leaning over the railing to press a kiss to my cheek. I wrap my arms around him, hugging him tightly. “I’m so sorry I scared you, but I’m proud of you for calling Uncle Shotty for help. That was brave, and your dad would be so proud too.”

“Me too!” Raiden says. “You proud of me too!”

I laugh. The sound foreign to my own ears. “Yes, of course. Come here and give me some sugar. Just be gentle, okay? Uncle Shotty was right when he said Mommy’s belly is still healing.”

“When are you able to come home?” Legend asks as he settles into my side, giving his brother room to hug me.

“I’m not sure,” I tell him honestly, but as I say those words another reality hits me—one I haven’t allowed myself to entertain. There is a strong possibility I will be discharged without Killian. I don’t know how I’m going to manage that.

“Can we see the baby?” Raiden asks.

Still worrying about how I’m going to take care of two kids at home and a preemie in

the hospital, I don't answer right away.

"Because your brother couldn't wait to meet you and came a little early, he needs a little T.L.C. so they have him in a special unit in the hospital, but when he's strong enough you'll be able to see him. He's already the coolest baby in the hospital, rocking a pair of shades like it's nobody's business," Shotgun tells him. "I took a picture." He lifts his eyes to mine. "Is it okay if I show them?"

I nod and he moves closer, reaching into the back pocket of his jeans to retrieve his phone. When he finds the picture, he shows it to the boys.

"He really has sunglasses," Raiden exclaims. "I want a pair of sunglasses."

"You can have mine, little man," Biggie says. Kicking off the wall he's leaning on, he pulls the glasses out from the neckline of his shirt and props them on his nose. They're way too big for his little face, but he doesn't seem to mind.

"Why does he have so many wires connected to him?"

"They're just monitoring him to make sure he continues to do well," I say, finally finding my voice. I smooth a lock of his hair away from his forehead. "He's already doing a lot better than when he was first born."

"Hey, why don't you guys get a little closer to your mom so I can take a picture of the three of you," Shotgun suggests. My eyes find his and he points to the shirts the boys are wearing. "Isn't that why you sent me on a wild goose chase for those t-shirts?"

"Let's try this again, baby," I murmur as I guide Killian to my breast. He nuzzles close but shows no feeding cues. The nurse suggests trying to get him to latch onto my other nipple, but that doesn't work either.

“It could be a number of things that’s preventing him from latching. We can try again in a couple of hours. In the meantime, I think you should pump, and we can try bottle feeding.”

I furiously wipe at my cheeks. “I don’t have a pump.”

I’m the world’s most unprepared mother.

“Mrs. Callahan we have everything you need here. Please don’t get upset. Fed is best no matter how it’s done.”

I know that, but my brain isn’t working right. My world imploded three weeks ago, and I think it’s finally fully hitting me. “Can you take him?”

“Of course,” she says. “I’ll get you a pump so that you can start pumping in the privacy of your own room. When you’re done, we can try bottle feeding.”

“And if that doesn’t work?”

“We have other options.”

I snuggle him closer, pressing my lips to the top of his head before I hand him back to the nurse. Then I turn back to Shotgun. “Can you take me back to my room?”

Without saying a word he does just that, and once we’re inside, he moves to help me back to bed. I try to push him away, but when I straighten up, the pain in my abdomen returns. So reluctantly, I lean on him, and when he props the pillow under my head, I murmur my thanks. He’s been patient, and kind. A lifesaver really, but I think I need a break. Maybe if I have myself a good cry then I’ll snap out of whatever funk this is.

However, before I can properly express that, Shotgun speaks up.

“Jade, we need to talk.”

“I’m not really in the mood to talk, Shotgun.”

“I understand that, so I’ll make it quick before I get out of your hair for a little while.”

Sighing, I meet his gaze. “What is it?”

“I ran into your doctor when I walked Biggie and the boys out. He’s discharging you tomorrow morning.”

I don’t know what I did wrong to have so many things go against me, but man, I sure as hell must’ve pissed someone off.

“The last I spoke with the pediatrician in the NICU, he indicated that Killian would have to stay longer,” he continues. “His breathing is starting to improve, but now with the jaundice situation, that set him back a little.”

“Despite how much I’m failing, this isn’t my first rodeo, Shotgun. I didn’t think they’d discharge him with all the wires connected to him, and with him not eating, that’s going to only cause more issues.”

The reality is it could be weeks before he comes home.

“Okay, so we need a plan. You can’t be in two places at once. I respect that you don’t want to stay at the clubhouse, but my apartment isn’t equipped for kids.”

“What exactly are you suggesting?”

“The side apartment you and Irish planned to have Irene move into...it’s still vacant, yeah?”

My brows pinch together as I try to figure out where he’s going with this.

“Yes, we never finished the work renovating it.”

“It got working plumbing?”

“Yes.”

“Then, I’m suggesting that I crash there until you get on your feet.”

I scoff. “Absolutely not.”

I don’t know if he didn’t hear my response or if he’s choosing to blatantly ignore me, but he continues to ramble on like as though I didn’t say a fucking word.

“I’ll help get the kids off to school in the mornings, and you can come spend time with Killian. I don’t know how feedings and all that shit works, but I think babies eat every couple of hours and depending how you decide to do that—whether by breast or bottle—you’re going to need to be here.”

He isn’t wrong about that. If it turns out that I do have to bottle feed, I’ll likely have to pump and drop off my milk for the nurses to feed him when I’m not able to. How he’s aware of any of this is beyond me, though.

“How do you even know that?”

An exasperated breath leaves his lips, and he scratches at the scruff lining his jaw.

“When I was with the baby, I saw another NICU mom come and drop off her milk.”

“How observant of you.”

“For fuck’s sake, Jade. Why is it so hard for you to accept my help?” He combs his fingers roughly through his hair, tugging at the ends. My eyes widen at his tone, but I remain quiet. I guess I finally poked hard enough. He releases his hair, dropping his hands to his sides, and balls his fists. “I’m going for a walk. Try to be fucking reasonable when I get back.”

Shotgun returned a half hour later with a turkey sandwich from the cafeteria, and a bottle of orange juice. He angrily tossed them on the table next to my bed.

“Eat,” he said gruffly before he took a seat in the corner of the room. He hasn’t said a word since, and neither have I. I did eat the sandwich, though. Not because he ordered me to, but because I was starving. I even drank the orange juice, and I hate orange juice.

A knock sounds on the door, and we both lift our heads as it opens.

“Good afternoon, I hope I’m not interrupting.”

“Not at all,” Shotgun mutters, crossing his arms against his chest.

“Are you one of the lactation specialists?”

“No, I’m Lisa Crowl. I’m one of the social workers here at the hospital. I was told you wanted to make some changes to your healthcare proxy.” She taps her fingers against the folder she’s holding. “Is now a good time?”

I stare at her blankly. “I think you may be confusing me with someone else.”

“You’re Mrs. Callahan, are you not?”



“I am but?—”

Shotgun cuts me off. “Thank you. You can leave the papers on the table. If we have any questions, we’ll be sure to reach out.”

Ms. Crowl’s gaze cuts to him, and she smiles. “Very well. My card is stapled to the inside of the folder.” Her gaze darts to me. “Congratulations on the new edition.”

I don’t offer her my thanks, I’m too busy trying to keep myself from exploding. Where does Shotgun get off making requests on my behalf? She drops the folder on the rolling table next to my bed before she sees herself out. As soon as the door closes behind her, I turn my attention back to Shotgun.

“What the hell is that about?”

“Irish is still your emergency contact.”

My eyes widen. “He’s my husband.”

His eyes soften slightly, and he takes a step forward.

“He’s dead, Jade.”

I don’t need a reminder. I wake up every morning, and it’s the first thought in my head. And I really don’t need him, of all people, to be the one who points it out to me.

“I’m sorry, do you think I don’t know that?” I sneer, clenching my teeth. “I’m very well aware my husband is dead, despite you people thinking you had the right to withhold his body from me.”

“He can’t make decisions on your behalf.”

It's very obvious where he's going with this, and while I know he means well, I can't get past the anger I feel. I can't push it aside or pretend it doesn't exist. I also don't know what to do with it, so I project it onto him, because deep down, I know he'll take it. He'll take everything I give him, and after he's done taking it, he'll buy me a sandwich.

"First you let everyone here believe you're Irish, then you tell me you're moving into my house, and now you want me to erase his name from my medical records and what... put yours instead? You got his patch, might as well take the house, wife, and kids too, right?"

He grits his teeth, his jaw popping slightly as he growls, "I explained this already. I didn't have a choice. You were in bad shape, and no one was giving me any information on you or Killian. It wasn't right, but I had to do it, and if given the chance, I'd fucking do it again."

"Of course you would," I snap. He uncrosses his arms, bracing his hands against the side railing of my hospital bed.

"You could've died, Jade. You and Killian could've needed extreme measures to survive. If decisions needed to be made, I wouldn't have been able to make them. Fuck, Jade, the boys—Legend and Raiden—they could've been taken by the state."

Logically, I know everything he's saying is true. I just don't want to accept it. I don't want to accept any of this as my new reality. I think if I keep putting things off, they'll just go away. Or maybe I'm still hanging onto hope that Irish will come back. That I'll wake and this will all have been one big nightmare.

"You, Irish, and me, we learned early on that life ain't all that different from riding. There are lots of bends in the road, and if you don't lean into those curves, Jade, you'll get knocked on your ass. I ain't asking you to forgive me, or the club for what

happened, nor am I asking you to let go of your pain. You got every right to feel what you're feeling, and no one can take that from you. But like it or not, we're family. You, me, the boys, and the club."

A tear rolls down my cheek, and I quickly wipe it away.

"Oh, please, don't give me that bullshit. You call me family, but for the last twelve years you've barely acknowledged me. Ever since me and Irish got married, maybe even before that."

Diverting his eyes away from me, he flexes his around the railing. "That's not true."

I scoff. "I'm sure you're good at a lot of things, Shotgun, but lying isn't one of them. I know you love my boys, and I'm grateful for that." I have difficulty showing it, but I am. They need a man in their life, and Legend has already decided it's going to be him. I keep telling myself I won't take that away from him, but it's hard. I have too much resentment. "I won't be a charity project of yours. You got guilt for what happened to Irish, that's on you. But I know he wouldn't want you to hold onto that. So, as his widow, I'm giving you a pass. You can see the kids—you don't even need to call ahead. But I need to do this on my own."

"I don't want a fucking pass, Jade. I want you to stop fighting me. I gave you space, went against my gut...against my fucking word ... and it blew up in both our faces. Are you even listening to a word I say? You could've fucking died . The baby too. Then what? How do I explain that to your kids? How do I fucking live knowing I stood back and did nothing while both their parents died?"

He slaps his hand on the papers the social worker dropped on the rolling table, and I purse my lips. I don't think can recall a time when I've ever seen him this angry.

Definitely not toward me.

“Sign the fucking papers. And when you get released from the hospital, you’re going up to the kids’ schools, and putting me down as an emergency contact for them. I already called the club’s lawyer. He doesn’t do wills, but he referred me to someone who does. There needs to be a plan in place for the boys God forbid something happens to you. I won’t move into the apartment, but you’re going to accept my help. Period. End of story.”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

SEVEN

SHOTGUN

I pull my Harley next to Biggie's and kill the engine. Desperate for a little wind therapy, I could've ridden for hours, but I'm pressed for time, which seems to be a regular occurrence these days.

We make our way into the diner, and the hostess seats us at a booth in the corner of the restaurant as per Biggie's request.

"Can I get you fellas anything while you look over the menu?"

"Coffee, black," I say.

"I'll have the same, sweetheart."

"You got it," the waitress says before she disappears behind the counter. Once she's out of ear shot, I push the menu away from me.

Biggie tracks the motion, lifting an eyebrow. "You know what you're getting?"

"Don't got much of an appetite."

I didn't come here for eggs, I came here because I've been stretched thin, running back and forth between the hospital and Jade's house, which is unacceptable for a man in my position. Irish would never. The man loved his family, and worshipped his

wife, that was obvious, but he always showed up for his club first. I'm just not how sure he juggled it all, or how he managed to make it look so fucking easy.

Biggie laughs at my response as he opens his menu. "It was your idea to meet here."

"It's close to Irene's nursing home, and Jade asked me to bring her some soup. She hasn't been eating."

Biggie hums thoughtfully. "How's that going?"

It's been two days since Jade was discharged, and we've fought about a dozen times, so not too well. Sighing heavily, I lean back and spread my arms over the back of the pleather booth. "The boys aren't any trouble. I think they like having me around to help, but Jade hates it, and I don't know if that's because she's bitter about what happened with Irish, or if it's just me she can't stand the sight of."

I didn't know a woman isn't allowed to drive after a c-section, so I didn't factor in I'd be her chauffer too. I just figured we'd be like two passing ships.

That's not the case.

Yesterday wasn't so bad because the kids didn't have school, but this morning was brutal. I was ten minutes late and that fucked everything up.

"The woman is going through a lot."

"I know that."

"And she blames us," he says pointedly. "Every mother needs a village, and hers consists of a bunch of bikers who don't know jack shit about what she's feeling. It's killing her that we're all she's got." He closes the menu and folds his hands on top of

it. “She’ll come around eventually. It may be months from now, or possibly even years. The question is how long you plan on doing this with her?”

“I didn’t think about a time frame,” I tell him, shrugging. “I’ll be there for her and the boys for however long they need me.” But it’d be a lot fucking easier if I didn’t live on the other side of the borough.

“As noble as that is, I feel it necessary to remind you how slippery of a slope that can be.”

The waitress returns just then and places our coffees in front of us before taking our order. But as I listen to Biggie ramble off on how he prefers his eggs, I think about what he just said. No one, not a fucking soul on Earth, knows how I feel about Jade, and even if they did, what I’m doing has nothing to do with those feelings. They’re irrelevant at this point.

The waitress takes off, and Biggie’s focus returns to me.

“I don’t like what you’re insinuating.”

“I’m not insinuating anything, brother. What I’m saying is straight facts. Jade and those kids will always be part of the Kings of Anarchy. She will continue to get a piece of everything that was Irish’s, and we will be there for her in any capacity they need. What she needs now though is support, and out of everyone, I agree that the only one fit to supply her with that is you. Aside from being tight with Irish, you have a longstanding relationship with her. She’s comfortable with you, and even though you wear the same patch as the rest of us, she knows who you are beyond the patch, and I reckon that makes you more of a safe space for her.”

“I don’t see the problem.”

“You spend enough time with that woman and those kids, you will grow an attachment to them. It’s not a question of if, it’s a matter of when. So when I say Jade will always be part of the Kings of Anarchy, I mean she will always be Irish’s.”

“You think I don’t know that?” I inch forward, my jaw tightening as my heart pounds violently inside my chest.

“Just throwing out a reminder. She’s in the thick of it now, Shotgun, but she won’t always be. Gonna come a time when those kids don’t need her twenty-four seven. She won’t feel like she’s drowning anymore. It’ll be a day of reckoning for her. She’ll realize she’s still got some life in her, and she’ll start living for her again. When that happens she’s either gonna push you away to make room for someone else someone who will fill the days and make ‘em not so lonely. Or she’ll pull you close.”

I swallow thickly as I consider his words.

I can’t see a day where Jade belongs to someone other than Irish, but, man, if that day did ever come, I have faith I would be able to handle it. I’m a fucking pro when it comes to watching her love someone that isn’t me. That being said, I don’t know how I’d react if she did choose me. I don’t know that I’d be able to push her away. When a man gets a shot at everything he’s longed for, it becomes a test of character.

“I took an oath.”

“Brother, your cock won’t give two fucks about the oath you took if Jade chooses you. I don’t think anyone else has ever noticed, Irish surely didn’t or you wouldn’t be sitting in front of me today, but I see the way you look at her. The way you’ve always looked at her. That woman fucking owns you.”

I could deny it, but I don’t think he’s buying anything I’m selling. Biggie didn’t get as far as he is by being stupid. He’s a thinker and a watcher. He takes time to process



things, and he doesn't act on impulse. He doesn't speak just to hear himself talk. The reason he's bringing any of this up is because he is certain he has me figured out.

"I appreciate the concern, but I have plenty of experience in keeping myself in check. If the day should come when Jade decides to move on, I'll step aside. They'll be no issues for the club."

"Well, that's a relief. Lord knows we got enough of those."

That's my opening to change gears, and I fucking jump all over it. "How did the meeting with Mondestino go?"

"He's very eager to assist in providing intel on Fatmir, and when I made it clear that taking out the leader isn't our first priority, that we are saving him for last, he didn't care for that. He offered to put eyes on Fatmir's operations and told me he'd deliver the mercenaries to us in forty-eight hours."

"You're telling me this cocksucker is going to deliver the men to us? What does he want in exchange?"

"Well, for one, I think he wants us not to kill him."

My eyebrows pinch inward as I study him. "You think he knows we're aware that he made us Fatmir's target?"

"I think he's suspicious. He's also got a lot of heat on him, and a shit ton of problems that we could help with."

Help? The last thing that motherfucker deserves is our help.

"Why the fuck would we help him when the plan is eventually to have him meet his

maker?”

He blows out a breath. “I’m going to bring this up at church, but I think before I do that, you and I should have a clearer picture of things, that way when it’s presented to the club, we have answers to these questions.”

“I’m taking that to mean you don’t have an answer to mine.”

Biggies sighs.

“Mondestino is in a jam. His beef with Fatmir is deeper than a power play for the seaport. It was revealed to me that Fatmir lit up Mondestino’s whore house. Torched the thing to ash while the women were inside.”

Not sure what that has to do with us. I’m a fan of pussy, but I don’t pay for it, and I don’t got any soft spots in my heart for the women who sell it. Call it mommy issues if you will, I don’t give a fuck.

“So?”

“So, he wants to join forces with us and expand Lipstick & Lace.”

Anger slashes through me. I got no problem expanding our businesses. The more legit our shit is, the less risk we pose at getting pinched. But going into business with a man who is our number one enemy, is just fucking absurd. The plan is to kill him, not make his pockets fat.

“You’re not seriously considering this, are you?”

“I am, and you should be too. The closer we get to Mondestino, the easier it will be to cut him at the knees. We can hurt his family, tie him up and make him watch, but it

won't hurt him. Family is disposable to him. That man only cares about money and power. Strip him of that, and he'll bleed out."

I shake my head, not because I don't believe Biggie. I just find it hard that a man can find more pleasure in being defined by status than he can his family. Maybe that's because I don't have one.

"So what's the proposal? He wants a percentage of the strip club?"

"He wants a place to house his brothel. The strip club remains ours. What he wants to do is expand the property. He'll pay for all the construction, and when it's complete Lipstick & Lace will expand their services. The only condition he seems to have with that is that we only employ the women he hires for those services. We can keep our dancers, and the rest of the staff, but Mondestino will be in charge of employing the brothel. He'll pay us rent, we'll provide security, and we take a twenty-five percent cut of whatever the brothel makes."

Financially speaking, it appears to be a win for us, which makes no sense as to why Mondestino would do it. Before I can voice any of that, the waitress arrives with our food. Once she's gone, I cut right to the chase.

"What's in it for him? You said it yourself, he's all about money and power. This guy is offering to cover all expenses, pay us rent, and give us a cut of his business."

"If he's in bed with us, greasing our palm, he thinks that saves him. Man can't make more money or climb any ladders if he's six feet in the dirt. Plus, I saw the financials. He must be selling some magic pussy, because that man is making bank. We're talking a half a mill a year—out cut. And he projects that figure to double two times over in the first year."

"Hang on a second, how many years do we let this go on before we take him out?"

He cuts into his pancakes, his eyes lifting to lock with mine. “I don’t have an answer for that. We cease the business, and all his assets, take out all his guys one by one before we kill him. That’s going to take time.” He sets his fork down and pushes his plate aside. “I know you want to revenge Irish as soon as possible, but it’s not as simple as you want it to be. Think of Fatmir as an appetizer, and his mercenaries the palate cleanser. The main course will be Mondestino, but you gotta fatten him up first before you sit down to enjoy him. The club has a lot of mouths to feed, Shotgun.” Pulling in a deep breath, he leans back against the booth. His hand shoots up and he scratches at his thick beard.

“In all the years you’ve worn that patch, you’ve never once questioned my judgement or doubted my leadership. I’m asking you not to start now. I know things are more personal with you and Irish being the victims of the attack, and I respect that. I want this as bad as you do, but I want to do it right. I want to make sure Irish didn’t die in vain, and I believe deep down you want the same.”

He's right about a few things. Biggie has never given anyone reason to doubt his choices, least of all me. I want revenge on what happened, but if there’s a possibility to make Irish’s death count for more than just brutality and violence—it should be explored. A deal like this could set up his kids for life, even if it comes by way of pussy. They don’t need to know that.

“I want to be at the next meeting.”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Biggie says. “How does tonight work for you?”

“Just give me the time and I’ll make it happen.”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

EIGHT

JADE

Me: Hey are you awake?

I stare at the text, hoping those gray little bubbles will appear, but two minutes go by, and I get nothing. At this point I wouldn't be surprised if Shotgun is awake and is just intentionally not answering me. By now he's probably had enough of my bullshit, and I can't say that I blame him. The last few days have been rough.

I don't know if he really knew what he was signing up for when he offered—no, scratch that—when he demanded I accept his help, but I can guarantee he definitely got more than he bargained for. The last two nights I must've really been unbearable because he dipped out as soon as we got back from my nightly visits to the hospital, when usually he hangs around, helping me get the boys to bed before he leaves.

This morning before we took the kids to school, he asked if I could see Killian a little earlier than normal. It didn't really matter what time I got there. He still wasn't latching, and for the sake of my mental health, I gave up on trying. So now that I'm exclusively pumping, and bottle feeding, I don't have to be there at a specific time to feed him. I just made sure to bring extra milk for the nurses.

I told him that was fine, and he asked if I minded if Bella stayed with the boys while we went to the hospital. I thought it was random that he asked, but I agreed. I liked Bella, and I trusted her. Plus, she's a nurse, what more can you ask for in a babysitter?

Instead of waiting in the truck like he did when the boys were in tow, Shotgun came up to the NICU with me, and when I was done feeding him his bottle, I let him hold Killian for a little while. It was the first time since I was discharged that he did, and even though I caught him up to speed every night on the way home from the hospital, he seemed amazed by the progress Killian was making. The jaundice had cleared, but he was still on oxygen, although the doctors don't anticipate he'll be on it much longer. They seem more concerned about him gaining weight. Now that he's taking the bottle, we're hoping to see more of an improvement over the next few days. If that happens, he might be released by the end of the week.

After our visit, he dropped me off at the house. I thought it was odd he didn't come in to see the boys or say goodbye to Bella, but I didn't ask any questions, and I figure I did that more out of habit than anything else.

Bella stayed for a while, and having her company was nice. She didn't ask me a million questions or treat me like a charity case. I realized I needed more friends in my life. For the longest time my social life revolved around Irish's, and since most of the guys didn't have 'ol ladies, I was often the only woman. It didn't really bother me, but I'm thinking it'd do me good to have at least one girlfriend.

Guido picked Bella up a little while later, and he let it slip that he was in a hurry to meet Shotgun and Biggie at Lipstick & Lace.

I didn't start to dwell on that until after the kids went to bed.

At first I thought he probably had to handle club business, but as the night dragged on, I wondered if there was more to it. Maybe he finally got tired of playing house with me and found a girl to release all the tension I've been causing him. As quickly as thought entered my mind, it disappeared, though. Shotgun would cut his dick off before he ever put it anywhere near a stripper. Being neglected by his mother as a small boy, watching her pay attention to the men who paid her to fuck them, really

did a number on him.

I specifically remember Irish telling me when the Kings first acquired Lipstick & Lace, Shotgun refused to go the club. That's why Irish was there so much in the beginning. I also recall asking my husband how Shotgun ever got laid. I knew the club had some girls on rotation that often serviced the guys' needs, but if Shotgun had such a problem with strippers, it didn't make sense to me that he'd be willing to share women with his brothers. Irish laughed in my face.

"Shotgun gets more pussy than any of the Kings. He's got half the neighborhood girls on speed dial. His dick ain't hurtin' for nothing."

That shut me up, and I never asked another question about Shotgun's personal life. Never even gave it a second thought.

Until tonight.

Now, I'm sitting here with a sick child lying across my lap, staring at my phone, wondering where he takes all these neighborhood girls, and what they look like. Does he prefer blondes or brunettes? Do they know he's been at my beck and call for the last few weeks? Are they mad about it? It would sure as hell bother me.

"Mommy, I hot," Raiden moans.

I set my phone down on the end table and press my hand to his forehead. He woke up two hours ago, complaining about his belly, and proceeded to throw up all over himself and me. I took his temperature and gave him some Tylenol, but it hasn't helped break the fever. Hence why I texted Shotgun at three in the morning. Both Legend, and Raiden tend to spike high fevers, and the only thing that helps is rotating between the Tylenol and Motrin, and in case you haven't figured it out yet—I'm all out of Motrin.

“I know baby. I’m going to get you another cold compress to put on your head,” I say, easing him off my lap so I can go into the kitchen to get another damp towel. But before I can even take a step my cellphone rings, and Shotgun’s number flashes across the screen.

I quickly accept it, pressing it to my ear.

“Hi, I’m sorry?—”

He cuts me off, his voice breathless as he barks, “Is everything okay?”

“Raider doesn’t feel well. I think it’s a stomach bug or something because he threw up all over the place. But he has a fever, and I’m all out of Children’s Motrin.”

“Send me a picture of what to get, and I’ll go and get it. Might take me a half hour or so, I have to stop at the clubhouse first.”

“I can Instacart it if it’s too much trouble.” I should’ve done that in the first place, but I didn’t think of it until just now. I probably could’ve called Fuckface too. He graduated from sitting outside my house and ruining my lawn since I was released from the hospital, but I doubt it would’ve been an issue.

“You’re not Instacarting fucking Motrin,” he growls. “Just send me the picture. Do you or the kids need anything else?”

“No, I think we’re good.”

“Okay. See you soon.”

He disconnects the call, and I quickly Google a photo of the medicine, screenshotting the picture before I send it to him.



“Is Uncle Shotty coming?” Raiden asks, his little voice groggy as he rolls onto his side. I stare into his glassy eyes, and touch my hand gently to his rosy cheek.

“Yeah, sweetie, your Uncle Shotty is on his way.”

Shotgun: Open the door.

I scramble off the couch, careful not to wake Raiden, before I hurry toward the front door, and disarm the alarm. When I pull open the door, the motion detection lights shoot on, illuminating my front porch. Shotgun lifts the bag from the drugstore between us, and that’s when I notice his knuckles are all bloody and bruised. My gaze immediately tracks over the rest of him, inspecting him for any other injuries, but he’s pretty covered up, dressed in a black zip-up hoodie, and a pair of jeans. The only thing I notice is the splattering of blood on his bright white sneakers.

“Here,” he says, pushing the bag toward me. “Take it.”

“What happened to you?”

“Nothing, just take the bag. There’s some Ginger Ale in there too, in case he gets nauseous again.”

Instead of reaching for the bag, I take his free hand in mine, turning his hand over to inspect the bruising. It looks like he drove his fist through a brick wall. My eyes lift to his.

“This isn’t nothing.”

He quickly snatches his hand back. “Don’t ask questions you don’t want to know the answers to. Just take the fucking medicine. It’s been a long night, and I have to be back here in a few hours.”

I'm taken back by the first part of his answer. I never asked Irish questions, because answers weren't an option. I knew from the jump he wouldn't divulge anything to me. But Shotgun makes it seem like he'd give me answers if I pressed hard enough. I don't know that I want to, though.

What I want is for him to come inside so I can clean his hands. The man has been taking care of me and my children for weeks, and I've been nothing but unappreciative and resentful. And he still shows up. It doesn't matter what time I call him, or how inconvenient the task is. He drops whatever he's doing. The least I can do is take care of him, the way he's been taking care of us. I think he needs that. I think he's gone his whole life without having anyone show up for him.

"Come in," I demand. "Let me put ice on your knuckles."

"No." His nostrils flare and his jaw goes tight as he shoves the bag at me once again. "I'm fucking tired, Jade. Take the fucking bag and let me be. I'm not your problem."

That fires me up, and I snap, "But I'm yours?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hate to break it to you, buddy, but it works both ways." I grab the bag with one hand, and his with the other, pulling him into the house. "Raider fell asleep on the couch, so be quiet," I whisper, closing the door behind him, then I motion him to follow me into the kitchen, but he just stands in the foyer.

"Jade."

I toss the bag on the console table and spin around, planting my hands on my hips.

"Is this payback for me being difficult? If it is, you've made your point," I hiss. "But

I feel I should remind you, I'm hormonal and my husband is dead. I have an excuse, what's yours?"

He jaw tics. "In case you didn't notice there is blood on my shoes. Not looking to track it on your floors."

"Then take them off, and I'll throw them in the washing machine." I drop my hands to my sides and give him a once over. "You got it anywhere else?"

Something flashes in his eyes, something I can't quite detect. He lifts his bruised hands to the zipper on his hoodie, slowly dragging it down to reveal his white shirt is also stained with blood.

"I hope the other guy looks worse."

He slicks his tongue over his teeth, his eyes flickering over my face. "The other guy is dead."

"Then it looks like a job well done to me." My eyes lock with his. If he's trying to villainize himself to me, it won't work. "Does this have to do with Irish?"

His eyes darken. "Does it matter?"

Of course it matters, but I think our reasons for it mattering are different. Shotgun needs revenge to be able to live with himself. I want it for my sons. Nothing will bring their dad back but knowing the men who took his life don't get to live theirs, provides a sense of validation. Why should those men get to see their children grow up when Irish will never see his?

"It matters," I whisper. "I just don't want you to get so lost in revenge that you forget there are now three boys who have lost their dad, and they would be devastated if

they lost their uncle too.”

“I won’t stop until everyone pays for what happened to him.”

I nod. I wouldn’t expect anything less from him. “Just make sure you always come back. Bloody shoes, bruised knuckles, and all.”

We’re counting on you.

Whether I like it or not.

“Are you going to wake him to give him the medicine?” Shotgun asks as I dump a handful of ice cubes in a Ziplock bag.

“He just fell asleep before you got here. I don’t want to disturb him.” I walk over to the kitchen island where he’s sitting. After he took off his shoes, and the t-shirt under his hoodie, I put them both in the washing machine. Now he only has the hoodie on, and it’s zipped halfway, revealing all the tattoos that trail from his neck and disappear to God knows where. “Can you place your hands flat on the counter? I’ll grab another bag of ice.”

“It’s fine, they don’t even hurt,” he grunts.

He takes the ice from me and presses it against one of his hands. I frown because that isn’t doing anything for the other hand. Without giving him a chance to argue with me, I go about my original plan and fill another Ziplock with ice.

“Jade, it’s late, you should get some rest. Is Legend still going to school in the morning?”

I take a seat next to him and press the ice pack to the top of the hand that’s holding

the ice against the other one. “Eh, if we wake up on time. It’s not a crime if he misses a day, and I think we can all use a break from the grind.” I frown as I stare at his hand. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to go up and see Killian, though. I have to call the NICU and see what they suggest since I was exposed to whatever bug Kaiden has.”

I lift my eyes to his. “I owe you an apology.”

“For what?”

“I’ve been horrible to you, and I keep telling myself I’m going to do better, but...I don’t know... I have all these conflicting emotions, and I don’t know what to do with them. It’s just easy to lash out on you, because you take it, and that’s not fair to you.” I hold his stare. “You have to stop letting me walk all over you.

“Jade—”

“I’m serious, Shotgun. You deserve better from me.”

He doesn’t say anything, he just stares at me for a beat too long before he looks away. “If you need someone to lash out on, I rather it be me than anyone else.”

“You’re a sadist.”

The corners of his mouth curve slightly. “Maybe.”

Neither of us say anything for a long while after that. The ice starts to melt and he takes the bag from me, walking both over to the sink. “I’m going to take off. If you decide to send Legend to school, just call me. I promise to keep my phone close by.”

“Your shoes aren’t dry. I didn’t even take them out of the washing machine yet.”

He combs his fingers through his hair, an exasperated sigh leaving his lips. “Well, fuck. We probably should’ve thought of that.”

My eyes shoot to the clock on the stove. It’s close to five in the morning. The man looks exhausted. He has dark circles under his eyes, and no fucking shoes. He shouldn’t have to drive all the way to the other side of Brooklyn, only to come back here in a couple of hours if Legend wakes for school.

It dawns on me that this all could’ve been avoided if I had just let him stay in the side apartment. It was a temporary fix that would’ve made both our lives easier, but because I’m a stubborn bitch, I shut him down and made life even more difficult than it had to be.

But maybe it’s not too late to fix that.

“If you still want to move into the apartment, you can,” I blurt. “Temporarily of course. Maybe just until I get clearance to drive again?”

I don’t want the kids to get used to him living here. They’re confused enough.

His eyes widen slightly as he stares at me. “I think you’ve lost your mind. It’s five o’clock in the morning, Jade. I ain’t moving shit.”

I roll my eyes. “I don’t mean right now. I don’t even know what it looks like in there.” Irish is only gone a month, but it’s been at least three since anyone went in there. Occasionally, Irish would disappear in there to smoke a joint, but I can’t remember the last time he did that. “It definitely needs a good cleaning.” I pause, returning my gaze to him. “Sleep on it. For tonight you can stay on the couch in the den, and then tomorrow we can figure out the details if you want to. They’ll be rules of course.”

He leans against the sink, crossing one foot over the other as he folds his arms against his chest. “Rules, huh?”

“Yes.”

“Five in the morning, and she’s still laying down the law.” He shakes his head, a small smirk playing on tired face. “What kind of rules, Jade?”

I don’t know why I even said that since I can’t think of a single rule that would need to be enforced. Pulling my lower lip between my teeth, I try to conjure up at least one.

“I know you’re the VP now, and things come up, but you leave the club business at the door. This is my boys’ home, it’s their sanctuary. There needs to be separation. If you come home like you did tonight, there is a fire pit in the yard, and a slop sink in the basement. Get rid of any evidence before step foot inside the house.”

“What else?”

“Um... well, you’re here to help, not overrule. You can’t go against me when it comes to the boys. I have final say in all the decisions.”

“Not looking to overstep.”

“I know that, but the boys might try to take advantage of the situation, and if that happens, I need you to be on my side.”

“Always.”

“Dinner.”

His brows pinch together. “What about it?”

“Do you eat?” I’m aware that question sounds ridiculous, but every night before we go to the hospital, I make sure the boys are fed, and he has never once sat down and eaten a meal with us.

His lips quirk again, and something sinister flashes in his eyes.

“Don’t mock me, Shotgun.”

“Oh, trust me, I’m not mocking you.” He licks his lips. “I eat, Jade.”

“Ok, well, you’re going to start eating dinner with us. It’s weird when you just stand by the door while we’re sitting at the table. I’m not a great cook, but no one goes hungry around here.”

“Anything else?”

Just one thing.

“No neighborhood girls in the house. I don’t need to explain to Legend why there’s a revolving door of women coming in and out of your place. You need to get laid, do it at the clubhouse.”

“Kind of you to worry about my cock, but I assure you, I don’t shit where I eat.”

My cheeks flush at his crassness. I don’t think I’ve ever heard him speak like that to me before. “Then we’re good.” I slide off the stool, ignoring the dull ache where my incision is healing. “I’ll go put your things in the dryer and get you a blanket.”

“Jade?”



“Yeah?”

“It’s only temporary.”

My brows furrow at the reminder. “I know. I’m the one who said it first.”

“Right.”

NINE

SHOTGUN

It was only meant to be six weeks, but the day after Jade got clearance to drive again, we got word that Irene had passed in her sleep. Six weeks then became six months, which turned into one year, and now here I am, fourteen months later, still living in the side apartment of Jade's house. I pull my boots on, and open the door, making way to the back of the house.

In the beginning of our arrangement, I would ring the bell every morning until she gave me a key. But when winter rolled around, it became easier to go through the yard—less snow.

I open the sliders on the back deck and step into the kitchen. The morning chaos is in full swing just as it always is. Legend and Kaiden are fighting over some nonsense while Killian runs around the table in his diaper. Potty training has fully commenced, and the kid wants no part of it. My eyes shoot to the counter where Jade is making lunches, and filling water bottles. Her hair is in a messy bun on top of her head, and she's wearing one of those expensive pajama sets she loves so much—a pretty pink number that consists of a silk camisole that stretches tight around her chest, and matching wide-leg satin pants that ride low on her hips, and cling to her ass.

Mornings were easier in the early days of me living here. She was sleep deprived and didn't give a single fuck about what she wore to bed. Don't get me wrong, there were other things that I struggled with—like all the times I walked in on her pumping. I tried not to look the first few times, but then I just gave up. Jade had a fantastic set of

tits. They were big, round, and by the looks of it, firm as fuck. And her nipples were always hard. There isn't a man on this green earth that could resist staring at them.

Now I fight with my cock every morning because it's impossible for the fucking thing not to react to the whole package. The tits... her ass, and those fucking hips that were made for a man to hold while she bounces on his cock. I fuck my hand every morning before I make my way into the kitchen, and every morning I walk to the coffee pot with my dick straining against the zipper of my jeans. It's fucking torture, and as many times as remind myself she's Irish's, my cock doesn't seem to get the message.

I want her.

But I know I'll never have her.

Every time I fuck another woman, I imagine it's her body my cock is buried inside of and when I cum it's her fucking name I call out. I keep waiting for a sign from Irish, figuring it's only a matter of time before he starts haunting me for filthy desires.

"Good morning to you too," Jade taunts, as she bumps her hip against my side. The coffee pot nearly slips from my hand as I turn to face her. I'm hit with a smile and fingers tighten around the handle of the pot. Her body is my greatest temptation, but that smile is my undoing. "They are absolutely feral today. Six more weeks and school is out."

"You do realize they'll be home every day after that," I say, placing the coffee pot back where it was.

"But I won't have to wake up at the crack of dawn to cook three different breakfasts, or race around to make any lunches."

She says that now, but when they're bothering her for a snack every twenty minutes, her tune will change. It did last summer.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. They changed the time of Raiden's T-ball practice tonight. It's five o'clock at Marine Park."

I sip my coffee as she turns and struts to retrieve the boys' book bags, that ass of hers swaying from side to side with every step she takes. Biting back a curse, I tear my eyes away. "Legend has football practice at five."

"Yes, that's why I'm bringing it up. I figured I'll take Raiden, and you'll take Legend—that's of course if you don't have something else planned. I can probably ask one of the coaches to help."

Jade don't know shit about football, but because she went to one Yankee game fifteen years, she calls herself a baseball fan. It's the reason she chose to sign Raiden up for T-Ball.

When things overlap, she prefers to take Raiden because she claims to understand the game better. I don't have a problem with it because it's clear Legend's football coach has a thing for her. I'm sure the motherfucker would jump at the chance to take Legend to practice if it meant he got to ogle Jade when he picked him up.

"I'll take him."

"Great. One more thing, they need someone for the chains for the game. Legend is the only kid who hasn't had a parent do them yet. I would do it but I don't want to embarrass him or you any more than I already do."

I laugh at that. There isn't anything more entertaining than watching Jade cheer for her son at a football game. The woman has no idea what the fuck is going on most of

the time, but when she sees Legend with the ball, she becomes a lunatic, screaming at the top of her lungs for him to run.

“I’ll do the chains.”

“You’re the best.”

“I got something tonight, so don’t count me in for dinner.”

That’s another thing that has evolved over the fourteen months of me living here. I used to skate by having dinner with them once a week, then the sports schedule threw everything into disarray. She doesn’t cook when the boys have practice or games, and we usually grab takeout together.

“Actually, Bella is coming over tonight. We’re going to order sushi. Do you want me to get your usual for when you get home?”

She and Bella have gotten close, and every once in a while, they have a girls night. It usually consists of Bella coming to the house, and them breaking open a bottle of wine. I keep offering to watch the boys so she can actually go out somewhere, but for whatever reason, she hasn’t taken me up on that offer.

“No, I’ll just grab something on the go. It’s going to be a late night.”

Her eyes snap back to me. “Oh. Okay.”

For as much as I’m around her, I can never figure what goes on inside that head of hers when she looks at me like that. I don’t believe it’s disappointment that washes over her features, but it’s something akin to it.

I take one more sip of my coffee before dropping the mug in the sink.

“You boys ready to head out?”

“I call the front seat!” Legend says.

“When am I going to be big enough to sit in the front with you Uncle Shotty?”

I tousle his hair. “Don’t rush it, kid.”

Turning my attention to Killian, I lift him up. “I’ll see you later, buddy. You be good for your mom okay?”

“Mmm kay!” I kiss his cheek then set him back on the floor. As soon as his feet touch the ground, he takes off, his diaper hanging off his butt. Of all the boys, I think he’s going to be the one that drives us to drink.

When he disappears into the living room with his bagel, I turn my attention back to Jade.

“I’ll see you later.”

She gives me that smile again. It’s a little dimmer than before, but nonetheless still beautiful. “Later, Shotgun.”

I crack my fingers, rolling my neck slowly as my fingers tighten around the meat hook in my hand. With the three mercenaries, I nailed them to a beam and let them hang there for hours. Then, every hour on the hour, I took a piece of them, just like they took pieces from Irish.

Fingers.

Limbs... whatever I felt like taking at the moment.

One bitched and moaned so much, I took his tongue out.

But each lost both their eyes, and I did it with the rustiest pair of pliers I could find.

The carnage was plentiful, and they begged for mercy.

But there was none to be found.

Killing them, disposing the bodies, making everyone who was paying attention aware that no one fucks with the Kings—that's the shit I get hard on.

But this one is extra special.

After word got out that the first mercenary was taken out, Fatmir vanished. No one, not even Mondestino, could get eyes on him. But when the third mercenary was nailed to the beam, bleeding out like the pig he was, he squealed, revealing that Fatmir had fled to Albania.

It's taken six months to lure him back to the states, and much to my dismay, I can thank Mondestino for that.

I stalk towards the oil drum in the center of the room, watching intently as the flames dance from the top of it. Guido nudges me, offering me a pair of metal tongs. I take them from him, catching the meat hook with the prongs, and lower it into the fire, getting the hook nice and hot.

I want to smell his flesh burning as I hang him.

“You're making a mistake,” Fatmir spits, struggling against Biggie and Jersey who have him pinned to the concrete wall.

“Did I say you could fucking speak?” Biggie growls. “One more fucking word out of you, and I’ll cut your tongue out just like we did with that other cunt.”

“Mondestino set this all up,” Fatmir sneers. “But you know that, don’t you? You know it and you still suck his cock.”

Biggie slams Fatmir’s head against the wall, wedging his thick forearm against the base of his throat.

“You about ready, Shotgun? Cuz if not, I’m going to blow this motherfucker’s head off.”

Fitting the flame-retardant gloves to my hands, I remove the hook from the flame. Sweat drips into my eyes, and I blink it away, turning to where Fatmir fights to breathe.

“Turn him around and put him on his knees,” I order.

Keeping his arm around Fatmir’s neck, Biggie spins him around, then Jersey kicks him in the back of the knees. His legs buckle, and Biggie goes down with him, never removing his arm from his neck. Fatmir braces his hands flat against the wall as he kicks his legs, using all his strength to fight Biggie’s hold, but he fails miserably.

In one fluid motion, I rear my hand back before driving the hook into the back of his neck. His flesh sizzles. Fatmir screams in agony as Biggie quickly releases him. Blood spurts everywhere as I twist the hook through the muscle and tissue beneath his skin. Guido steps to my side handing me a long, thick chain. I thread it through the hook, and signal for Jersey to flip the switch. The chain starts to move, and inch by inch Fatmir is pulled off the floor. His arms flail and he kicks his legs, screaming in his native tongue.



He begs.

He pleads.

He bleeds .

When he's fully suspended in the air, Guido kills the motor on the lift.

Fatmir's movements slow as blood pools on the concrete basement of Monty's Pork Store. The prospects are going to have a hell of a time cleaning this shit up, but I've got zero regrets. I walk to the other end of the basement and grab one of the milk crates. Bringing it back to where Fatmir hangs, I flip it over and climb on top of it, pulling the KA-Bar knife from my leather holster.

"Open your eyes," I growl.

"Fuck you," he croaks.

"Open your fucking eyes before I nail them open."

"I said... fuck you."

My jaw clenches as my hand wraps around the back of his neck. Pulling him down an inch, I lean closer, my breath hot against his ear. "You killed my brother. Left three children without a father. Now your penance is death, but you're going to die wondering if when I leave here, I go to your home, take your wife from your bed and do the same to her. Sweet dreams, motherfucker."

A gurgling noise sounds from the back of his throat, and it's the last sound he makes before I drive the knife through his throat. I wait for his body to fall limp against the hook before I jump off the crate and slide the knife back into my holster.

Then my eyes lock with Biggie's.

"It's done, brother. Go home. We got it from here."

Home.

Where Irish's wife and children wait for me.

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

TEN

SHOTGUN

I swing my leg over my bike, and reach into my saddle bags, taking out the drawstring bag I dumped my bloody clothes into. I could've disposed of them after I took a quick shower at the clubhouse, but I knew... I fucking knew she'd have the fire pit going. The woman has a sixth sense when it comes to my sins.

Clutching the bag in my fist, I follow the scent of burning wood into the yard. I find Jade sitting in one of the Adirondak chairs in front of the fire, her knees drawn up to her chest, a glass of red wine in her hand, the mostly empty bottle on the small table beside her.

I pause for a moment, giving myself a moment to drink her in. The glow from the fire illuminates her face, and I can see her cheeks are flushed. I'm just not sure if that's a side effect of the wine or the heat from the fire. Either way, she looks vibrant and relaxed.

Unsticking my feet from the ground, I tear my gaze away from her and make my way toward the fire. Feeling her eyes on me, I reach into the bag and toss my sneakers into the flames, watching as fire grow taller. Next to go is my bloody t-shirt, followed by my favorite pair of jeans. When there is nothing left to burn, I throw the bag into the pit too.

It's all so routine.

“What number is that?”

Her voice is raspy. It gets like that after she’s had a few drinks, or when she’s overly tired, and every time it happens, it sends a jolt to my cock. Because try as I might to forget, I know her voice gets like that when she cums too. I close my eyes as the image of her pinned against the wall, her legs wrapped around Irish’s waist, fills my head. You think after all these years I would’ve found a way to bleach the memory from my mind, but for some torturous reason, my brain won’t let me forget the way she looked that night.

Her cheeks were flushed then too, and when she begged him to fuck her harder, her eyes locked with mine over his shoulder. I expected to feel some resemblance of shame at her catching me watch her climb her way to ecstasy, but that feeling never came.

I swallow thickly as my eyes meet her from over the flames. “Four.”

She’s witnessed the aftermath of every kill, and it doesn’t seem to faze her. At least not in the way I figured it would.

I guess Irish trained her right.

There ain’t too many women who would still welcome a man into her home, and trust him with her children, all while knowing the night before he was drawing the filthy soul out of a body, even if that body is the reason she’s a widow.

Jade eyes me from the rim of her glass but doesn’t say a word.

She accepts me as I am.

Every cell in my body knows I should bid her goodnight and make my way to the

side apartment. The adrenaline is still alive in my veins, and I did nothing to release it. I am a ticking time bomb walking straight to Hell.

I drop my ass into the chair next to hers, my gaze lowering to the bottle of wine.

“You and Bella polish that off?” I ask, smoothing my hands over my denim clad thighs. I hunker back against the chair, spreading my legs wide as I make myself comfortable, staring at her as she takes a long sip of her wine, draining what’s left in the glass.

“Nope, that’s bottle number two. She helped with the first one, but I took this one down all on my own,” she replies, licking the remnants of wine from her lips before setting the empty glass on top of the table. Her gaze flits to mine. “I got bored waiting for you.”

“I told you not to.”

“You say that every time, and every time you find me in the exact same spot as I’m in tonight.”

She refills her glass, finishing off the bottle before her eyes cut back to me and a frown graces her pretty mouth. “Are you going to make me drink alone?”

“Wine ain’t really my thing.”

She lowers her bare feet to the floor, and pops out of the chair, giving me my first look at tonight’s choice of pajamas. Another camisole, this one ivory with lace trim around the neckline, and of course, because the universe hates me, the shorts match.

“I’ll get you a beer,” she offers.

Consuming any alcohol, even a measly beer, is not a smart move on my behalf.

Not tonight.

Not the way I'm feeling.

Yet I don't stop her.

Jade and I have come to some sort of a silent understanding. I have no doubt the reason she lets me take care of her and the kids is because I let her take care of me. Making sure I eat, keeping the light on the side of the house on when I'm not home, and stocking her fridge with the beer I prefer—it's her way of giving back. It makes her feel purposeful, and when Jade feels like she's got purpose, her confidence soars. She doesn't need to parade around in six-hundred-dollar heels that tear her feet to shreds just to walk with her head high, she needs to feel appreciated.

"Here you go," she says, extending the beer to me. "I brought out some chips and guac too in case you're hungry. Bella made the guac herself. It's so good."

I lean forward, taking the beer from her as she drops the bowl of guacamole on the table between us, along with a bag of chips. Before she takes a seat again, she reaches behind her, and tugs at the hem of her shorts.

I clear my throat before taking a long pull from the bottle.

The fact her shorts are riding up her ass makes me wonder if she's even wearing any underwear.

"Did you have a good night?"

"Yeah, it was fun," she says as she finally falls back into the chair, crossing her legs.

As she reaches for her wine, the strap of her camisole falls off her shoulder, giving me a clear shot of the side of her tit. I bite back a curse, and try to pay attention to what she's saying, but the woman makes it so damn hard. It's always the ones who don't try to get a man's engine going that actually do.

"The boys were exhausted from practice, and Killian went to bed early, so we weren't interrupted much. Did you know she and Guido haven't spoken in two weeks?"

I didn't know that. We don't really get involved in one another's business, but even if we did, Guido is vault when it pertains to Bella. I don't know what the man thinks he's hiding by keeping his feelings under lock and key. It's totally obvious he's in love with her. A man doesn't put a woman on the back of his bike unless he believes that's where he belongs.

That being said, them not speaking for a couple of weeks isn't a new development. They've always been hot and cold with each other. The cold comes whenever there is a new man in Bella's life.

"Let me guess, she's dating someone new."

Jade's gaze cuts back to me, and she raises one of her perfectly arched eyebrows. "How did you know that?"

I take another pull of my beer. "It happens every time. He can't handle the idea of her being with someone else, but he's too much of a pussy to claim her for himself."

There are no laws that keep him from taking what he wants. No fucking excuses. Another man would consider that a fucking gift.

Jade frowns at that. "I think they would be good together."

So do I, but what we think doesn't really matter.

"She likes this new guy, though. They've only been on one date, but he keeps asking her out again. He wants to take her on a helicopter ride over the city." She pauses, lifting her glass to her lips. I watch as she takes a sip, the long column of her throat working as she swallows. If she only knew how many times I pictured marking her there.

"Sounds romantic, doesn't it?"

I shake my head, dismissing any thoughts of me sucking her neck before I play back the question.

I've never put much stock in being a romantic, but renting a helicopter to take a woman on a joyride to see some skyscrapers seems like overkill to me. You want to impress a woman, give her your time. The effort a man puts into a woman, appreciating her for who she is and loving her on the days she doesn't love herself, that's unmatched. You can rent a fucking rocket ship and send her to the moon, spend a million dollars on frivolous nonsense, and none of it will have the same effect. The richest men are the ones with empty pockets. Those are the romantics.

"I guess that depends on what your definition of romance."

Keeping her eyes on the fire, she traces her finger around the rim of her glass.

"I miss it," she whispers.

"Romance?"

She glances down at her glass. "All of it. Date nights, having someone call me when I'm not around just to tell me they miss me. Kissing before bed, and lazy kisses in the



mornings to start the day.”

I would fucking give my life to kiss her like that just once.

“It’s been over two years since I’ve been on the back of a motorcycle.”

Give my life for that too. Can’t imagine there being anything better than feeling her tits against my back while I squeeze her thigh to mine and we ride.

“I miss those long rides. You know the ones that never have any specific destination but when they end you realize they weren’t meant for anything more than foreplay?”

No, I don’t.

A brazen Jade makes for a dangerous time. I don’t know what the hell is in that wine, but whatever it is has loosened her lips. The woman is killing me slowly, and if I don’t put an end to it now, I’m going to do something I can’t take back.

“Don’t know anything about that. Never had a woman on the back of my bike.”

I don’t know why she looks so shocked by that.

“Then I guess we’re both missing out.”

When you only want one woman, and she’s off limits, it doesn’t feel that way. I’d be a fraud if I put anyone that wasn’t her on the back of my bike, and you can’t miss something you never had.

“But you know what I miss most?”

Don’t ask.

Whatever you do, don't fucking ask.

"Sex," she blurts. "I miss sex."

It's a good thing my mouth isn't full, or she'd be wearing my beer. My head snaps around, and our eyes lock.

"Jesus, Jade."

She rolls her eyes as I squirm in my chair like a fucking schoolboy. My cock is way to happy to be having this fucking conversation with her.

"Oh, come on, Shotgun. Is anything really off limits with us?"

There isn't and I'm starting to sense that might be a problem.

"I just watched you toss your bloodstained clothes into my fire pit. We've seen each other at our worst, and you're helping me raise my children. If I can't talk to you about this kind of stuff, then who can I talk to?"

All valid points. Still, I grit my teeth, my fingers tightening around the bottle so hard, it's no wonder it doesn't shatter in my hand.

"Bella," I fire back. "You can talk to Bella."

"Why so she can pity me?" She scoffs. "The girl is off living her best life, and I'm..." Her voice trails as she drags her fingers through her long, brown hair, trying to find the words to convey whatever she's thinking. A sigh slips past her lips and she lowers her hand to her lap, peering at me from under the fringe of her long lashes.

"...I don't know what I am. Stagnant is the word that comes to mind." She sets the

wine glass on the table between u and turns in her chair so she's fully facing me. "I feel like I'm living life on pause if that makes any sense. Like is this it? Am I never supposed to have another person's lips on mine? Am I never supposed to hold someone else's hand or fall asleep next to another man. Bella's life is just beginning, and mine feels like it's already ended."

I place my beer on the table and release a heavy breath. Needing something to hold onto so I don't reach for her, my fingers curl around the armrests. Biggie warned me there would be a day when Jade decided she was ready to move. Maybe that day is now.

"Your life isn't over," I say softly.

"Isn't it though? I wanted more kids, Shotgun, and not because I wanted to keep trying for a little girl, but because I loved being pregnant. But even more than that, I love being a mom." Never seen anyone do it better, and don't think I ever will. She was born to be a mother, that I'm sure of. "It's hard for me to accept that I'll never experience that again. That I'll never have any of it again. No man to love me. No man to hold me. No man to fuck me so hard I can't walk the next day."

I love you.

My arms are dying to hold you.

And I'd fuck you harder than you've ever been fucked before.

"No man to give me more babies. No man to walk through life with. Irish died and he took the rest of my life with him."

I'll give you all the babies you want.

Walk through hell to hold your hand through life if you let me.

“You can still have those things, Jade. He wanted you to move on. Heard him say it with my own ears. It was one of the last things he said to me.”

“This isn’t about Irish,” she snaps. “This is about me.” She smacks her hand against her chest, emphasizing those words. “I loved him with everything I had, but I don’t need his blessing to move on with my life. I know he wouldn’t want me to rot here. He loved me too much to want that.”

My pulse quickens as Biggie’s words ring inside my head. If this is the part where she pushes me away to make room for someone else, I’m not ready.

I’m not fucking ready to step back into the shadows and watch her love another man.

“So what’s the problem?” I ask hoarsely.

She tears her gaze away from me, and stares back at the fire. “I wouldn’t even know where to begin to find someone. I’m a mom of three. I don’t go bar hopping, and the thought of online dating scares the hell out of me. Then there’s the club. I’ve given you all hell since Irish died, but you’re my family. Club life is the only life I know. Can you imagine me bringing around an accountant to one of Biggie’s cookouts?”

They wouldn’t care so long as she was happy, but it’d tear me to shreds.

“It’d take some time getting used to, but everyone wants to see you happy again.”

What I really want to tell her is that she doesn’t have to go to a bar to find someone to give her all those things. I’m sitting right beside her and have been wanting to give them to her since I was sixteen years old.

She glances back at me, a small smile playing on her lips. “You guys would torture the shit out of him.” Pausing, she waves a hand, dismissively. “That’s besides the point, though. It’d never get that far. I’d have to get passed all my fears and schedule a mommy makeover first.”

“What the fuck is a mommy makeover?”

“A tummy tuck and a breast lift. The c-section really messed up my stomach,” she says, lifting her camisole to reveal her belly to me. My eyes immediately lower to the span of skin, searching for any imperfections that would require the fix she’s suggesting. But all I see are the faint lines growing her babies left behind, and there isn’t a fucking thing about those lines that needs fixin’. They’re beautiful, and any man that would tell her otherwise, or make her feel like less for having them should shoot himself in the dick.

“There’s nothing wrong with your stomach,” I growl, lifting my eyes back to hers. I hold her stare for a beat, then glance down at her tits, specifically her nipples that are poking through the fabric. “And there isn’t a goddamn thing wrong with your tits.”

“I nursed three babies.”

“I’m aware.” I had a front row seat to the last.

“You don’t get it,” she sighs.

“No, I definitely don’t.”

“I’ve only been with one man, and he was arguably a boy the first time we had sex. No one else has seen me naked. My body looks a lot different now that I’ve had three kids. I don’t know that I’ll have the courage let alone the confidence to take my clothes off for another man.”

I can tolerate a lot of shit when it comes to Jade, but I won't listen to her demean herself or shame her body. My control snaps, and the words spill from my mouth before I can stop them.

“Your body was perfect then, and it's perfect now.”

Shock courses through her features for a brief moment before she lowers her top. “I didn't think you remembered that night. You never said anything.”

“What the hell was I supposed to say? It wasn't a big deal.”

That's a big fat lie. It might not have been a big deal if it was anyone other than her. There is no shame in the Kings Of Anarchy clubhouse. We've all walked in one another at some point, but I don't recall a time when one brother blatantly watched another fuck his wife. It's unspoken rule—'ol ladies are off limits.

“It was a big deal to me,” she whispers. Her lashes lower and she looks off to the side, giving me a clear view of her profile. “I liked it.”

“You liked being watched?”

Her teeth sink into her lower lip as she brings her eyes back to me.

“I liked that it was you .”

ELEVEN

SHOTGUN

I like that it was you.

I don't know what that means. Jade was happy with Irish. She didn't want me. She didn't yearn for me like I yearned for her. She's drunk and confused. Her emotions are all over the place. And even if she wasn't, she's just saying that because I'm here. She's scared to move on. I'm a safe bet. Like she said, we've seen each other at our lowest, and we've seen each other at our highest. There is a level of comfort between us.

"Forget I said that," she mutters. "Actually, if you could forget this whole conversation that would be great. I'm getting my period, and I'm a horny mess when that happens. I don't want things to be weird between us." She stands, collecting the empty wine bottle. She walks it over to the recycling bin, her shorts still riding up her ass, and a sense of panic washes over me.

I don't want her to go.

I don't want to forget anything about this conversation.

She comes back to where I'm sitting, and reaches for the empty wine glass.

"I'll leave the chips and guac out in case you get hungry." She turns around, and steps between my legs. The urge to grip her hips and pull her onto my laps tugs at me.

Lifting her free hand, she touches the side of my face. It's such a small gesture, but it packs a powerful punch. "You know, Shotgun, it's okay for you to move on too." Her eyes leave mine and she glances at the fire pit before staring back at me, her thumb gently tracing my jaw. "He wouldn't want you to be any more stuck than I am." Her hand falls away from my face, and she offers me a small smile, one that doesn't quite reach her eyes. "Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

Something inside me snaps and a low, animalistic growl surges past my lips. She goes to step out from between my legs, but I lurch forward, grabbing the backs of her thighs. A soft gasp escapes her as she turns her head back to me, but before she can ask me what the fuck I'm doing, I pull her onto my lap. Her knees fold onto the chair, bracketing my thighs, and she sits back on her haunches, her eyes flickering as they search mine.

I know she's waiting for me to say something, but everything I want to say to her right now is too fucking dangerous.

She places her hands flat against my chest and slowly inches forward until she's close enough for me to smell the fruity remnants of wine on her breath. Then she angles her head, and I suck in a breath. Her soft lips touch mine, and everything in me ceases.

I don't move a muscle.

I don't kiss her back.

Hell, I don't even think I breathe.

She blinks up at me, then goes in for another kiss, this one a little more firm. My hands move to their own accord, and I grip her hips, as her lips familiarize themselves with mine.



But I still don't kiss her back, knowing the second I do—it's over. I won't be able to stop myself from exploring every inch of her.

"Kiss me," she murmurs against my mouth. "Kiss me back, Shotgun."

A groan sounds from the back of my throat, as my fingers dig into her hips. Her hips rock forward, and she grinds herself against my painfully hard cock. She moans softly, and the sound reverberates through me. She winds her arms around my neck, angling her head as her teeth nip at my lips. "Kiss me."

I like to think of myself as a strong man. I can handle a lot of shit, and have, but I am no match for this. My hands fly up and I frame her face, pulling away from her only slightly so I can get a good look at her.

"I don't want to be something you regret," I rasp.

It would kill me.

"I could never regret you," she whispers back.

For whatever reason, I let myself believe those words, and my mouth crushes over hers. My intention to be soft and explorative fails, and the kiss becomes carnal in an instant.

Dominant and demanding.

A battle of tongues and teeth.

I can't get enough.

Her hands circle my wrists, and she tears her mouth from mine, licking her lips as she

stares at me with a befuddled expression flashing across her pretty face. She lifts both my wrists, pressing her lips first to the scars that mark my right one, then does the same to the left. Totally enthralled by her, I swallow thickly. She lowers my hands, placing them directly over her tits, the thin silk of her camisole doing nothing to hide the way her nipples pebble against my palms.

She releases her hold on my wrists, bending her head to pull my lower lip between her teeth. “Touch me, Shotgun,” she mewls.

My hands close around her tits, squeezing them roughly. It’s not enough. Not for her and not for me. I pull back, my hands lowering to the hem of her camisole.

“Hands over your head,” I growl. Licking her swollen lips, she rocks her pussy over my cock seductively as she obliges, and I waste no time tearing the camisole over her head. I toss it onto the ground and lean back against the chair, my eyes dropping to her tits. For as many times as I’ve seen them, I’ve never had the ability to truly appreciate them.

I cup them, familiarizing myself with their weight, my thumbs stroking over her nipples, making them even harder. I pinch and twist them, enticing the sweetest noises from her. Then I inch forward and take one into my mouth.

I suck and bite, flicking my tongue over the erect bud.

Heaven.

Moving to her other breast, I apply the same attention. Jade’s fingers comb through my hair, and he holds the back of my head, her hips rocking faster. My cock throbs. My pulse races.

“That’s it, mama, take what you need. Rub that pussy all over my cock.” I growl,

lapping at her nipple.

“Oh, God, yes,” she cries, her hips working wildly. I give her nipple one final suck before tearing my mouth away.

Cradling her tits, I press them together, my eyes snapping up to meet hers. “These tits are perfect. You’re perfect,” I say. “Do you hear me? Fucking perfect.”

She licks her lips but doesn’t say anything. She jumps keep a steady pace, dry humping the fuck out of me as she stares into my eyes.

“Say it,” I demand, squeezing her tits harder.

“They’re perfect,” she pants. “I’m perfect.”

“Good girl,” I praise, dropping my hands back to the armrests of the chair. I lean into her, capturing her lips with mine. My tongue pushes inside, swirling with hers. It’s a frantic kiss that I end too soon because I need more than just her mouth.

“Take your shorts off.”

It takes a second for my words to register before she scrambles off my lap. Standing between my spread legs, she watches as I undo my belt. Desire fills her eyes as she chews on her lips. Her eyes never leaving the spot where my cock strains to break free. I unzip my jeans but keep my cock in my pants. I just press the heel of my palm against the bulge, hoping it will provide the slightest bit of relief.

Her eyes flit up to mine, and I tip my chin toward.

“Come on, mama. Lose the shorts. Let me see that pretty pussy of yours.”

She hesitates for about a second before she slides her thumbs under the waistband of her shorts, and slides them down her legs, kicking them away when they reach her ankles. My eyes trail up her legs, and I inhale a sharp breath when I reach the apex of her thighs.

“Fuck,” I hiss, my fingers curling around the armrests. “Spread your legs.”

She obliges, revealing more of her pussy to me.

Bare, pink, and wet.

“Touch yourself.”

She cocks her head to the side, moving her fingers between her legs. I watch as she slides hers them between her smooth flesh, her thumb stroking back and forth over her clit.

“How’s it feel?” I lift my eyes to her face. That flush in her cheeks is back, and her lips are swollen. She parts them, panting softly.

“It’d feel better if it was your cock fucking me instead of my fingers.” Her eyes spring open, and lock with mine.

Yeah, it would. But that can’t happen.

“Come here.”

Her fingers continues to work between her legs as she steps forward. I pull her hand away, my fingers circling her wrist as she climbs back onto my lap, her legs spread wide, knees straddling my thighs. That pretty pussy positioned perfectly over my rock-hard cock. She sinks down, the wetness from her arousal soaking through my

jeans as I lurch forward and suck her fingers into my mouth.

I knew she'd be sweet.

Didn't know she'd taste like my favorite drug. A man could sustain solely on eating her pussy day in and day out. It's that fucking good.

Her free hand moves between us, and she tries to pull my cock free, but I stop her, removing her fingers from my mouth. She's about to object when I grip her hips and pull her down on my cock.

"I don't have condoms with me, and I ain't taking you bare."

There are a million other reasons I can't let it go that far, but I express none of them because deep down I know if I had a rubber, I'd already be pounding into her sweet cunt—consequences be damned.

"I don't particularly care for condoms. I get a reaction from the latex." She pushes her hair behind her ears, then winds her arms around my neck. "Are you clean?"

I never fuck without a condom, but I'm not taking any chances with her. It's been a minute since I've gotten a test, and as much as I want to feel her pussy cum all over my cock, I ain't risking her safety.

My fingers find her pussy, and I effectively shut her up by shoving two digits into her wet cunt. She's warm and tight, a perfect fucking fit for my fingers, but my cock—if I ever allow it the pleasure of being buried inside her—will struggle to get all the way in.

Gonna need to work her up to it.

Soaked in her arousal, my fingers fuck her hard and fast, my thumb stroking her swollen clit. She writhes over me, her beautiful body coated in a sheen of sweat as she bounces up and down on my fingers. Her tits sway with the motion and I lean forward, capturing one of her dark nipples between my teeth.

For the first year of Killian's life, I was tormented by these tits.

Now I get to enjoy them.

My other hand gathers the hair at the back of her head and I pull it hard, winding the silky strands around my wrist. Her nipple slips from my mouth and I lift my head, watching as she throws hers back, revealing the long column of her neck.

"Look at you, so fucking perfect," I growl.

So fucking mine.

I press my open mouth to her throat, and without giving it a second thought, I mark her there. I suck hard, my teeth scraping at her smooth skin. Branding her in a way I shouldn't.

Her pussy tightens around my fingers, and I can tell she's close.

"You gonna cum for me, mama? Make a mess of my fingers?"

"Yes," she pants. "Oh, God, yes."

"Do it," I growl, inching back so I can watch. "Cum for me, Jade. Been waiting my whole fucking life to watch."

Her hooded eyes find mine, and she slams down, her pussy fluttering as she moans

my name, and cums all over my fingers.

I watched another man fuck her.

Ingrained the image of her cumming to my brain.

But seeing her like this, knowing I'm the one responsible for making her feel so good, for putting that pink on her cheeks and the look of pleasure in her eyes, it's like nothing I've ever experienced.

In the back of my head, I know I have crossed a line, one that very well can get me kicked out of the club I've dedicated my life to or even killed. But I don't feel a lick of regret. I'll willing die at the hands of my brothers, take every bit of torture they give, all while remembering the sight of her face, and the feel of her cunt wrapped tight around my fingers, and when my soul is dragged straight to hell, I'll greet the Devil with a smile.

She falls limp against me, my fingers still wedged inside of her as she bends her head and kisses my neck. I untangle my hands from her hair, my fingers wandering down her bare back.

"I lied. You're even more perfect now." I rasp.

I thought it would be enough for her.

She came fucking hard.

But the second she caught her breath, she begged for my cock again. I was leaking, making a mess out of my jeans, and yet I still found the strength not to give into her.

In my twisted head, I've somehow convinced myself that I'm doing the right thing.

But as I kneel before her, her legs spread wide, hanging off the arms of the Adirondack chair, I realize there is nothing right about me eating her cunt.

She drives her fingers through my hair, holding the back of my head as my tongue flattens against her clit.

“Fuck, just like that,” she pants. “It feels so good. You feel so good.”

I switch things up, sucking hard on her clit, my hands moving up her body to play with her tits. She bucks against my mouth, panting and moaning as I get her to the point of no return, and when she cums, her thighs clamp around my head and she cries out my name.

My fucking name.

I continue to lap at her slowly, torturing myself as I drag out her orgasm. When I’m sure I’ve wrung her dry of every drop, I lift my mouth from her pussy, licking my lips to savor the taste. I playfully tweak her nipples before releasing them too, then my gaze drops from her face, and I stare at the faint marks across her stomach.

How she can think of them as imperfections is beyond me. My fingers trace over the lines before my lips take the same path, pausing over her c-section scar. She inhales sharply, her hand still cradling the back of my head. I stare up at her, trying to ignore the soft look in her eyes because if I read too much into it, I’ll make things even more complicated for us.

“You are fucking perfect. Got it?”

“Got it,” she whispers.

I push up on my knees and take her mouth one more time before I tear myself away



from her totally and stand. My hand slips down the front of my jeans, and I grip my cock. I haven't cum in my pants since I was fifteen years old, but that changed tonight, and I'm still hard.

“Are you going to do something about that?” she asks.

“Don't worry about it.”

“What if I want to watch?”

I swipe some of the cum away from the tip and blow out a ragged breath. “Woman, you are killing me.”

She pulls her legs over the armrests, pressing her thighs together as she straightens her shoulders. That's when I notice the abrasions my beard left all over her tits. I bet there are even some on the insides of her thighs.

“It's only fair,” she says, pulling my attention back to her face. “If you're not going to let me take care of you, then I should get to watch. You watched me.”

Yeah, I did.

“Take it out,” she murmurs. “Let me see what you like.”

I can't bring myself to say no to her, not when she looks at me like that. So confident and sure of herself. I yank down my jeans and pull out my cock. Her eyes widen, and she licks her lips, as I fuck my hand, squeezing and jerking my cock from root to tip, knowing I ain't going to last long. The sight of her naked body displaying all my markings, the flush in her cheeks, and the way her eyes are glued to me, desire radiating from them is all the ammunition I need.

“I want you to cum on me,” she says in that sultry voice of hers. “I want it to drip off my tits and onto my stomach.”

“Fuck, Jade,” I growl, my movements becoming more frantic.

“Make a mess of me, Shotgun. Paint me like I’m yours.”

Those words break me, and I lose control. I stalk towards her, closing the distance between us as I strangle the fuck out of my cock. She leans back, displaying her body a canvas for me, and I roar. My cum shoots across her tits, spraying over her stomach. It even hits her neck. She smiles sheepishly, lifting her hands to her body, rubbing every drop into her skin.

I stumble backwards, my cock still pulsing in my hand as I take in the show. Then, when she’s done, she stands and winds her arms around my neck, pulling my mouth down to hers.

My free hand winds around her back, and I grab her ass, drawing her even closer, as my tongue invades her mouth. We kiss and we kiss until I finally let go of my dick, and bring both my hands to her face. I pull away slowly, touching my forehead to hers.

“You good?”

“Yeah, Shotgun, I’m good.”

I nod. “Go get some rest. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Okay.”

I drop my hands from her cheeks, and pull up my pants, tucking my spent cock into

them. Jade grabs her pajamas from the ground but makes no move to put them back on as she struts toward the sliders.

Her head held high.

Shoulders straight.

Radiating confidence.

Seeing her like that makes breaking code worth it.

So fucking worth it.

### TWELVE

#### JADE

My decision to move on with my life didn't come to me over the bottle of wine I shared with Bella. It wasn't some grand epiphany I had while she shared her dating stories with me. It's been weighing on me for a while, but tonight when she asked me if I could ever see myself dating again, I let myself think deeply about what that might entail. And all the concerns I voiced to Shotgun tonight, did cross my mind but not in the way I expressed them.

I didn't want to throw myself into the dating pool. Not because the idea of stepping into a bar or creating an online dating profile scared the shit out of me. I didn't want to ride on the back of just anyone's bike, and I didn't want to take my clothes off or give my body to just anyone. My body was different. The parts that were once firm and tight, were now soft and there were scars from growing and delivering my babies. Men didn't appreciate imperfections they didn't create.

It was true when I said, starting over was terrifying, but the only man I could ever see myself taking that step with was the one already living in my house, helping me raise my children for over a year. Treating them and loving them like they were his. Supporting us in ways no other man would.

However, me moving on with another King, especially the man whom Irish truly considered a brother before he ever took any oath, would never be accepted by the club. I put Shotgun in a terrible situation, and the sad thing is, I don't feel bad about it.

I just don't know where we go from here.

Stepping out of the shower, I reach for my robe, but I don't rush to put it on. Instead, I wipe the steam from the mirror, and stare at my body. I lost myself after Irish died and Killian was born. That first year, I didn't care about what I looked like. You hear about women 'losing their pink'—well, that's just a hip way of saying, she's let herself go. She's given up on her femineity. It happens, but she gets it back.

It can start with a trip to the salon, where you get the works—mani, pedi, a blowout, and a Brazilian. Then the next day, before you put the same ratty sweats on, you grab an old pair of jeans instead. Soon you're throwing out the dry shampoo and shaving your legs every day. You hide the stretch marks, and you buy a push up bra to help the girls.

I had started to do all those things, and admittedly they were working, but it wasn't until I took my clothes off and bared my body to Shotgun that I truly felt my femineity return. The way he looked at me, the noises he made when he kissed me, and the way his cock hardened when he touched me—I never felt sexier aside from the time I caught him watching me fuck Irish.

Now, as I stare at myself, my eyes don't immediately dart to the flaws, they move to his marks. The bites he left on my thighs and the rash his beard left on my tits. And the only word that comes to mind is beautiful .

I slide my arms through the sleeves of the robe before loosely tying a knot around my waist, then I walk into my bedroom, and stare at my bed. The sheets have been washed a million times, and there are no traces of Irish, but it still feels wrong to slip into the bed I shared with him after being intimate with Shotgun.

I don't owe Irish anything. I gave him my heart, and we produced three beautiful children together. There's a part of me that will always love him.

But that's where it ends now.

Walking to the nightstand, I disconnect my phone from the charger and quietly creep out of my bedroom. In the morning, I will call the Salvation Army and donate the bed. Later, I'll go through Irish's things. There are some belongings of his I'm sure the boys will want some day, but his greatest possessions—his bike and his kutte—the club is safe keeping.

I make my way down the stairs and sprawl out on the couch. Instead of closing my eyes, though, I text Shotgun.

Me: Are you awake?

He replies instantly.

Shotgun: No.

I laugh.

Me: Very funny.

Shotgun: Thought you'd be conked out.

Me: I just got out of the shower.

Shotgun: Shame.

Me:??

Shotgun: Liked the thought of you going to bed with my cum on you.

I groan already feeling myself getting wet. Pressing my thighs together, I roll onto my side. If I was texting with another man I would probably over obsess over my response, trying to make it sound clever, and just as equally sexy for him. But this is Shotgun. I'm comfortable enough to just type the first thing that comes to my mind.

Me: Only way to fix that is if you cum on me again.

I hit the plus sign on the screen and pull up my camera app, turning it onto selfie mode. I've sent him selfies of me and the kids throughout the day, especially in those first few weeks of bringing Killian home from the hospital. But I never sent him one with my tits hanging out of my robe. I push them together, and maneuver the phone, trying to get the most flattering angle. Then I stop myself. Shotgun won't care if one tit looks slightly bigger than the other, or if a sliver of my loose belly makes it into the picture.

I snap the photo and send it.

Shotgun: Love your tits, mama.

I was never a fan of nicknames. On occasion Irish would call me babe, but it didn't have the same effect. When Shotgun calls me mama, I feel that right between my legs.

Me: Then come up here and play with them. I'm on the couch.

Shotgun: Tempting but I don't need the boys waking up and catching me with their mom. Been beating myself up since I walked in the apartment. We were not quiet, Jade. Legend or Raiden could've woken up and seen everything.

Always thinking of my boys.

Me: But they didn't.

Shotgun: We gotta be more careful.

Me: Does that mean there's going to be a next time?

His response doesn't come as quickly as the others, and that worries me. He still carries so much guilt, I don't want to add to that.

Shotgun: Unlock the sliders.

I toss the phone onto the couch in a hurry, and scramble to my feet. I stop short when I reach the sliders, and stare at him through the glass. I've seen him without a shirt a bunch of times, and I've admired all the beautiful tattoos that decorate his skin. But I've never taken the time to appreciate all the dips and valleys, or the dusting of hair that trails from his belly button and disappears beneath his unzipped jeans. He's a work of art that I can't wait to explore with my tongue.

Snapping out of it, I unlock the door and slide it open. Our eyes lock for a moment, then he steps to me, reaching for my face, and slams his mouth against mine. I push up on my toes, winding my arms around his waist as my lips part and his tongue pushes into my mouth. He kisses me just as frantic, just as thoroughly as he licked and sucked on my pussy an hour ago, and it makes me throb.

"Fuck," he rasps against my mouth. "I can't get enough of you."

He lowers his hand, hiking my thigh around his waist as he pushes into the kitchen. Neither of us bother to shut the door as he walks me to the table and hauls me on top of it. His mouth leaves mine, and he buries his face in the crook of my neck, sucking and kissing his way down to where my robe parts.



I brace my hands on the edge of the table and wrap my legs around his waist as his fingers fumble with the knot on my robe. Once he untangles it, his head pops up and he pushes the silk from my shoulders. His eyes slowly rake over my body, like he's just seeing it for the first time all over again.

Words are nice, but seeing a man slowly lose control as he looks at you as if you're his last meal, is unmatched. I feel alive for the first time in years, and I want to bottle this moment so I can relive it over and over.

His eyes cut back to mine as he unzips his jeans.

"Can you be quiet?"

"Yes," I pant.

"I want to jerk my cock while you play with your pussy. Then I'm going to come all over you. Your neck. Your tits. Might even shoot some on your pretty little cunt. But you're not going to wash it off this time. Can't hold you in my arms while you sleep but you're going to go to bed with my cum on your skin."

I finger fuck myself while he jerks off, but when I moan too loud, he clamps his free hand over my mouth. I cum fast and hard, and when it's his turn, he lives up to his promise, shooting his load all over my tits, my stomach, the insides of my thighs, and my pussy.

It's filthy fucking hot, and I can't get enough.

He straightens my robe, tying the sash in a tight knot around my waist. Then he takes my face in his hands and lowers his mouth. This kiss is different than the others. It slow, and sweet.

Lazy kisses are the best.

When he pulls away, he drops a kiss to my forehead and tucks his cock back into his pants.

“I’ll take the boys for breakfast in the morning. You sleep in. In the afternoon, I’ll see about getting a test. Until then, you take my cum however I feel like giving it to you. Good?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fuck, Jade.”

I grin at him. “You love it.”

He stares at me thoughtfully, then nods. “Yeah, I do.” His eyes dart to the clock and he shakes his head. “The boys will be getting up soon. I better get going.”

“It’s not like they haven’t woken up to you in the kitchen before.”

“True, but not after I watched their mother finger fuck herself on the breakfast table. Don’t trust myself, Jade. Need to gather my thoughts.”

I respect that. I respect him. “Okay.”

“I don’t know what we’re doing, and I don’t think you do either. Until we figure it out, we should be careful.”

He’s right about that. The boys, Legend and Raiden particularly, have been through a lot. They’ve leaned on Shotgun through it all. He’s been their anchor as they navigate their loss, and while I know they love him, I don’t know how they’ll react to Shotgun

and I exploring whatever this is between us.

Killian, is a different story, he doesn't know any better. He calls Shotgun Uncle Shotty like his brothers do, but that's just because it's easier to ignore the truth, than to confront it head on, and the truth is, Shotgun is the only dad that baby knows.

"I agree," I say hoarsely. "So we keep things quiet." I hop off the table and take a step toward him. My hands trail down his chest, my fingers tracing the V of his hips. "Everything stays the same. The only change is I get to wear your cum to bed," I tease, pressing a playful kiss to the center of his chest.

He slides a finger under my chin, forcing me to lift my head. His eyes lock with mine, and his thumb gently strokes my jaw.

"I don't want you to feel like you're some dirty secret of mine. But it's complicated, Jade. While the boys are my main concern, it's not just about them. I gotta figure out my shit with the club. Don't think I'm setting a good example as the VP by fucking my predecessor's widow."

"If they want me happy like you said, then maybe they'll give us some grace."

"It doesn't work like that baby. They want you happy but not with me. Biggie already made that clear after Irish died. Told me there would come a time when you found it in you to move on, and I'd have to step aside."

I didn't think anything could ruin the high I was feeling but hearing that seems to do the trick.

"Fuck that. Biggie doesn't decide how I live my life."

"Calm down," he soothes. "We'll figure it out."

“No, I can’t calm down.” I tag his hand away from my face. “What can happen? I mean to you. What will they do you if they found out?”

“That’s not something you need to worry about.”

“Can they kick you out of the club?” He doesn’t say anything. “Can they hurt you?” Again, he doesn’t say anything, but he does look away, and that only makes stomach roll. “Jesus Christ, Shotgun. Biggie wouldn’t kill you, would he?”

That causes his gaze to snap back to me, and his features suddenly grow very serious.

“Let me make something perfectly clear, Jade. I’d stand in front of the strongest army in the world, have all their guns pointed at me, and I would still fucking come out standing because no one, no man, no army, no fucking brother, is going to tear me away from you. Even if this thing with us runs its course for you, and you decide down the road that you want to move on with someone that isn’t me. You and those kids will never lose me.”

My stomach drops.

“You would be okay with me moving on with someone else?”

Because I sure as fuck wouldn’t be okay with him being with another woman, but that isn’t a new realization either. Every time the man leaves the house, and I don’t know where he’s going, I get a knot in my stomach.

He lifts his hands to my face, cupping my cheeks.

“No, mama, but I’m a seasoned professional in that area. I’d hate it with ever fiber of my being, but I’d still show up for you. It would twist me inside out, but I’d do it. I’d fucking do anything for you. That, right there, is gospel.”

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

THIRTEEN

SHOTGUN

“You’re all set. You can check the patient portal in one to two business days for your results, but if anything flags, someone from the lab will reach out to you,” the phlebotomist says.

I roll down my sleeve and thank her before making my way out of the clinic. Outside, I straddle my bike. I reach into my kutte and pull out my phone.

Three missed texts. All from Jade.

Jade: I got steaks from Monty’s. Feel like grilling them tonight?

Jade: Also, I got my period this morning. So after steaks, we’ll put the kids to bed, and then you can watch me get myself off in the shower. Orgasms are good for the cramps, and we both know how much you like to watch me cum.

Jade: In case you didn’t realize it yet, I’m the queen of inappropriate texts. I kind of hope you’re with Biggie and the rest of the club right now picturing me fingering myself in the shower while you’re off doing biker shit.

Me: Biker shit?

Jade: I’m insulted that’s what you responded to first. I thought for sure that would get your riled up.

Me: Sitting on my bike with a hard on. Happy?

Jade: Yes. Extremely.

Me: Steaks sound good. Watching you cum in the shower sounds even better.

Jade: Killian is down for his nap, and Raiden and Legend are playing with the kid next door in the yard. If you come home quick, I'll take a break from packing up these boxes and suck your cock.

Me: What boxes?

Jade: We'll talk about it when you get home. Or maybe we won't. It depends how long it takes you, and how full my mouth is. It's not very lady like to speak with your mouthful."

Me: Leaving the clinic now. Gotta make a quick stop, then I'll be home.

Pocketing my phone, I toe my kickstand. My engine purrs to life and I peel away from the curb. The ride to the cemetery doesn't take long, and when I arrive, I begin my ascent up the hill to Irish's gravesite with ease, recalling the day of his funeral. The ground isn't nearly as soft as it was that day, making the trek a fuck of a lot easier. Then again, I don't gotta worry about Jade's heels sinking into the dirt with every step I take.

As as I reach the top of the hill, I spot Irish's headstone.

Duke "Irish" Callahan

Beloved Husband, Father, & Brother

I've been here a couple of times since the stone has been set, and every time I see those words, they act as a punch to the gut. Today that feeling is intensified, but oddly enough, I don't feel any guilt. I don't know what kind of man that makes me. I'm not even sure I care to find out.

I lay a hand on the top of the stone and take a knee in front of it. I didn't come here for forgiveness, nor did I come here seeking permission. I came here because I made a promise to Irish, and for nearly two years, I've done everything in my power to keep it.

"I know you don't owe me anything, but I'm not here for me. I'm here for Jade, and your kids. I don't know what's going to happen with the club. I don't even know where to begin when it comes to figuring it out. You made me promise to look out for them. Well, I can't do that if the club decides my time on this earth is finished."

I sigh, lowering my hand back to my side. I promised Jade nothing would tear me away from her, but when I went back to the apartment, I realized I may have told my first lie to her. The truth is, we're entering uncharted waters. The club hasn't had to deal with such a blatant act of disloyalty before. There's a fifty-fifty shot I won't make it out of this no matter how much of a fight I put up, and I'm not ashamed to call in some reinforcements... even if they're fucking dead.

"Losing you destroyed her, but she pulled herself out from the rubble. It'd be a shame for her to be buried under all that debris again. So I guess I'm asking you to look after her should that happen. I might have her now, but I don't believe for one second, she'll be mine in the afterlife. That's all you, brother."

I stand, shoving my hands in my pockets.

"The boys are amazing. Legend is doing great in football, and Raiden is ham on the baseball field. They talk about you every day, and Legend is already asking for me to

teach him how to ride. I figure in a year or so, I'll buy him a quad. Get Jade used to the idea of her boy riding something a little more terrorizing than a scooter. Killian looks the most like Jade and is just as stubborn as she is. I think he might be the one that keeps us on our toes the most." I pause, rocking back on my heels. "You'd be proud of them, and I promise to make sure they know that. You'd be proud of Jade too. She's been nothing but a pillar of strength for your three sons. She has put them first every single day you've been gone. You made her happy Irish. You gave her a beautiful life, and three children whom she adores. I can't take your place in any of their lives, and I won't try too. But I will love them with everything I got."

I just hope I get to do it for a long time.

I took the garbage out when I brought the boys out for breakfast this morning, so I'm really not sure where the six black, contractor bags sitting on the front stoop came from. Sighing, I toss the bag of things I stopped at the drugstore to get on the mat in front of the door and haul the trash bags to the curb.

The fucking garbage men are going to hate us.

Making my way back to the house, I grab the bag from the drugstore and enter the house. Raiden immediately runs to me.

"Uncle Shotty, guess what? Mom said the soldiers are coming to the house. Like real soldiers with guns and tanks!"

"What?"

"It's true," he says, looking at his older brother to back him up. "What'd she call them?"

"Veterans," Legend supplies. "And they're not coming today."



“Where’s your mom?”

Legend points to the stairs. “Can we have a football catch? Billy from next door wants to play but his dad can’t throw the ball to save his life.”

“Yeah, give me a minute.”

“What about me? I want to play too,” Raiden whines.

“You can play too. I’m just going to run upstairs and talk to your mom real quick. Legend, go call for Billy. Raiden, you go in the garage and get the football.” My eyes dart around the living room. “Where’s Killian?”

“Upstairs with mom,” Raiden says.

The boys take off to do as I asked, and I head for the stairs, climbing them two at a time until I reach the landing. I find Jade in her bedroom, all the contents of her closet on the bed, and a bunch of open boxes.

“Jade, what the hell are you doing, and why do the boys think there are a bunch of army men coming to the house?”

She pops her head out of the closet. “Jesus Christ, Shotgun, you scared the hell out of me.” She tosses something into one of the boxes, and steps out of the closet, placing both hands on her hips. “For the record, you don’t greet me like that. Not anymore.”

“How would you like me to greet you?”

“A kiss would be nice.”

I kick the door closed behind me, and step toward her, bending my head to take her

mouth with mine. With the boys just downstairs, and Killian up here, floating around somewhere, I make sure not to get carried away.

“That’s better,” she murmurs, smiling up at me.

“Still waiting for an answer to my question.”

“I’m cleaning out the closet, and there are no army men coming to the house. Well, at least I don’t think so. I called the Veteran’s Association to see if they take donations. They do, and they’re sending someone to pick up the bags on the porch.”

“Fuck. I thought those bags were trash. I took them out to the curb.” I guess I’ll be lugging them back. Maybe I can bribe Legend and Billy to help. I focus on the boxes. “And the boxes?”

“Well, the boxes are things I’m keeping,” she says, her gaze sweeping around the room to take in the mess she’s made. “They’re things of Irish’s I think the boys will want one day. Oh, I made a box for the club too,” she says nonchalantly, like she didn’t just blow my chest wide fucking open. I watch her turn and strut toward one of the boxes. She lifts it up and places it on top of the bed. Filtering through it, she continues to ramble on, “There are some photos from past parties, and that traffic light him and Biggie robbed from the corner of Nostrand Avenue and Avenue U, and a bunch of other miscellaneous stuff I’m not sure what to do with.”

“Jade,” I call softly, forcing her to turn around. Her eyes lock with mine, and I close the distance between us, my hand closing tight around the bag I almost forgot I’m still holding. “You don’t have to do this.”

Her chin lifts and she angles her head. “Yes, I do.”

“No, you don’t. Last night?—”

“Last night was the start of something new. Something exciting. I will always have love for Irish, and I know you understand that. But I need to do this for me.” She rolls up on her tip toes and kisses me. “And you might not even realize it, but I need to do it for you too. You and I deserve a clean slate.”

I lift my free hand, gently brushing my knuckles across the side of her face.

“You’re incredible, you know that?”

“No, but if you keep telling me that I am, I might just start to believe it.” Her gaze lowers to the bag. “What’s in there?”

I hold it out to her. “Just picked up some things I thought you might need.” She takes the bag from me, and peers inside.

“This is a bag of chocolate.”

“There’s Midol at the bottom of the bag too,” I say with a wink.

“You brought me chocolate and Midol because I have my period.”

I shake my head. “I bought you chocolate and Midol because you’re going to let me make you cum in the shower later.”

She grins at me. “I said you could watch.”

“Yeah, and I decided I much rather be a participant.” I give her another quick kiss. “I’m taking the boys into the yard to play football. I’ll grab the bags from the curb and put them back on the porch.” My gaze swings to the box she packed for the club. “Got church later tonight. If you want, I’ll take your truck, and bring that over when I go.”

She shakes her head. "I think I want to bring it by myself."

"Whatever you want, mama."

"Here's Jade's check," Stacks, our treasurer says, handing me a simple white envelope just as he's done every week since Irish passed. It never bothered me before, she deserved every cent. Earned it even. That doesn't change my desire to be the one that takes care of them financially. Don't get me wrong, I've done a lot of that since I moved into the apartment.

The first week into our arrangement we had a major blow out when I told her to change all the bills into my name. She refused, and we wound up fighting that whole week. Eventually she agreed to have me pay all the utilities, and I try to go grocery shopping with her any chance I can so I can pick up that bill too, but the mortgage and her car payment she insists on keeping.

Once I figure out what the hell I'm doing with her and the club, we're going to revisit that conversation. I rather her see her bank all Irish's checks for the boys'.

I pocket the envelope, and he hands me another. "And that's yours." Then he moves to hand out the rest of them.

Biggie leans back in his chair at the head of the table, seeming to weigh the envelope in his hand. "Feels a lot fatter than last month."

"You can thank that sleezy Italian mobster, Mondestino," Stacks retorts. "I don't know what kind of voodoo pussy he's peddling, but the man is rolling in it. Our take has already increased ten percent from two months ago when he opened the brothel."

"I think we should sample it for ourselves," Fuckface suggests. "See what all the hype is."

“You can look and smell, but you can’t fucking touch or taste,” Jersey warns, pointing a finger across the table at him. “Got it, Fuckface?”

Suppressing a grin, I pocket my envelope next to Jades. Jersey takes pleasure in razing the newer members, Fuckface especially. I can’t knock him for it. We may have given Fuckface his bottom rocker, but we all like to fuck wit him. Jersey makes an art of it, though, continuously testing his limits like the sadist he is. Tonight his brand of torture is pussy, tomorrow it’ll be blood. He likes to switch it up, he’s generous like that.

“So pretend I’m a gynecologist,” Fuckface says, swiping the sweat from his brow. “Copy on that.”

“Some of us have sampled it,” Guido shares. “It ain’t nothing to write home about.”

“Bullshit,” Taxi says. “The two Russian girls made me see stars last night. I haven’t cum like that since Maddie Wilks blew me in her dad’s garage.”

I stare at Guido for a beat, watching as he folds his hands behind his head. “Maybe I’ll give them a try.”

I’m in no position to judge anyone, not when I had my fingers and tongue inside my dead friend’s wife’s pussy last night but the words spill from my lips before I can stop them.

“Bella was at the house the other night. Jade tells me she’s dating some guy.”

His jaw goes tight, and his eyes narrow into tiny slits as he pierces me with a glare. “Is that what you do when you dip out on us? Gossip with the girls?”

“It came up in conversation,” I say, ignoring his dig. “Jade says she’s really into this

one. Just thought I'd throw it out there."

"Maybe instead of worrying about who Bella is fucking these days, Jade should take a long look in the mirror, and realize she's wasting years she can't get back."

I don't know if he's trying to goad me or what, but I don't take kind to the tone of his voice, and I sure as fuck don't like him talking about Jade.

"Keep Jade's name out of your mouth."

"Sure, when you keep Bella's name out of yours."

"Bella isn't an 'ol lady," I snap, my patience thinning.

"And Jade isn't yours," he returns.

"Jade is off limits," Biggie interjects. "No reason to bring her name into anything. Shotgun wasn't telling you about Bella out of disrespect, and if your head wasn't so far up your ass, you'd realize that."

Guido's eyes cut to Biggie. "I don't need my VP informing me who Bella is dating. I'm fucking aware." He glances back at me. "Did she happen to tell Jade that he's a cop?"

I blanch at that. Jade wouldn't have kept that quiet, even with our conversation taking the turn that it did.

"Yeah, I didn't think so," Guido growls. "Bet she left out the fact that he's married too."

The room goes silent, and he drops his hands from behind his head. Gripping the

edge of the table, he pushes out his chair. The legs scrape against the floor as he rises to his feet. His gaze turns back to Biggie. “If we’re done discussing business, I’m going to take off.”

“We’re not, but I think it’s best if you do. One of us will catch you up to speed when you’ve had a chance to cool off.”

Guido wastes no time grabbing his cell from the box by the door before he storms out of the chapel. When he’s gone, I turn my attention back to Biggie.

“Bella definitely didn’t share all that with Jade.”

“I don’t reckon she did,” he says, leaning his elbows on top of the table. “Could be a problem for us.”

He isn’t wrong. Bella knows a lot of our secrets. Too many if I’m being honest. But until now she’s held every one of those secrets tight to her chest.

“I gather Guido knows that much, and that’s why he acted the way he did,” Biggie continues, strumming his beard, thoughtfully. “If the pig is married, there’s a good chance this doesn’t go anywhere.” He sighs. “I can’t believe I’m even fucking talking about this.” He looks across the table at Stacks. “I really wanted to open up the books and discuss our cross-country trip. June will be here before we know it, and I want to make sure we’re set.

Every year in June the mother chapter of the Kings Of Anarchy hosts a rally. Big Daddy, the current president, goes all out. Chapters from all over the country travel to attend the two-week event. With our club being in New York, it’s quite the project to get us all to Southern California. Lots of moving parts. And with our current businesses expanding, and the high demand of gun contracts, we can’t all go. So we rotate the roster every year. However, I’ve skipped the last two years. After Irish

died, and Jade went into premature labor, we all agreed that my place was to stay close to home. Then last year, we put it for a vote, and again, it was decided that I stay home to help Jade and oversee the expansion of Lipstick & Lace.

Don't know that Biggie will let me pass for a third year. It doesn't look good if his VP doesn't show up by side.

Irish never missed a year. He would fly Jade and the boys out to California, put them up in some five-star hotel, and while the rest of us partied our asses off, he snuck away to spend time with his family. I think he and Jade even took the boys to Disney Land one year.

I'd love to do that. Killian would fucking love it.

"We're going to leave a week ahead of time. I arranged for us to stop at some of the other chapters along the way. They're happy to put us up for a night, that way we're not a bunch of fucking zombies on the road," Stacks reveals, opening his ledger. "Kneecap, Joker, Monsignor, Cook, and Bed-Stuy are gonna stay here, and run all our daily operations."

"The plan was for Guido to follow us with the cage," Biggie reveals. "Not sure how that is going to pan out, but we got time to rearrange things if need be."

"Worst case scenario, I'll drive the cage, and hook a trailer to the hitch," Jersey offers. That way when we're there I can ride."

Biggie turns his attention to me. "Do we need to make arrangements for someone to help Jade while you're gone?"

I scratch at the scruff lining my jaw. "I uh... haven't discussed it with her."



Biggie narrows his eyes. “Well, it ain’t something new to her.”

“No,” I caution, trying to decide how I want to approach this. I can’t tell him I don’t want to leave her because she and I are making a go of it and I’m fucking addicted to her, and me suggesting she travel by plane like she used to do with Irish would raise the eyebrows of every man sitting at this table. “It isn’t new, but for that doesn’t mean it’s at the forefront of her mind. The last two years I skipped the trip. Never even brought it up to her. And the year before that, she flew out with Irish.”

“You afraid bringing it up is gonna open those wounds?” Jersey asks.

A couple of days ago my answer would’ve been yes, but that was before I knew she had been working on letting go of Irish for some time.

“No, I just think she’s gotten used to me being around, and it might come as a surprise when I tell her I’m gonna be gone for three weeks. With both Raiden and Legend in sports, she relies heavily on the extra set of hands.”

It’s not a total lie. Legend only has one more game of spring ball left, but he jumps right into soccer the following week. And Raiden doesn’t end T-ball until the end of June, which means I’m going to miss his last few games.

“Gavone and Bed-Stuy can be on call for whatever she needs,” Biggie says, but his eyes remain on me. I can sense there is more he wants to say, but he’s holding his tongue for whatever reason.

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I just think this is a blessing in disguise. You’re going on two years, man. Some people might say you’re enabling her.”

That grinds my gears.

“Some people? Or you?”

“Does it matter? It must be true if you’re getting defensive over it.”

“Since when does helping someone out become enabling?”

“Brother, I’m not faulting you for anything you’ve done for her or those kids. You might not have any desire to take a wife or have kids of your own, but I can’t imagine Jade being alone forever. Can you?”

“No, I can’t.”

Because she’s not alone.

She’s with me.

“All I’m saying, is maybe she needs to feel the hard. You being gone might make her realize she wants more out of life than to just play house with you.”

“Biggie has a point, Shotgun,” Stacks says. “You can’t tell me you don’t need a break from all that too. It’s gotta be exhausting looking at a woman as pretty as Jade all day and having to keep your hands to yourself. I would’ve lost it a long time ago, and that’s no disrespect to Irish.”

No, but it strangely feels disrespectful to me.

I barely get my boots off when my phone chimes.

Jade: Unlock your door and turn the shower on.

I shrug off my kutte, and toss it over the back of my couch before I pad into the bathroom, and turn the shower on. It's small in comparison to the shower she has in her master bath, and there is no bench. It's just a tub with a showerhead. I don't even have a shower curtain, but that would only get in the way for what I have planned for her.

Reaching behind me, I pull my t-shirt over my head and make my way back out into the living room. The door opens and Jade enters wearing nothing but that fucking robe of hers. In her hand she holds a pair of panties and her phone.

"I thought you would never get home," she says, tossing the panties on top of my kutte. She makes her way toward me, throwing her arms around my neck. I hook my arms under her thighs and lift her into my arms. Her mouth covers mine, and her tongue licks past my lips. I walk her back into the bathroom, and deposit her on top of the tiny vanity. My hands come up to frame her face, and I take the kiss deeper, plucking and plundering, owning her mouth with mine.

She sheds her robe, and reaches for my hands, bringing them to her tits. My thumbs roll over nipples, pinching and pulling at them as my mouth leaves hers. I bend my head, taking one of her nipples between my teeth.

"Oh, God, if you keep doing that I'm going to cum before we even make it to the shower."

Considering I plan on making her cum multiple times, I don't see the issue with that, so I continue to wreak havoc on her tits, jumping from one to the other. She pushes her fingers through my hair, and wraps her legs around my waist, pulling me even closer to her. My cock, thick, and hard, strains against my jeans as it rubs against her pussy.

I release her nipple and smooth my hands down her sides, squeezing her hips so hard

my fingers leave indents.

“Spread your legs for me, mama. Let me take care of that pussy.”

One thing about Jade, give her a command, and she fucking obliges. Dropping her legs from my waist, she spreads her them as wide as she can, revealing her perfectly wet cunt to my hungry eyes.

I spread her swollen lips, dragging my thumbs through all that wetness. “Fuck,” I growl. “Look at how needy you are.” I plunge two fingers inside her, loving the noises her cunt makes when I move them in and out of her.

“I’m not going to last long. I’ve been aching since you left to go to the clubhouse. Give it to me fast and hard.”

“Whatever you want, mama. However you want it.”

My fingers find a steady rhythm, powering deep and hard. Her legs hang off the edge of the vanity, her back arches, and when she cums, her pussy flutters around my fingers. I don’t let up, giving it to her slow, drawing another one out of her as soon as she comes down from the first. She starts to fall backward, and I catch her with my free hand, cradling the back of her head so it doesn’t slam into the mirror. I crook my fingers inside her, and lower my mouth to hers, fucking her mouth slow and purposefully, my tongue in tangent with my fingers.

“Why is it this good?” She murmurs against my mouth. “Promise me it will always be like this. That when we’re old, and gray, we will still fuck like this.”

I pull back an inch, touching my forehead to hers. “I promise.”

She closes her eyes, sighing softly. “I’m going to need a minute before I suck you

off.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Oh, I do. I’ve been thinking about it all day.”

“Yeah?”

“Mmhmm. I can’t decide where I want your cum though. Think you got enough in you to spread the wealth.”

I laugh. “I think I can manage.”

With her, I’m always hungry.

Her hand circles my wrist, and we both lower our gazes to her pussy, watching intently as she pulls my fingers out of her slowly. “I made a mess out of your fingers,” she says, taking my hand as she slides her ass across the vanity and turns on the faucet. She brings my fingers under the stream of water, washing away the hint of blood and her arousal that coats them. “There, all clean.”

“We could’ve done that in the shower,” I remind her.

She shrugs. “I just want to take care of you.” She gives me another peck on the lips before she turns off the faucet and hops off the vanity. “Now drop your pants, Shotgun, and feed me your cock.”

I stare at her ass in the mirror as she pads into the shower and drops to her knees. I don’t know what the fuck I did to get so lucky, but I ain’t complaining.

“You keep rubbing that cunt on my cock, and we’re going to have a problem,” I hiss.

A man can only take so much teasing before he cracks.

After shooting my load down her throat and watching her swallow every single drop, she checked the nanny cam footage on her phone to make sure the boys were all still asleep, then she put on her panties and climbed into my bed. For a few minutes we just held each other, then she started fondling my balls, and now she's straddling my thighs rubbing her panty covered pussy all over my cock.

I wanted to tell her about the trip to California, and get her take on things, but we're clearly not having that conversation tonight.

"You owe me one more," she says, pointedly as she cups her breasts. "I want it dripping down my neck when I go to bed."

"That was before you sucked my cock and I blacked out in the shower," I argue, pulling her panties to the side to reveal all that pink to me.

I want to eat her out but she refuses. I'm allowed to finger her, and she's allowed to dry hump me while she's on her period, but she draws the line when it comes to sitting on my face. I should really ask her how she feels about taking my cock up her ass.

The thought of fucking her tight little hole makes me unbelievably hard, and I start stroking my cock. Gripping my shaft, I run the head between her lips, beating her clit with the crown. That seems to light her up, and she starts to rock over me, desperate for more friction. "That's it mama, use my cock."

Planting one hand on my chest, she leans forward, and picks up the pace, humping the fuck out of me, moaning and panting with every rock of her hips.

"Yes, yes, yes."

“Who owns your pussy?” I growl. She moans loudly, her greedy little cunt vibrating against my cock. “Say it, Jade. Say it loud enough so the neighbors hear.”

“You,” she pants. “You own my pussy.”

“That’s a good girl.” Working her clit with the head of my cock, I shove three fingers inside of her. Her back bows, and she cums loudly, screaming my name.

I fist my cock harder, my movements frantic as I tug harder.

“Give me your neck,” I grind out. “Fast.”

She sits on top of my thighs, pulling her hair up and away from her face. All my marks from last night are still there, and slightly darker than they were this morning.

Groaning at the sight of them, I give my cock another pull. My cum sprays across her slender neck in thick ropes. Completely depleted and fucking exhausted, I drop my head back on my pillow. Jade hovers over me, and my eyes catch on the pattern my cum creates on her neck.

“That’s a pretty pearl necklace.”

She grins at me. “Better than diamonds.”

FOURTEEN

JADE

Bracing my hands on the steering wheel, I glance up at the clubhouse and a sense of nostalgia washes over me. In the years since Irish passed, I've done everything possible to avoid this place. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. But the truth is I had a lot of good times here, times that I easily forgot the moment I learned of Irish's death.

It's hard to imagine having all of that again. Almost as much as it is terrifying. I don't think these men realize that they once collectively held my heart's happiness in their hands, and I know they're unaware that they hold it once again. It's cruel that they have so much power over my life.

Cruel and unjust.

But that's what I signed up for.

Not once, but now twice.

I turn my head, and peer back at Killian who is occupied with his iPad. I always feel guilty when I hand him that thing, but he loves it. Surely an hour a day won't screw him up too much.

"Come on, bud, let's go say hi to Uncle Biggie."



He tears his eyes away from the screen and I watch as his face lights up with pure joy. “He give me a dollar?”

I laugh. Every time Biggie comes around, he always gives each of the boys a twenty-dollar bill. Killian is too small to know the difference between a dollar and a twenty, so he doesn’t realize his piggy bank is stuffed with a couple hundred dollars. He’s just excited to receive something like his brothers.

“I’m sure he will.”

I get out of the car and help him out too. Fuckface appears out of nowhere and greets us as I move to my trunk to retrieve the box I packed up for the club.

“Here, let me get that,” he offers, hauling the box into his arms. “Where does this go?”

“I was hoping to give it to Biggie. Is he here?”

“Yeah, he and Taxi are inside planning routes for the trip to California. They’re currently fighting over what gas station we’re going to stop at when we hit Utah.”

My steps halt for a moment. I’m very well aware of the annual trip across country. I’ve planned all mine and Irish’s family vacations around it, but I haven’t had any reason to think about it.

But now that it’s been brought up all I can think about are the times Irish came back to the hotel, and told me stories about the rally, and all the parties. They weren’t particularly family friendly, and I specifically recall a rather disturbing tale that involves Shotgun being with two women.

Those parties are like one big orgy. I don’t care what anyone says.

“When is that coming up?” I ask Fuckface.

“Couple of weeks.”

“Is Shotgun on the rotation this year?”

It’s Fuckface’s turn to go still, and when he slowly turns to face me, regret flashes in his eyes. It’s all the confirmation I need, but he doesn’t know that, and he feels it’s necessary to confirm it for me.

“Fuck, you didn’t know?”

I force a smile. “It’s fine. I’m sure it just slipped his mind.” I’m not sure how he could forget to tell me something like that, but it’s fine. Everything is fine.

If the brothers don’t know he’s in a relationship, they’re definitely going to expect him to cut loose and sew whatever wild oats he has. Maybe that’s why he didn’t tell me.

“Um this is going to make me sound like a total douchebag, but I’m going to say it anyway. Remember that time when you went into labor and I kind of saved your life?”

“You mean that time when my kid let you into my house, and you called 9-1-1 because Shotgun told you too?”

“Yep, that’s the one. I wasn’t going to cash in on that little favor, but if you could maybe not tell Shotgun I told you about California, we could call it even.”

“You know it’s becoming more and more clear to me why they call you Fuckface.”

His brows knit together, and confusion mars his features. “I think you mean that as an insult.”

“Damn, nothing gets past you, huh?” I roll my eyes. “Don’t worry. I won’t say anything.”

I strut past him, taking Killian’s hand, and make my way into the clubhouse. Fuckface trails behind, carrying the box. The guy really is a tool. It amazes me they voted him into the club, I guess no one is banging down the door to become a King these days.

As soon as Killian sets his eyes on Biggie, he releases my hand and runs straight toward him.

“Uncle Biggie!”

His gaze swings around, and his eyes go wide when he sees Killian. “Whoa, is that my favorite almost two-year-old?”

“You give me a dollar?”

Biggie chuckles, already reaching into the back pocket of his jeans. He flips through the wad of cash, fishing out a twenty and places it my son’s palm.

“Don’t spend it all in one place.”

“I put all ya dollars in my pig! Right, Mommy?”

“That’s right,” I say.

Biggie lifts his head, giving me a warm smile. “This is a nice surprise. What brings

you by?” The smile slips slightly. “If you’re looking for Shotgun, he isn’t here. He and Guido took a ride out to Jersey to scope out some property.”

That I knew. He texted me before I even decided to leave the house to come here. Apparently, crossing the Outerbridge is a bigger deal to him than telling me he’s going across the fucking country.

But I’m not mad. Everything is fine.

“I’m actually here to see you. I was packing up some of Irish’s things to donate, and I thought the club would like some of the things I found,” I say, pointing to the box Fuckface is currently sorting. He pulls out the traffic light, eyeing it like it’s a fucking spaceship.

“Can I have this?” he asks. “It would look mint in my room.”

“No,” Biggie grunts. His gaze lingers on the light then he glances back at me. “That was a wild night.”

“I remember it vaguely.”

“Memory serves me correct it was you that drove the getaway car.”

Yes, it was. The old me, the Jade before kids, got off on all that shit.

“I plead the fifth.”

That earns me another chuckle. “It’s good to see you, sweetheart. Miss seeing your face around here.”

It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell him he’ll see it a lot more once Shotgun outs us to

the club—you know, providing he doesn't persecute him after he does so—but I smack my lips together, keeping that bit of information to myself. Although, a part of me wonders what would happen if I just told him.

“I needed time,” I say instead.

“That's understandable. I'm hoping you being here means you're ready to let someone other than Shotgun into your life.” I'm not sure what my face does, but Biggie's eyes narrow slightly. “By that I mean the club. We miss you and the boys.”

“Oh,” I sputter. “Right, well, Legend has a football game this weekend. I bet he would love to see some of his uncles there, cheering him on.”

He smiles. “I'll get the time and location from Shotgun.” He tousles Killian's hair. “What about you? You're too little to throw a ball, aren't you?”

“I go school.”

“Preschool,” I clarify. “He goes half-days twice a week. Raiden is playing T-ball, though. He's got a couple more games left in the season, but they may overlap with your trip west.”

“Shotgun tell you we're keeping a few of the guys here?”

“We haven't talked about it yet.”

“Well, I'm sure he'll fill you in. You need anything, you just call one of them.”

“Right.” I lower my lashes, tugging the frayed hem of my shorts. “Well, we need to get going. I have the Salvation Army coming to pick up some furniture, and I didn't entirely think that through. Now, they're picking up my bed before I've had a chance

to buy a new one.”

Biggie’s eyebrows shoot up. “Lots of changes.”

I lift my head. “Yeah, they’ve been on the horizon, though.” My gaze slides to Killian, and I crook my finger, signaling it’s time to go. “I hope you make it to the game, Biggie.”

“I’ll be there.”

I take Killian’s hand and start for the door, but something makes me pause. I glance over my shoulder, my eyes connecting with Biggie’s. “If it isn’t too much trouble, can I ask a favor?”

“Anything.”

Don’t say it, Jade. Just keep walking.

I ignore the warning inside my head, fearing I will regret the consequences of keeping quiet more.

“Make sure he comes home from your trip in one piece.”

He doesn’t ask who I’m talking about. He already knows.

Something tells me he knows everything.

Me: So when were your planning on telling me you were leaving for three weeks to go to California.

Shotgun: I planned on telling you the other night, but you distracted me by jumping

on my cock.

Me: That's not an excuse.

Shotgun: It wasn't meant to be one. We'll figure it out.

Right because that's what we always do. However, knowing that doesn't quell my anger. I toss my phone on the counter. A little while later the men arrive to take my bedroom furniture out of the house. I was too mad to go to the furniture store, so I don't know when I'll actually have a bed, but I found an air mattress in the garage that will suffice until I find something I like.

I'm helping Legend get dressed when my phone chimes with a text.

Shotgun: Running late. Raiden doesn't have T-ball tonight. Think you can take Legend to the field? I'll meet you at the practice, and you can take the boys home.

Me: No need to meet me there. I'll just stay for the entire practice.

Shotgun: Jade.

Me: ??

Shotgun: You're mad.

Me: I am not. Everything is fine. I'll see you tonight when we get home. I'll pick up a pizza or something for dinner.

Shotgun: Only an idiot of a man actually believes that when a woman says everything is fine she's being truthful.

I don't bother responding. If I do, we'll never get out of the house, and putting Legend's gear on takes me a while. I help him get dressed, then I pack a bag, loading up on snacks. I also make sure to grab the iPads. All the Karens can come for me, but at least I don't let my kids run around the sports complex, disrupting the practices. It's too easy for them to wander into the parking lot.

Once I triple check that I have everything we need to hang on the bleachers for two hours, I load the kids into the truck and head for the field. I'm not even going to lie, I silently applaud myself when I get there with five minutes to spare.

Legend runs onto the field, and Raiden runs straight for the concession stand. Forty dollars later, the boys are munching on French fries and chicken fingers while I sit on the bleachers, my Stanley cup in one hand, my phone in the other. Every time it's Legend's turn to practice tackle drills, I video him. I have no idea what I'm recording, but I know Shotgun records all his practices, and on the off days, they study them. I'm not sure what they go over, but I make a mental note to ask so that I can do it with him when he's in California. Even during the off-season, Legend likes to go over his videos, and I can find him in his bedroom watching Hudl videos of his past games.

He's got a real passion for it, and I'm here for it.

It doesn't even bother me that I'm the only mom here tonight.

I love watching my boy, I just wish I had a better understanding of the game.

Legend gets low, wrapping his arms around of his teammates, and takes him down to turf. When his coaches cheer him on, I pop up off the bleachers, and do the same.

"Get him, Legend!"



Legend rolls off the other boy, and even though he's wearing his helmet, I can see his cheeks turn red, so I sit back down. That's when I hear the roar of a motorcycle. I knew he would still show.

It's another reason I didn't respond to his text.

"Uncle Shotty is here," Raiden announces, pointing to the entrance of the complex. I lower my sunglasses so he doesn't see me stare, and I take my time, drinking him in. He doesn't usually wear his kutte to the boy's practice, which tells me he came straight from wherever he was, just like he said he would. "Can I go to him?"

I wait for his eyes to latch onto us so he sees the boys before turning to Raiden.

"Sure."

He tosses his iPad on the bleachers a little too recklessly and abandons his food, jumping off the bleachers. Killian watches his brother take off toward Shotgun, and instantly turns to me. Pointing a pudgy finger to his chest he says, "Me too!"

I laugh because of course he'd leave me for Shotgun too.

"Go ahead, but don't run. You'll get a boo-boo."

Not one to waste food, he takes another bite of his chicken tender before he follows the path his brother just took. When he reaches Shotgun, he bends to lift him onto shoulders. With Killian on his shoulders, and Raiden glued to his hip, he strides for me. I turn my head, doing my best to appear unbothered and focus on the field.

He climbs the bleachers, taking a seat next to me. Neither of us say a word to one another. He's too busy fielding questions from the boys, and I'm too stubborn. The practice wraps up an hour later, and he sends the boys to throw out the garbage.

I start to pack everything back up, still refusing to acknowledge him.

“How long you plan on staying mad at me?” He finally asks.

“I didn’t know there was a time limit.”

“I’m going to be gone for three weeks, Jade. There are other ways I rather spend our time together than seeing that puss on your face.”

“I don’t have a puss on my face,” I snap.

He reaches out gently lifting my sunglasses to the top of my head.

“Mama, you won’t even look at me.”

I lift my eyes to his to specifically prove him wrong.

“That’s better.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m not mad you’re going. I’m mad you didn’t tell me about it.”

“I know. I think part of the reason I didn’t was because I was still hoping to find a way out of it.”

That surprises me. “You don’t want to go?”

He sighs, lowering his hands to his sides. “I want to go. It’s good for the club if I go. I don’t want to be away from you and the boys for three weeks.”

If he came clean, I could fly out with the boys like I used to do with Irish, but I’m not sure that’s wise. Telling everyone we’re together is bad enough, having to explain it

to all the chapters, including the national one, would only make things more difficult.

I cross my arms against my chest so I don't wrap my arms around him.

"I'm going to miss you."

"Then quit fighting with me while I'm here."

"Fine." I pout. "But just so you know I'm a fan of make-up sex."

"Sweetheart, you're a fan of all the sex." He inches forward, his eyes doing a quick sweep of our surroundings. When he catches sight of the boys running around the field chasing after Legend and his teammates, he lets his finger trail from my collarbone, sliding it all the way down between my breasts. "Got my test results today," he says as he blatantly stares down my shirt.

"Oh, so you're finally going to fuck me?"

He snaps his hand back, flashing me a wicked grin.

"All night long."

He makes it really hard to be mad at him when he makes promises like that, but when we leave, I tell him I have to stop at the gas station before we get dinner, and he pulls his motorcycle right behind me to pump my gas—he makes it damn near impossible.

He does, however, make it really obvious that I'm in love with him.

And three weeks without him is going to feel like an eternity.

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

FIFTEEN

SHOTGUN

The weeks leading up to the cross-country ride, I spent whatever free time I had with Jade, and the boys. First order of business was to get her a new bed. We went with a California King and the day it was delivered, we wasted no time christening it after we got Killian down for a nap. Got sloppy about it after the kids went to bed, and on more than one occasion, I fucked her on all fours, her ass perched high, her face pressed into the mattress. I always snuck out before the kids woke up, though, and I felt guilty about it the next day.

Guilty for fucking her while the kids were down the hall and could catch us if they woke up.

Guilty for cheapening what we had done by sneaking out of her room.

And even more guilty for not holding her while she slept afterward.

Throughout all the time spent loving on my family, and fucking Jade, I contemplated how I would approach the club about our situation, and I've tried to configure how I would react to any and all consequences. But the truth is one doesn't know how they'll fight for everything until they find themselves in the thick of a battle. That's why tonight I'm not thinking about anything other than Jade. It's our last night together, and I'm going to give her something to remember me by when she's alone in her bed every night.

Spreading my knees wide, I jerk my cock, enjoying the feel of Jade's tongue lapping at my balls. She sucks one into her mouth as she arches off the bed and pushes her fingers into her cunt. As much as I love all the attention she's been giving my cock, it's high time my tongue takes over the work of her fingers.

I lean over her, spreading her legs wide. My face lowers, hovering over her pussy, and I watch as her fingers move in and out of her glistening cunt. She's come twice, but that's nothing for her. I thought things would die down, that once she got my cock inside of her, the daily number of orgasms would dwindle. But the girl is insatiable. She'd be content if she fell asleep with my cock inside her every night, and so would I.

Give it to her morning, noon, and night.

Fill her to hilt with cum and decorate her smooth skin with whatever is left.

Only to do it all over again.

Shoving her hand out of my way, I wrap my arms around her thighs, and pull her ass up from the mattress and her pussy to my mouth. Don't know how she always tastes so sweet, or why I can never get enough.

I lick her from ass to clit, my tongue flattening over the sensitive bud. She moans around my balls, sucking one, then the other, her hand wrapped tight around my shaft, squeezing it as she thrusts against my face. I tear my mouth away for a second, swiping my fingers through her cunt, getting them nice and wet. My thumb circles her asshole, and I shove two fingers inside her pussy, scissoring them.

That makes her go wild, and suddenly my dick is in her mouth. She sucks and licks, swirling her tongue all the way down my shaft, taking it deeper and deeper, until the crown is touching the back of her throat.

She chokes and my precum leaks down her throat. I dive back into her pussy, my tongue frantically flicking over her clit. Her mouth loses my cock, and her nails rake over the backs of my legs. I push my thumb into her tight little hole, and she goes off like a firecracker, squirming and thrashing against my fingers and my tongue.

It's fucking glorious, and when I've slurped up every drop, I pull my fingers out of her, and spread her pussy lips. Finding her clit all swollen and pulsing, I spit on it before taking my fingers back to it, rubbing it furiously.

Her legs close around my head, but I don't let up.

"One more, mama. One more on my tongue, and I'll give you my cock and take two more from you. Then, and only then, will I fill you with cum, and watch it leak down your pretty thighs."

"Oh, fuck," she cries, then she covers her mouth, muffling the most sensual sound I've ever heard come from her filthy little mouth, and I wring another orgasm from her tight little body.

My tongue slows, lapping at her as she comes down from her high. The scent of her pussy is all over me, and I consider not washing my face to see how long it will take for it to wear. Pressing a kiss to her thigh, I roll onto my back. My fingers close around her ankles, and I drag her legs over my chest.

"I don't know if I can take anymore," she pants, smoothing her hands over her sweat clad body.

"You can, and you will," I tell her, grabbing her by the hips. I pull her up so that she's on her knees and position her so that she's straddling me. My cock springs forward, and cum drips from the tip onto my stomach. She swipes at it with her finger, then rubs it into her nipple.

I pinch the other one while my free hand travels up her body, and my fingers circle her neck. “Sit on my cock, mama. It’s gonna be three weeks before you can do it again, so you better make it count.”

“Is that a dare?”

“Take it as you wish,” I grunt, applying pressure to her neck.

She bends down, taking my bottom lip between her teeth. “I’m going to fuck you so hard that all you think about when you’re in California is my cunt and how empty it is without you.”

I wanna tell her that she doesn’t have to trouble herself, that it’s all I’m going to be thinking about anyway, but I’d only be doing a disservice to us both. Jade loves to fuck, but she loves it most when we fuck filthy, hard, and rough.”

She pulls my cock to her entrance and drops down hard, her ass smacks against my thighs and her tits bounce in my face, and she keeps at that pace, pulling off me only to pounce down hard, and harder. My fingers tighten around her neck in a feeble attempt to slow this down, but I like it just as fucking hard as her.

I slap her ass until it’s red and the palm of my hand stings. The sound of our flesh smacking and the scent of dirty sex fills the room, along with our moans, and all the filthy promises we make to one another. I lower my other hand between her legs and play with her oversensitive clit. Two strokes, that’s all it takes before she impales herself on my cock, her cunt spasms around me, and when I see her mouth open, my hand leaves her neck and flies up to her lips. Shoving my fingers into her mouth, I watch her fall apart as she moans around them.

My hips thrust upward, and with the hand I was using on her clit, I grab her hip, holding on as tight as I can as I fuck her mindlessly. There is no thought of tracking

her cycle. I don't worry about waking the kids. I don't even care to know if I'm tearing her pussy apart. My vision blurs and with one more hard thrust, I welcome my release, shooting it deep inside her.

I pull my fingers out from between her lips and squeeze her tit as I try to remember how the fuck I'm supposed to breathe. When it feels like I have absolutely no strength, I release my hold on her. My hands flop onto the mattress, and she falls over me, her tits pressed tight against my chest, her face in my neck. We lay like that for a while, neither of us able to move. And even when I start to feel my cum leak out of her, I don't make any attempt to move. It trickles down my thigh, and I still don't fucking move.

"Don't leave tonight. I want to sleep just like this, sticky with sweat, your arms wrapped around me, and your cock inside me."

I take that as my cue to wind my arms around her. "The kids, Jade."

"The door is locked, and if they wake before us, then we'll just tell them the truth," she whispers. "I don't want to sneak around anymore, especially not in my own house. When you come home, I want you in this bed with me every night. I want your face to be the first thing I see in the morning, and maybe that's selfish of me, but I don't really think so. I think my boys want you close too."

My chest tightens and my throat goes dry.

I want all that too.

So I give myself a pass, and I let myself fall asleep with my woman in my arms.

"I don't want you to leave," Raiden says, his lower lip quivering slightly. "You promised you wouldn't."



The kid is fucking killing me. All three of them.

“I’m not leaving you , Raiden. I’ll be back in three weeks, and you can Facetime me any time you want.”

“It’s not the same,” he argues, furiously wiping at the stray tear that slides down his cheek. He reminds me so much of Legend on the day of Irish’s funeral.

“It’s not, but please don’t think I am not coming back to you. I’d be lost without you guys, and I promise I need you more than you need me.”

Legend comes to stand behind his brother, placing a hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay, Raiden. When Uncle Shotty makes a promise, he never breaks it. Just give him your pinky to seal the deal.”

Fuck.

This kid is going to make me cry. I swallow the lump in my throat, and wink at him, silently praying my emotions remain in check. Then I bring my attention back to Raiden and hold out my pinky. He hesitates for about a second before wrapping his little pinky around mine.

“No backsies,” he cries.

“No backsies,” I say hoarsely.

He releases my finger and throws his arms around my neck. “I love you, Uncle Shotty.”

“I love you too, kid. So fucking much.” I squeeze him tight, probably even a little too tight because he breaks the embrace shortly afterward. He moves to Jade’s side,

giving Legend the opportunity to step forward.

I cup the back of his neck, giving it an affectionate squeeze.

“Remember what I said?”

He nods. “I’m the man of the house now.”

“That’s right, my man. Do you remember what else I said?”

“You promised to always be there for me and Raiden, and mom too. But on the days when you can’t, I need to step up and help mom out.”

“Let’s put Killian in there too since he wasn’t born before we had that talk.”

“Okay,” he says, shoving his hands into his pockets.

“Hey,” I call gently. “Look at me.”

He lifts his chin, and as strong and brave as he is, his eyes are like a mirror image of my own, full of unshed tears, and a longing to belong.

“Couldn’t love any of you more if it were my blood running through your veins. You hear me?”

“I hear you,” he whispers.

“Take care of your mom.” My gaze cuts to Jade who unlike the rest of us is openly letting her tears fall down her cheeks. “C’mere, mama,” I say, holding out my arms. She repositions Killian so he’s hanging off her right hip and comes to me.

This morning we woke before the kids and when they came down the stairs, they found Jade sitting on my lap in the kitchen. Jade didn't hop off, and I didn't run to the other end of the kitchen. Instead we told them that their Uncle Shotty was head over boots in love with their mother, and that I'd be moving into the main house when I got back.

They looked at us like we were crazy, then Legend laughed, and said "I thought you were going to tell us you were getting married."

Jade laughed, and said no. But as she asked the boys if they were okay with the idea, I was itching to ask them for their permission to marry their mom.

I'll be a King until my dying day or they strip me of my patch, but the only people I answer to, the only people I seek permission to love their mother, are the three boys in this room.

I lower my mouth, gently brushing my lips over hers.

"I love you, Jade."

With everything I got.

With everything I am.

And with everything I'll be.

SIXTEEN

JADE

Shotgun stood true to his word. He Facetimed every day, and multiple times on some occasions, but seeing his face through a screen wasn't enough for me, and it wasn't enough for my boys.

We wanted our guy back home.

By the start of the second week of the rally, I could tell Shotgun was just as frustrated. He barely engaged in any of my dirty texts, and the night before they left to come home, he said he was done, that he was going to tell Biggie the truth on the way home at one of their stops.

I didn't know if that was the best idea, but there was no talking to him. He was spiraling, and at the end of the day, he knew better than me as to how to proceed.

He didn't call until late the next night, and I knew he had done it before I even answered the phone because he didn't FaceTime me.

"Hey, mama," he slurred. "It's done. Told them all you're mine. That I fucking love you, and plan to marry you as soon as I get home. And if you're not already pregnant, then I'm going to work on that too. Give you that little girl you've been dreaming of. Can you see it? You, me, the boys, and a little girl that looks just like you?"

I could see it clear as day, and I told him that through the tears that streamed down

my face. Then I asked him what happened with the club, and he didn't tell me anything more than they would be taking a vote on the course of punishment.

“What the hell does that mean?” I demanded.

He sighed. “It means they hold my future with the club in their hands, but my future with you—ain't no one taking control of that but us.”

I keep replaying those words over in my head, thinking they will somehow ease the anxiety filtering through my body, and it does for about a millisecond, until I let my mind trail down memory lane, and I think about all the sacrifices Shotgun has made for the club.

The Kings of Anarchy are embedded in his soul, and he shouldn't be sanctioned because he fell in love with me. He should be fucking honored. He took a broken-hearted woman, they claim to care and respect, and he made me whole.

He fixed what they broke. They claim this a breach of brotherhood, but anyone who knew Irish would tell you that the only man he'd trust his family to is Shotgun. They also say this about me belonging to one man, and one club. Well, I belong to me, and only me. I've given my body to Shotgun, along with my heart. And I only answer to my children.

As for the club, I belong to them, and they belong to me.

It's a mutual respect.

I pull my truck into the compound, and park directly in front of the clubhouse where the convoy of bikes is usually parked.

“Legend, I want you to take your brothers into your dad's room. I'm going to wait out

here for Shotgun.”

He seems to contemplate what I’m saying, and not because he plans to argue with me, but rather he’s considering if Shotgun would approve of him leaving me outside alone. He’s taught my boy well.

“Go, on, baby, I’ll be fine. Gavone is standing right over there.”

“Fine, but if he doesn’t come soon, will you come and wait inside with us?”

“Of course.” I lean over the console to give him a kiss on the cheek, then I turn to my two boys in the back seat. “Go with your brother. He’s going to show you your dad’s old room.”

“But we want to see Uncle Shotty. We’ve been waiting forever.”

“Just a little while longer, and he’ll be all yours. He’s counting down the minutes. I’m sure of it.”

That seems to persuade him, and he takes Legend’s hand. I watch as the three boys enter the clubhouse, then I open up my hatch, and sit in my truck, waiting for the convoy of bikes. Gavone tries to make small talk with me, but I have no desire to shoot the breeze. I barely know the guy, and I’m too riled up to care about anything he has to say.

About thirty minutes later I hear the roar of pipes, and a minute after that, I see them roll through the gates. Biggie is the first to park behind my truck, and I glare at him. Then my eyes scan over the rest of the bikes, and that’s when I see my man with a busted lip and a black eye.

Killing the engine, he toes the kickstand and quickly dismounts. I run toward him, my

feet coming to a skidding halt right in front of him. Lifting my hands, I cradle his face.

“What are you doing here? Where are the boys?”

“I couldn’t wait another second,” I shout over the engines. “The boys are in Irish’s room.” My thumb gently traces his bloody lip. “Which one of them did this to you?”

He bends his knees and winds his arms around the back of my thighs, hoisting me up against him. “It doesn’t matter.”

He goes in for a kiss, but my head inches back. “It matters to me.” The engines die around us, and it suddenly gets very quiet. I turn my attention to Biggie, and find him staring at me, a blank expression on his face.

“Put me down,” I demand.

“Jade—”

I turn my eyes back to Shotgun. “I said put me down.”

He shakes his head but lowers me back onto my feet, and I walk over to where Biggie stands.

“Sweetheart—”

“I came here to speak my mind, and I’d appreciate if you let me do that.” He sighs heavily but doesn’t object, and I take that as my cue to continue. “I forgive you, Biggie,” I rasp, my eyes filling with tears. “I forgive all of you for what happened to Irish. But if you hurt one fucking hair on that man’s head, you’re dead to me. You’re dead to my children too. I know you got rules, and a code to abide by. But that man

standing over there, he's not just a brother. Not to me, and not to my children. And he wasn't just a brother to Irish either. Take that into consideration when you make your judgements, and remember there's gonna come a day when you're the one under judgement, and the one who delivers your sanctions might not be too forgiving of your sins."

"Jade," Shotgun calls from behind me.

"It's done. Jersey threw a couple of punches at me when we stopped at the gas station. The only thing left to decide is if I get to keep my rank. But it's all over, mama. The Kings know the only thing Irish would've wanted is for you to be happy, and they accept that I'm the man who gets to do just that."

Shotgun and I don't lie to each other, but I still turn to Biggie for confirmation.

"It's true, sweetheart. You've been through enough. Your ol' man too."



*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:12 pm*

### SHOTGUN

I pictured this moment countless times in my head, never truly believing it would happen—Jade on the back of my bike, her arm wrapped around my middle, tits pressed tight against my back.

Fucking Heaven.

I reach for her calf, squeezing it gently as I pull my Harley through the clubhouse gates. If it weren't for the kids, I would've crossed state lines, taken her to Jersey, maybe even as far as Philly. We could've stopped for cheesesteaks, then on the drive back, I would've found a spot on the highway to pull over and bend over the back of my bike.

But we aren't livin' for stolen moments anymore. She's mine and we got nothing but time. There will be plenty more rides, and ending this one a little earlier isn't the end of the world, especially if it means I get to fuck her in my bed sooner rather than later.

I kill the engine on my Harley, and Jade loosens her arms around my waist. My eyes dart to the sideview mirror, and I watch as she removes her helmet. I bought it for her this morning, and had the guy at the shop put a decal on it that reads Property of Shotgun .

“Oh God, that was fun,” she says, shaking out her long, brown hair. I take the helmet from her, looping the straps through my handlebars as she throws her leg over the side of the bike, and pops up on her feet, winding her arms around my neck. Her

mouth crushes against mine, and that sweet tongue of hers licks into my mouth.

I grip her ass tight as I kiss her back. Maybe it isn't too late to bend her over.

That thought is killed when she breaks the kiss and reaches for my hands. Lacing her fingers with mine, she flashes me that gorgeous smile of hers. "Come on," she urges. "I want to check on the boys, then I want to have a drink, and after that I want to suck your cock."

She gives my hands a tug, and I dismount.

Licking my lips, my eyes slowly trail the length of her. "As much as I want to fuck your mouth, mama, I've been waiting way too long to have your pussy."

Rolling her eyes, she pulls me toward the clubhouse.

"Fine, but you're not allowed to go to sleep until you cum down my throat."

"That's not a hardship, Jade."

She pops her shoulder, releasing one of my hands to open the door to the clubhouse. "I think that depends on your stamina. It's that time of the month, Shotgun. I can fuck all night, and I'll still be hungry for your cock."

"There's a solution to that."

She walks into the clubhouse, then turns and glances at me from over her shoulder. She quirks an eyebrow. "Oh, yeah? What's your solution?"

I step around her, pinning her back to the door as I press one hand above her head. Lowering my lips to her ear, "I knock you up."

We haven't talked about having more kids. We haven't discussed marriage either. Though, I'd take her to the courthouse in the morning and make her my wife if she told me that's what she wants.

I lean back, my eyes searching hers for a beat. I don't realize I'm holding my breath until a grin spreads across her face, and the pressure leaves my chest.

"You want to put a baby in me, Shotgun?"

I want to put a dozen in her, but I'll be grateful for one.

"That shouldn't even be a question."

"Then I should tell you that I'm even more horny when I'm pregnant." She licks her lips. "Once the second trimester hits, you won't be able to leave the house. I'll be on your dick morning, noon, and night."

I bend my head, nipping at her lips. "I think I can deal with it."

"Oh, shit, they're back," Taxi shouts. "Hide the cocaine and take the gun out of Legend's hands. Did you get a long sleeve shirt to hide Killian's tattoo?"

Jade's eyes go wide, and she sheds my block. When I turn around I find all the brothers gathered around the common area.

Taxi winks at her, "Relax, Jade. The boys asleep in their room."

Their room.

Not Irish's room.

But theirs.

“All went well,” Biggie shares. “We may have hyped them up on sugar and fed them one too many slices of pizza. But they’re good. Killian needs a bath in the morning, though. We were only partially kidding about the tattoo thing. Jersey, here, gave him a sleeve with some washable markers.”

“Incoming,” Jersey says, pointing his beer toward the surveillance footage displayed on the flat screen televisions positioned over the bar. I don’t bother looking, my people are here. The boys are safe and sound in their room, and Jade is standing between my legs, her back against my chest, my arms wrapped tight around her waist as she sips her wine. Jesus Christ himself could walk through those doors, and I wouldn’t give a fuck.

Jade laughs as I nuzzle her neck. “You don’t want me to finish my wine, do you?”

“What would give you that idea?”

She turns her head slightly as she reaches behind her to wind her arm around my neck, lowering her voice so only I can hear her. “Your cock pressed against my back.”

“Can’t help it. I’ve been hard since our ride.” And even harder when we started talking about having a baby together. Now, it’s all I can think about.

“Isn’t that Bella’s car?” Jersey asks. Jade turns her head, her eyes darting to the screen over the bar. I’m convinced the woman loves torturing me. However, the movement gives me the perfect opportunity to nuzzle her neck.

“Yeah, that’s her car,” Jade confirms. “That’s not Bella, though.”

My lips leave her neck, and I glance up at the screen. My eyes immediately narrow at the figure extraditing himself from the driver’s seat, but then I catch movement directly behind Bella’s car.

“That’s one of Mondestino’ guys,” I say, immediately turning to where Biggie sits at the other end of the bar. The woman he’s been fucking more regularly, a stripper from Lipstick & Lace, quickly becomes a forgotten thought as he pushes her away and vacates his stool. He comes closer, taking a better look at the surveillance footage, his eyes zeroing in on the black Suburban parked directly behind Bella’s car.

“And that’s fucking Mondestino,” Biggie growls. His gaze cuts to me, his eyes conveying what I’m thinking.

We should’ve fucking killed this motherfucker already. Wiped out his entire organization. That’s always been the plan. But just when we’re ready to strike, he pulls a wild card, making us believe it only benefits us to keep him breathing. First he delivered the fucking Albanians, then we started making money hand over fist with the expansion of Lipstick & Lace. All that aside, I’m mostly to blame for why he’s still alive. I got soft after Jade and I got together. The hunger in my veins had little to do with revenge, and everything to do with my woman.

Loving her.

Fucking her.

Building a goddamn life with her.

“Where’s Guido?” Biggie snarls.

“He went back to his room with Tatiana, and Christa,” Skid shares.

“Well, go get him. Tell him the fucking party is over.”

I turn my attention back to Jade, giving her lips a quick peck. “Go to my room. I’ll be there shortly.”

Searching my eyes, she purses her lips, hesitating only a fraction of a second before she lowers her glass to the bar. “Don’t keep me waiting too long, Shotgun.”

“I don’t intend too.”

Before she can untangle herself from between my legs, the front door to the clubhouse swings open, and Mondestino struts inside, donning a black, custom-tailored suit. The top few buttons of his crisp white dress shirt are undone, and usually perfectly combed hair is disheveled. A dark expression clouds his face as the man who was driving Bella’s car holds the door open behind him.

“Mondestino,” Biggie greets, his jaw clenched tight. “Thought we had an agreement. My boots don’t touch your palace, and you fucking high-price loafers don’t touch mine.”

I push off my stool, pushing Jade behind me, and glare at the man who orchestrated Irish and I to be taken. My hand moves inside my kutte, to the leather holster containing my gun. I will blow this motherfucker’s head off if he tries any shit.

“Yeah, well, considering I found something that belongs to you, I didn’t think you would mind making an exception,” Mondestino says, turning toward the door. One of Mondestino’s enforcers enter the clubhouse, carrying an unconscious Bella in his arms.

All bloody and bruised.

My hand pauses on my gun.

“Oh my God,” Jade shrieks from behind me. She pushes me out of the way, and steps in front of me. My hand leaves my gun, and I circle her waist, holding her back from taking another step forward. “What happened to her?”

Mondestino's eyes dart from Jade to me, then land on Biggie. "We found her in the parking lot of Lipstick & Lace. She was on the ground right outside her car. My brother checked the cameras, and it appears that she drove herself to the club, got out, and collapsed. She needs a doctor."

"Set her down on the pool table," Biggie orders. "Where the fuck is Guido?"

"I'm right here," growls, zipping up his jeans. "What's the big..." His voice trails when he steps out from the mouth of the hallway and his eyes land on Mondestino's enforcer laying Bella on the pool table. Before any of us can get a word out he lunges for the guy, taking him by the lapels of his suit and throwing him up against the nearest wall.

"What the fuck did you do to her?"

I jump to pull him off the guy. "Man, stop. They fucking found her and brought her here. It wasn't them."

"Control your pit bull, Biggie," Mondestino warns.

Guido drops his hold on the guy's suit and shrugs out of my hold. With his nostrils flaring and his fists balled tight, he turns to Bella. All the color drains from his face, and he strides toward the pool table. For a second he just stares at her, cataloging all her injuries, then he gathers her in his arms. A moan slips past her lips as he pulls her against his chest.

"I'm going to kill him," he vows.

THE END