



Quadruplets for the Vipers (Never Just One #3)

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Category: Romance

Description: Four bikers. Four babies. One woman they'll kill to protect.

Desperate to escape my violent ex, I agree to be a surrogate for the Steel Vipers MC Prez and his Old Lady. Their babies, my way out. But nothing in the outlaw world goes as planned.

The moment I find out I'm pregnant, they're murdered. Now, I'm carrying a legacy—four babies bound to the club. And that makes me a target.

With war brewing, only four bikers stand between me and the chaos.

Axel—Former VP, now the one calling the shots. Fierce, commanding, and completely off-limits... until he's not.

Rider—Brooding, haunted, scarred. He keeps his distance, but when he touches me, I shatter.

Jace—A cocky tease with a dark past. He grins, he tempts... but when he claims, he owns.

Knox—Reckless. Wild. The one who pushes me too far—then pulls me back just to make me his again.

They say I belong to the club now. That I'm off-limits. But as my belly grows, so does the fire between us.

I never meant to fall for one of them... let alone all four.

But in a world this ruthless, love might be the deadliest sin of all.

A stand-alone reverse harem biker romance with forbidden heat, heart-stopping danger, and a guaranteed HEA!

Total Pages (Source): 43

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Leah

Mondays at the club are always quiet, especially as it's only early.

I'll never know why they bother opening this early or on Mondays at all.

But aside from a lack of tips, I don't mind it as it's less of a hassle.

The only patrons are a few regulars—lonely men desperately seeking comfort from their favorite girl, content to pretend their relationship isn't purely transactional—and a couple of businessmen from out of town.

Later on, we might get some drunk tourists coming here hoping to buy a beautiful woman's company for the night.

I've worked as a waitress at the Sugar Shack strip club for almost six months.

While it isn't exactly my dream job, the tips are good, the management is decent, and, more importantly, it's discreet.

Unlike the bigger, flashier clubs, the Sugar Shack is a little rough around the edges and is located further outside the city.

Which suits me fine since I know it's the last place he'll ever look for me.

"Can I get you a top-up, Earl?" I ask one of our regulars.

“Please, darlin’, and a dance, if you’re offering...” he asks, his gaze fixed firmly on my cleavage.

I laugh it off. Earl’s asked me practically every day since I’ve worked here if I’ll give him a lap dance, and it’s become a running joke between us.

“We could never! You’d break poor Honey’s heart,” I say, pulling a sad face and pointing over at Honey, his regular girl, gyrating on the pole on stage.

Honey has the typical stripper look, gravity-defying breasts that are too large for her skinny frame, bottle blonde hair, and pouty blow-job lips. That and bags of confidence. One thing I’ve learned from the girls here is that when you believe you’re the sexiest bitch in the room, you are.

I think Earl’s sweet requests are more platitudes than any real desire to see me naked.

I’m the total opposite of Honey and definitely not stripper hot.

For starters, I’m about three dress sizes bigger than half the girls, and I have no desire to be the token ‘big girl’.

Secondly, I also have zero confidence about my body, my ex made sure of that.

After taking Earl his drink and checking that everyone else is happy, I head downstairs to the basement for supplies to stock up the fridges. “I’m just grabbing some more stock. Keep an eye on the floor for me?” I ask my colleague, Big John.

“Sure thing,” he replies without looking up.

Big John had been a bouncer here since the place opened, but recently, he became a grandfather and decided a safer, less active role as the manager would suit him better.

He's pretty useless at bartending, and we often have to stop him from getting involved with kicking out rowdy clients, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

John is part of the furniture here. His safe, solid presence is part of the reason why many girls choose to stay, even though there are busier clubs out there.

He's the father figure they crave in their lives.

When I return to the main floor a while later, I notice two new patrons sitting by the front of the stage.

Immediately, I can tell that they're members of a motorcycle club—the tattoos and leather vests are a dead giveaway.

I recognize the patch on their vests, I know they're affiliated with the Steel Vipers, one of the most notorious clubs in town.

There's a palpable tension in the room that wasn't there before.

The Steel Vipers don't come here often, but their reputation precedes them.

We're not affiliated with any particular gang, as we're in neutral territory.

This usually means they don't come here unless they're planning a meeting with a rival gang.

Neutrality can quickly go out the window when alcohol and naked women are involved.

"Everything good?" I ask Big John, slipping behind the bar, where he's watching the men like a hawk.

“So far. Supposedly it’s just the two of them. Said they wanted to come someplace quiet and asked for every girl in the house to perform on stage,” he murmurs back. From his tone, I can tell he’s not buying it.

“You think they’re up to something?”

“Mmhmm... that one right there is the President,” Big Joe says, pointing out the older of the two, a man with a giant barrel chest and a big bushy gray beard.

I watch with curiosity as, one by one, the girls perform for them.

After dancing, each girl tries to talk with the men to ask them for a private dance.

They all flirt outrageously, some choosing to sit on the lap of the president’s companion, while others, sensing the president is the cash cow.

The second man ignores them all completely, leaving the president to do the talking.

Some, the older man dismisses immediately, while others he speaks to briefly before dismissing them, too.

Each girl is given a tip for their trouble before walking away, looking dejected.

“What do you think he’s asking them?” I whisper to Big John.

“I don’t know, and I don’t like it. If he’s trying to get these girls to sell drugs for him...”

It wouldn’t be the first time drug dealers have approached the girls to get them to deal or mule.

Since the owner of the place is never in town, the running of the club falls to Big John.

He runs a tight ship and is adamant that it remains a clean, respectable, and safe space for the dancers to work.

Anyone disturbing the peace will see a side to Big John that is nothing like the gentle giant he appears to be.

Just then, the second man looks up, his eyes meeting mine.

Even from a distance, I can tell this man is stupidly attractive.

No wonder the girls have been simpering over them and are desperate to give them a dance.

He tilts his head to the side curiously before whispering something in the president's ear.

The president looks over at me, and I feel hot under his intense scrutiny.

Both completely ignore the girl on the stage, their focus is entirely on me.

"Big John, is it just me, or are they talking about me?" I whisper nervously, hoping it's all in my head.

Big John watches them for a second, one predator sizing up another. Without saying another word, he steps out from behind the bar and strides over to the men. They exchange tense yet civil words before Big John nods, seemingly satisfied, and returns.

“Grab them another drink and take it over to them, will you, Leah? Two double whiskeys and two beers.”

“Sure,” I reply, feeling a little off-balance but confident that Big John wouldn’t throw me to the wolves.

“Here are your drinks, gentlemen,” I say politely as I set them down on the table.

It’s only now that I get a proper look at them both.

The president has a surprisingly kind face for a man of his reputation, but it’s his companion that holds my attention.

He’s even more handsome up close. Dark hair pulled back from his chiseled face, a strong jaw highlighted by a smattering of stubble, muscles that I thought only existed on movie screens, and the greenest eyes I’ve ever seen.

I have to drag my attention back to the president as he begins to speak.

“Thank you. Sit, please,” the president says, gesturing to the empty chair beside him.

My eyes dart to Big John, who nods his approval. I hesitate before sinking into the chair, my body tense as if ready to run at the first sign of danger.

“Please, don’t be nervous. I just want to ask you a few questions,” the president says soothingly.

While he looks intimidating, the man has a strangely soothing presence akin to Big John. I take a deep breath to gather my courage before replying.

“Okay... sure, though I’m not sure I’ll be able to help with... whatever it is you’re

looking for.”

“Let me be the judge of that,” he says with a reassuring smile that doesn’t show his teeth. “What’s your name?”

“Lacy,” I reply automatically, using the fake name I give customers.

“Your real name,” he presses, seeing straight through the lie.

“We don’t share our real names with customers. Nothing personal, it’s just a company policy for safety,” I reply firmly.

“I can find it out quite easily, I’m sure...”

I shrug. “Not from me,” I reply, more confidently than I feel.

He smiles at me then, a slow, pleased smile, as if I’ve answered correctly. I can feel his companion’s eyes on me, sizing me up with naked curiosity. I deliberately avoid his stare. Something tells me that if I look into those green pools again, I’ll be lost in their depths.

“That’s fair enough. True names are valuable. We’re part of the Steel Vipers, and we all have nicknames, too. I’m Zeus, and this is Axel,” the president replies.

I nod, risking only the briefest glance at Axel before forcing myself to focus on Zeus. The name suits him, he bears a strong resemblance to the mythical god, minus the tattoos.

“Nice to meet you both.”

“How old are you, Lacy?” Zeus asks me.

“I assume if I tell you that it’s rude to ask a woman her age and refuse to answer, you won’t be best pleased?” I retort, raising my eyebrow.

Axel releases a snort of laughter before resuming his brooding, composed observation.

“I’d appreciate it if you’d share with me. I promise not to tell anyone else,” Zeus replies conspiratorially.

“I’m twenty-five.”

“Where are you from? I can tell from your accent you’re not from around here?” Zeus says.

“Nebraska I moved here when I was twenty-one.”

“Why?” Axel is the one to ask this time, surprising even himself by the looks of it.

I force myself to look at him, burning under his gaze. I decide to be honest. I have nothing to be ashamed of.

“The same reason most people move to LA. I wanted a better life than the one I had. I thought I had a chance to make it here, to be someone. As you can see, it’s going fantastically,” I say sarcastically, gesturing around me.

“You weren’t running from anything?”

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“Other than a dull life in the Midwest? No.”

“Do you have family here?” Zeus asks.

I’m grateful to look away from Axel. Looking at him is a bit like staring at the sun too long; you’ll get burned.

“No. I’m an only child, and my parents died when I was young. The only family I have left is my grandfather back home. Sorry, but is there a reason why you’re asking me all these questions?”

“Yes. But we’ll get to that later,” Zeus replies.

“Do you have any children, a husband, or a boyfriend?” Axel asks.

“Why? You asking me out?” I retort. I’m not normally so outspoken, but their personal questions were making me uneasy.

I don’t like being under such scrutiny, but the president of a notorious biker gang wanting to know so much about me can’t be a good thing.

“I think I’m done here. It was nice to meet you both,” I say, jumping to my feet.

For a moment, I think they’re going to force me to stay, but Zeus simply nods. “It was a pleasure to meet you, too, Lacy. Until next time,” he adds, a threat or a promise.

I head to the restroom to compose myself.

“Fuck, I would climb that man like a tree,” one of the girls giggles to another as they reapply their lipstick in the mirror.

“God, me too. I wonder what they’re looking for... I’ve heard half the Steel Vipers are stone-cold hotties. Maybe we should find out where their club is and hang out there,” the other replies.

The girls look up at me and smile, but ignore me as I make my way into a cubicle.

They’re polite to me, but I’m not one of them, so I’m generally excluded from their gossiping tales of customers.

I hear them leave as I’m leaving the stall.

I take my time washing my hands and fixing my makeup.

I don’t wear much, but in this line of work, it pays to look your best. Considering I’ve been living out of my truck for the past few weeks and showering at work, it hasn’t been easy.

I slick some gloss on my lips, the kind that contains a hint of chili to plump them up, and scrunch my long, wavy, brown hair between my fingers. It’s an unruly mess that I frequently tie up to keep out of the way, but again, I get better tips when it’s down.

Wearing makeup and my hair down are also small acts of rebellion against my ex, who hated me doing either. In a way, so is working in the club. Knowing how much he’d hate my new career choice brings me a small sense of satisfaction.

As I leave the restroom, I collide with a steel pillar of muscle. “Sorry, I didn’t see you

there,” I stammer as I realize I’ve just barged right into Axel’s chest.

At well over six feet with broad shoulders and rippling biceps, he’s not exactly easy to miss. I step back to look up at him, he dominates the entire corridor; I can’t get around him without touching him.

“The customer restrooms are back that way,” I add, pointing behind him.

He nods but makes no move to leave. He steps closer, watching me with that intense gaze.

“You didn’t answer my question before,” he says.

“What question?” I reply, playing dumb.

“Are you taken?”

I don’t know what takes over me —perhaps it’s the raw, animalistic sexuality that he exudes, or the fact that I know there’s no way a man like him would be interested in me so he’ll likely find my answer funny and back off—but I find myself replying with uncharacteristic confidence.

“Why don’t you try to take me and find out for yourself?” I challenge.

A sound akin to a growl erupts from his chest, and before I fully understand what’s happening, he closes the gap between us, buries his hand in my hair, and crushes his lips against mine.

Instinct takes over as I kiss him back hungrily.

He lifts me from my feet, and I wrap my legs around his waist as he pins me against

the wall.

He kisses down my neck—strong, violent kisses that will surely leave marks, but feel incredible.

A moan escapes my lips, and I can feel myself soaking wet through my panties as I grind against him.

I should not be doing this. Not here, in the middle of work. Not with some biker. But I don't care, I'm totally lost in the moment. I've never wanted anyone more.

“Leah... you dark horse!” Honey screeches, breaking the spell.

As quickly as we collided, we spring apart. I avoid looking at him as I adjust my rumpled clothes.

“Save some for the rest of us,” Honey purrs as she sashays past us into the restroom.

“I'm sorry... I don't know what came over me...” I mumble as I push past him to leave.

He captures my wrist in his hand, stopping me. “I'll see you around, Leah,” he says, drawing out my name like a promise.

I don't reply. I wouldn't even know what the hell to say, and he lets me go.

I can feel his eyes burning into my back as I walk away.

I mentally curse Honey for using my real name.

Though I get the impression they could have found it out if they wanted.

I head back to the bar, losing myself in busy work while fending off Big John's questions and resolutely avoiding looking in Axel's direction.

I think I'd die of embarrassment. He's probably used to women throwing themselves at him all the time.

Thankfully, they've already paid their tab, and they leave the club shortly after Axel comes out.

I think of his last words to me, something tells me this isn't the last I've seen of the Steel Vipers. I can't decide whether that's a good or bad thing.

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Leah

Two Weeks Later

I 'm walking across the parking lot after finishing my shift when I see him casually leaning against the side of my beat-up truck.

I startle a little as if I've seen a ghost. In all honesty, it feels as if our first encounter was a dream.

After two weeks of no-shows, I figured that whatever they were looking for wasn't at the Sugar Shack.

But here he is in the flesh. The man I haven't been able to get out of my head for two weeks.

Not some sexy made-up man of my dreams, after all.

Just a big, bad biker who I'm now alone in a dark parking lot with.

"What do you want?" I say warily, keeping my distance.

"My Prez wants to meet with you."

"Okay... then where is he?"

"In private," Axel replies for clarification, pointing to the chopper parked next to my

car.

“You must be insane if you think I’m going to get on the back of a stranger’s bike and let him take me someplace in the middle of the night,” I say dryly.

“You can follow in your truck, and you can message a friend to tell them who you’re with if you like. I promise no harm will come to you. We just want to talk.”

The logical side of my brain says this is madness, I should refuse like any sensible person would, yet I’m intrigued.

I watch him warily, trying to make up my mind.

He seems earnest enough, though behind his stoic mask, I can tell he feels uncomfortable in my presence.

God, how embarrassing. I must be the last person he wants to see—some chick he regrets making out with.

It must be important if he’s come regardless.

“Fine. Lead the way,” I grunt, climbing into my truck.

I make a show of sending a message, but in reality, there’s no one I can contact.

Big John would undoubtedly come to my aid if needed, but I wouldn’t want to bring that kind of trouble to his doorstep.

The girls wouldn’t come unless there was something in it for them.

They’re practical and not remotely altruistic; it’s every woman for themselves in their

line of work.

Any friends I had here have long since disappeared, frozen out by me, thanks to my jealous ex.

His bike roars into action as he turns it on and pulls out of the parking lot, and I follow.

I briefly contemplate trying to lose him, taking a turn at the last second, but I instinctively know he'd have no issues catching up with me and I'd rather not piss him off.

I'm also curious to know what the Steel Viper's president wants from me.

I was expecting to be taken to the club's main headquarters, the infamous Viper's Den.

So when we pull into the parking lot of a sleepy diner, I'm momentarily confused.

Axel climbs off his bike with practiced ease as I turn off my engine and clamber out of my truck, trying and failing to look graceful.

It's late, so the diner is mostly empty. In a booth at the far end, Zeus is sitting with a woman. She looks to be in her early fifties with white hair cut into a severe, short spiky style, but her tattoos and angular features make her seem younger. I nervously follow Axel over to them.

"Leah, it's good to see you again. Please sit," Zeus says, warmly.

I do as I'm told, hiding the pang of disappointment I feel when, instead of sitting beside me, Axel slopes off to sit on a stool at the counter away from us.

“This is my old lady, Donna,” he says, gesturing to the woman beside him.

“Nice to meet you,” I reply.

“You too. Can we get you something to eat or drink?” she replies, gesturing to the menu. She has a kind, maternal air to her, despite the severity of her look.

“Oh, no, it’s okay,” I reply, but they insist. When the waitress comes over, Zeus orders coffee and pie for all of us.

I’m exhausted, and though I shouldn’t drink coffee this late at night, I know I’m gonna need it to keep my wits about me for this conversation.

Only after our order has arrived do they begin questioning me.

“I’m sure you’re wondering why we dragged you here in the middle of the night.

We apologize for the cloak-and-dagger methods, but we want to keep this meeting as private as possible.

The last time you saw my husband, he had some questions for you, and you were helpful enough to answer them. Now we have a proposal for you.”

“Look, no offense, you seem like nice people and all, but I don’t have any interest in working for your...

club,” I say, narrowly stopping myself from calling it a gang.

“I’m not a stripper, I don’t ride, nor do I have any interest in...

whatever else you guys do...” I add, holding up my hands in surrender.

Zeus smiles, “We’re aware, we know that you have a clean record, that you’re fit and healthy, you don’t do drugs or have any gang affiliations, nor are you a sex worker, and you’re alone without a partner or family nearby.

What we want to offer you is an opportunity.

For you to do something for us that we believe you’re uniquely equipped to do.

We’d pay you handsomely, enough money to move wherever you like or to stay here and live comfortably. ”

“What is it you want me to do for you?” I ask warily, imagining that it’s drug trafficking or worse.

“I can assure you, it isn’t anything illegal. And, of course, we would guarantee your safety. You would have the full protection of the Steel Vipers for life,” Zeus adds.

This piques my interest. Having the protection of a powerful club like the Steel Vipers would make me untouchable.

Either they know about my ex and how tempting the offer of protection is, or they’ve made a lucky guess.

Perhaps they can recognize a desperate person in hiding as easily as we can recognize their club affiliation from their tattoos and patches. Is my vulnerability branded on me?

“Okay, I’m listening...”

Donna places a loving hand on her husband’s as she looks at me, taking over the conversation.

“Our son, Levi, and his wife, April, were killed in a motorcycle accident six months ago. When they died, they had been trying for a baby. It was all they wanted, a little boy or girl of their own. But they were having problems, and they struggled to conceive. Before they died, they decided to undergo IVF treatment. The embryos were created, but they never got to the final stage. My husband and I have thought long and hard about this, and we want to honor their last wish and raise our grandchild. We want to bring the life they so desperately wanted into this world. Even if our son is gone, we can have our grandbaby.”

I look at them, perplexed, wondering what this could possibly have to do with me.

“We have a contract here that details everything,” Zeus says, slipping the paper across the table to me.

I read through it, noting the eyewatering sum of money they’re offering as well as board, protection, medical care, expenses, as well as an NDA to not share information with outsiders, and that I agree to grant full custody of the child following its birth to Donna and Zeus.

It takes me a moment to comprehend what they’re asking of me.

“Wait... I’m sorry you want me to...”

“We want you to be the surrogate mother for our grandchild.”

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Leah

Six Weeks Later

It took me only three days of deliberation to agree to their offer.

My initial reaction was no way. I've never been pregnant or had a child.

Heck, motherhood isn't something that I envisioned happening any time soon in my life.

Normally, you need a partner for that, and I am painfully single.

I told them that there are surrogate services out there with plenty of women who would happily carry the baby for them. But they were adamant they wanted me.

When asked why, they said there was no way they could use traditional methods.

Given their criminal ties and the fact that it isn't even their child, I suppose it makes sense.

They also replied that I met their criteria: I was young, healthy, with no family history of poor health, and I reminded them a little of their daughter-in-law.

For whatever reason, they'd decided I was the perfect person to do this for them.

I suppose, given the fact that I agreed, they weren't totally wrong.

I'm probably certifiably insane to agree to carry the grandchild of a notorious gang leader. I also wonder if I could give up a child that I've carried for nine months. But the overwhelming reality is that I need money and protection, and I've got no other choice.

I've been homeless for six months, ever since I left my ex.

At first, I lived in flea-ridden motels.

For a brief time, I had a small apartment, but when he found me, I had to leave.

Since then, the motel money has dried up, and I've been living in my truck.

I barely make enough money to live, let alone afford the deposit for an apartment.

Even if I did find a place, it's only a matter of time before my ex shows up at my door.

With the offer of accommodation and protection, as well as enough money to finally escape this city and his clutches, I couldn't resist. Being a surrogate for the Steel Vipers seems like my only chance.

After several meetings, the contract signing, and an initial doctor's appointment to ensure I am healthy and able to carry a child safely, as well as to work out the best time for implantation. That day has finally come.

I was surprised by the reaction when I handed in my notice at the Sugar Shack.

I didn't think I'd made much of an impression, but everyone wished me well and said they'd miss working with me.

Big John told me, “You always were too good for this place, girl. Take care of yourself,” before pulling me into a bear hug.

Today, the IVF specialist will insert the embryo.

I’ve been taking special medication for weeks to prepare my uterus for implantation to give us the highest chance of success.

After this, I’ll move into the Steel Vipers’ clubhouse.

Ostensibly to keep things secret, I’ll be there under the guise of working as the new waitress.

Once my pregnancy is confirmed, only a few trusted members will know the truth to protect me.

The clinic where I am being treated is a little shady, to say the least. They pride themselves on discretion and are willing to overlook certain things for the right price.

This means they don’t mind that Zeus and Donna are paying me to carry their dead son’s child, something that probably breaks multiple laws.

Despite this, the doctors are competent and reassuring.

For every other appointment, Donna and Zeus have remained in the room, and this time is no exception, though at least they stay outside of the curtain so I can retain some privacy.

“How’s it going in there?” Donna calls out anxiously while the doctor fiddles around, inserting things into me.

“Everything’s fine, we’re almost done,” the doctor replies.

“We are?” I say, surprised at how quick and painless such a life-altering procedure is.

“Yep, all of the embryos have been successfully implanted. When you come back in two weeks, we’ll know for sure if you’re pregnant, but I’m confident of success.”

“All the embryos? I’m sorry, what do you mean, all of them?” I ask, confused.

“As we discussed in your last appointment, we’ve elected to implant multiple embryos to increase your chances of conception,” he explains.

Although I don’t recall this taking place, I suppose it’s likely I wasn’t listening properly or misunderstood the medical jargon.

“So I won’t give birth to a litter of children?” I ask, only half-joking.

He chuckles. “You have nothing to worry about; that’s very unlikely. Besides, that will be the parents’ problem,” he replies with a wink.

I want to yell that just because I won’t be raising the baby doesn’t mean I want to carry multiple babies around in my belly for nine months like a prize sow, but I keep quiet.

Donna and Zeus have been good to me, I wouldn’t want to upset them by saying the wrong thing or making them worry that I won’t hold up my end of the bargain and will want to keep the baby when it arrives.

The doctor fiddles around for a moment before declaring that we’re finished and that he will see me in two weeks for the blood test that will let us know if I’m pregnant or not.

When I see Zeus and Donna's hopeful faces as I emerge from behind the curtain, I send out a silent prayer to the universe that this works.

As kind as they've been, I don't know how they'd react if their one chance at a grandchild is ruined because of my inadequate uterus.

They fuss over me as we leave, driving in a fancy SUV to the club that's to be my new home. At least for as long as I'm useful to them, anyway.

The building looks exactly as I expected, a typical slice of American debauchery.

An unassuming facade—the only indicator of what's inside being the multiple motorcycles parked out the front and the small group of tattooed men and women smoking who greet the Prez and his old lady as we walk inside, not hiding their naked curiosity at my presence.

I could swear one of the women even hissed at me.

The windows are blacked out, so I get my first glimpse into the Steel Vipers' nest as I walk through the front door.

The bright sunshine is swallowed by the gloom of the bar, which somehow feels smoky, despite the no-smoking sign on the wall.

I'm surprised at how many people are there.

I'd always imagined biker bars to be nocturnal, but several patrons are drinking at the bar and sitting in booths, eating lunch, greasy hamburgers, loaded cheesy fries, bacon pancakes, and other cholesterol-heavy meals that aren't for the faint of heart.

I suppose if they aren't afraid of riding fast on death traps, getting into fights, or bending the law, then a little bit of greasy food isn't going to scare them.

I don't see Axel as I look around, and I feel more disappointed than I ought to.

I have to remind myself why I'm here, and it's not to make out with hot bikers or get moon-eyed over some guy.

Just as I'm telling myself that, Zeus and Donna walk over to the bar, and I come face-to-face with the drop-dead-gorgeous guy behind it.

He has movie-star classic good looks with perfectly symmetrical features, but this is offset by the fact that nearly every inch of skin on display is covered in tattoos, including his shaven head.

The intricate pattern snakes down his neck, along his broad shoulders, chest, washboard stomach, and down the lean muscles of his arms. I can only assume that under his jeans and the parts of his body not covered by his open leather vest, there are more.

The effect should be too much, almost intimidating, but it suits him perfectly.

He wears them like a second skin, as if they've always been a part of him, waiting to emerge.

"Knox, meet Leah, our newest waitress."

"Not the usual type we hire," Knox comments casually as he glances from me to Zeus and back again. "Nice to meet you, Leah," he says with a slow smile, his hypnotic blue eyes rendering me dumb.

I realize then that I'm taking far too long to respond, and quickly thrust out my hand. "Nice to meet you, too, Knox."

He takes my hand and places a kiss on the back of it. I almost yelp in surprise and pull it back, scalded, although the last thing I want is to move away. Thankfully, that seems to be the right thing to do as Zeus immediately barks out a stern warning.

"Hands off this one Knox or I'll chop your fucking nuts off."

Knox holds his hands up in mock surrender. "Just being polite, Prez," he says cheekily, his eyes glinting with mischief as he looks at me.

"I'm serious, Knox... that's an order," Zeus growls.

"Understood," Knox replies seriously.

Zeus glances at me, he doesn't need to warn me.

I know exactly what he's reminding me of.

My contract states that if I have any intercourse at all before the pregnancy is confirmed, the deal is off, and I don't get a penny.

He doesn't need to worry about that. Even though Knox is drop dead gorgeous and I ended up making out with Axel back at the Sugar Shack that was totally out of character.

I'm here to do a job, not hook up with sexy bikers.

Zeus and Donna continue to introduce me to various members of the club, most of whom are old or otherwise unattractive.

Thank god, I don't think I could manage more than two hotties walking around the place like sex on a stick.

I can feel Knox watching me the whole time.

He's perfectly professional when we return to the bar for him to show me the ropes, so maybe I'm imagining it.

After a few hours, Donna announces that she will show me to my room and leads the way through the back of the building to the small community of houses behind where certain members of the club live. I'll be staying in Zeus and Donna's house with them, no doubt, so they can keep an eye on me.

Their house is homely with more of a woman's touch than I anticipated.

Zeus might be the president of the club, but it's clear who's the boss of their household.

Donna gives me the tour, pointing out the kitchen and living areas first before heading upstairs.

There's a simple nursery already made up in anticipation of the baby they hope I will give them.

The sight makes me feel a little queasy with the weight of their expectation and hope resting solely on my shoulders, and I'm grateful we don't linger.

My room is simple, but to my eyes it's heaven. There's a double bed with a soft quilt and two big fluffy pillows, a bedside table with a lamp, a wardrobe, a dresser, a television, and a small ensuite with a shower.

“It’s nothing fancy...” Donna starts apologetically.

“It’s perfect,” I reply truthfully. After living in my truck, it’s like a palace. “Thank you, for... well, I guess for trusting me with something so important and giving me the opportunity,” I add a little awkwardly.

It’s an unusual situation, but I really do feel a little like they’re my fairy godparents who have arrived at the perfect time in my life and provided me with the lifeline I so desperately needed.

I was one hungry day away from giving in and becoming a working girl.

Not that I have a problem with stripping or prostitution, but it just isn’t for me.

Sex is... complicated—for starters, I don’t have the confidence.

Plus, the thought of my grandfather back home in Nebraska, if he knew how my dreams of stardom had turned out...

I can’t bear to think of how heartbroken he’d be.

He thinks I have a regular slot as a nightclub singer, which was what I always wanted to do.

If he knew I was working the bar he’d want me to return home.

But to do so would feel like the ultimate failure.

Even if I know I’m never going to be a famous singer, or even a paid one.

“No, thank you. After we lost Levi... well, it was a sad time for us,” Donna says,

brushing away the evident pain of their loss. “To be able to have a grandchild, some part of him, it means the world to us. Now, you rest up. If you need anything, let me know. I’ll let you know when dinner’s ready.”

“I can help? Or don’t you want me to work in the bar?” I ask, not wanting to feel useless or unhelpful, I’m unaccustomed to being waited on.

“No, definitely not, the best thing you can do is rest—we wouldn’t want to do anything that might harm the baby,” she replies, acting as if I’m already pregnant.

If anyone had asked me a month ago if I’d be praying I was pregnant, I’d have laughed in their face.

“Okay, thanks, Donna,” I reply as she leaves, giving me a final, grateful smile.

Despite my excitement at no longer having to live out of my truck, I wasn’t sure how I felt about living with them.

I was worried about whether or not they’d be constantly monitoring me, watching for every little mistake I made, concerned for the unborn child inside me.

Right now, I’m feeling grateful. Not only do I have an actual bed to sleep in and a roof over my head, but Donna and Zeus seem like genuinely nice people.

Everyone I’ve met so far seems nice —maybe a little nonconformist—but certainly no different from the people I worked with and served at the Sugar Shack.

The other reason it’s probably for the best that I’m staying right under their noses is that it also well and truly stops me from giving in to any temptation.

I take a cold shower and try to banish the thoughts of my steamy kiss with Axel, and

Knox's piercing blue eyes, mentally undressing me.

How had I gone from swearing off men for life, to finding two I couldn't get out of my mind in only just over a month?

I didn't think the hardest part of this job would be steering clear of sexy bikers.

I shouldn't need a babysitter when my life is literally on the line... perhaps that's what people mean when they say someone is so hot they're to die for?

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Axel

I tried so damn hard to convince Zeus that Leah wasn't the right girl for the job after that initial meeting. I did everything I could to avoid her being the one. Apart from telling him about that kiss...

Not that I can blame him. Whatever it is.

That indescribable thing that some people have, an aura that makes you want to know more, that means you can't look away, no matter how much you should, Leah has it.

And for the past week that she's been staying with my Prez, it's been hard to avoid her but I'm doing my best. Yeah, she definitely has it.

For Zeus, it meant he saw her as the perfect surrogate for his grandchild.

Young, healthy, single, no family, in need of money, no history of drug use or sex work, she ticked all the boxes.

I tried to convince him otherwise, but that 'it-factor' had him hooked.

I suppose he believes that it will bring these children to fruition, that her magic will rub off onto them.

The problem is, Leah's 'it-factor' had a decidedly different impact on me.

I wanted her. Goddamn, I wanted her the moment I laid eyes on her.

I was pissed at myself for wanting her like that, for having such an immediate, visceral reaction to her.

I knew what we were there for, what the Prez was looking for.

I should never have followed her to the restroom, let alone kissed her.

Fuck, that kiss. It's been keeping me up at night. Thoughts of what I wanted to do, and what I still want to do. I have to have her. I would have fucked her right then and there if we weren't interrupted and fuck the consequences.

Afterward, I tried to find other girls, other options. But the more Zeus looked into Leah, the more convinced he became that she was the one.

I told myself that when I saw her again, the spell would have worn off, that she'd be just another girl, but seeing her again, I felt the same. I resolutely ignored her, I did my job, got her to the Diner, and sat as far away as possible.

My next hope was that she'd refuse the offer. With no chance of her carrying Levi's child, the president's grandkid and legacy, she'd be free for me to pursue. To scratch the itch. But of course, she said yes.

I should have owned up to that stupid, reckless kiss when I had the chance. Now she's living at the club, I have to endure seeing her every day and there's not a damn thing I can do about it.

The first day she arrived, she caused quite a stir. It seems I'm not the only one who's drawn in by her. When Rider, Jace, and I got back from our ride, she wasn't there, but Knox was keen to tell us all about her.

"Holy shit guys, you should have been here earlier to meet our new waitress!" he'd

said.

“Is she hot?” Jace asked. He’s the playboy of the group. Jace got every woman he wanted in and out of the club thanks to his all-American good looks.

“She’s not just hot, there’s something about her that’s just—”

I cut it off before they could devolve into some sort of competition over her. “She’s off-limits.”

Knox looked at me sideways. “That’s what the Prez says. What gives? No waitress has ever been off-limits before.”

“Maybe because between you two fucking idiots we get through more waitresses than a damn Taco Bell. You keep fucking and dumping them and they quit. The boss probably wants to keep some staff this time,” I replied, only half lying.

It’s true, they need to cool it with the waitresses.

But also, I’ve been sworn to secrecy by Zeus and his old lady.

They don’t want anyone to know about the baby until it’s the right time.

Probably not for a few months at least. The more people who know about it, the more at risk Leah is from our enemies, who would love to use her and the baby against us.

I trust my brothers with my life, but I made Zeus a promise, and I intend to keep it.

Rider, of course, immediately accepted. Quiet and loyal, Rider will always do as the Prez commands.

He also isn't as much of a ladies' man, not that we don't occasionally get him to join in the fun.

Knox did too, citing that he was just kidding and he wouldn't go against the Prez's wishes, as did Jace.

That gave me little confidence since Jace hadn't met her yet, and I know what he's like when he meets a woman he wants; nothing gets in his way.

Thankfully, in the week she's been here, me and Zeus have been coming up with creative excuses to keep us out during the day shift when she's working.

By the time we get back, she's already been ushered off home.

It seems that Zeus isn't taking any chances with having her anywhere near a bunch of horny bikers until he knows that the IVF has been a success.

The day crowd is mostly old or married men, but at night, the place becomes a den of sin.

I wonder if he's cursing himself for not hiring an ugly surrogate.

Some chick who's already had several kids and won't mind popping out one more for a bit of cash.

He's hinted that Leah reminds him of April.

I'm not sure I see it, but then I never wanted to fuck my buddy's wife, so maybe I'm blinded by that.

Today, it seems our luck has run out. As we return to the bar from a long, hard day of

debt collection, we're all ready for a drink, to let loose and have some fun.

I see her immediately as we walk into the crowded bar.

She's wearing a pair of denim cutoffs and the club's tee, the logo stretched tight across her chest, highlighting her ample assets.

I don't need to wonder why she's still working.

Zeus and Donna are out of town for the night, and one of the usual night waitresses hasn't turned up.

I'm not the only one who's spotted her. Knox immediately strolls over to her section, grunting at a prospect to, "Move over or fuck off". He immediately scoots over, seemingly in awe that we've deigned to sit with him.

Knox waves at Leah, signaling her over.

"Hey guys, what can I get for you?" Leah asks, keeping things professional and seemingly trying to ignore my presence entirely.

Fine. That suits me.

"A round of shots and a couple of pitchers of beer. Unless you need me to come save you and help behind the bar?" Knox asks, somehow making an innocent offer of help sound sexual.

"No, thanks, we'll manage," Leah replies, darting off before we can say any more to her.

"Fucking hell, is that the new waitress you were on about?" Jace asks, ogling Leah.

“Yep,” Knox says with a grin.

Even Rider seems impressed by her, his focus honed in as his gray eyes trace the contours of her ass, as if trying to commit her to memory.

I can handle my best friends, my club brothers, looking at Leah like this. I have no claim to her other than the strangely territorial need I feel for her, and we’ve shared before. But when the prospect glances over and tries to join in, my possessive side comes out.

“I’d fuck her,” he casually tosses in, trying to be part of the group.

“You so much as look at her the wrong way, and I’ll pull your eyeballs out of their sockets and feed them to the dogs,” I snarl. “Prez says she’s off-limits.”

The prospect squeaks an apology that I ignore, and I’m vaguely aware of him mumbling something about seeing someone he knows across the bar before he all but runs away.

“Way to scare off the newbie,” Knox chuckles.

“A bit of an overkill, but effective,” Rider says, his voice low and soft, but his attention never leaving Leah.

When Jace doesn’t chip in with a witty comment and continues to watch Leah with curiosity, I know we’re screwed. All three of my best friends seem as inexplicably intoxicated by the one woman we can’t have and barely know.

Usually, when there’s a woman I’m particularly attracted to, that attraction wears off after we’ve fucked a few times. Considering that’s not an option, I’m torn between trying to avoid her entirely, or getting to know her in the hopes that the shine will

wear off once she's no longer an enigma.

When I think of that kiss, I know I should get up right now and walk away. It's just one night that she'll be here, I can avoid her. I have to.

But I stay.

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Leah

Oh, good grief, there are two more of them...

I felt their presence before I saw them. It was like the air in the room shifted. I felt hot as their eyes were on me, the hairs on the back of my neck standing to attention.

When I finally dare to look, I see Axel and Knox, more devastatingly gorgeous than I recalled.

They aren't alone. With them are two other men, the polar opposites of each other.

The only similarity is that they both have tattoos.

One is blond with the all-American good looks of a football team captain.

With a cocksure grin and swaggering walk, he's a man who is well aware of his attractiveness.

The other is lean and sinewy as opposed to the broad bulk of the blond.

With a crooked nose from being broken one too many times and a large, angry scar that runs down the length of his face, he's by no means conventionally attractive, yet there's a dangerous, captivating energy that draws you in.

I manage to stumble my way through taking their order, aware of their intense focus on me —apart from Axel, that is, who seems determined to ignore me entirely.

I try to tell myself that it doesn't bother me, but even so, I subtly try to draw his attention, standing just a little straighter, my eyes subconsciously flicking over to him.

Knox teases me as he orders, I get the impression I'll never know what's about to come out of his mouth, perhaps he isn't even sure half the time.

When I return with their drinks, I notice that the prospect has scurried away.

It's clear from the body language and the jealous looks of the other patrons in the bar that these four men are big deals in the Steel Vipers.

In the week I've been here I still haven't quite gotten my head around the hierarchy.

"Here we go, guys. Can I offer you anything to eat?" I say with a forced jovial voice that sounds alien to me.

"Are you on the menu?" the blond jokes, biting his lip and slowly smiling in a way that makes me want to smack the grin off his face while also tearing off his shirt.

"Why, so you can spend five minutes eating before you decide you're too full?" I snap back. "Guys like you talk a good game, but in my experience, the jock types are only out for their own satisfaction and rarely even know where a woman's clit is."

"Trust me, I know where it is," he retorts with the confidence of a man who knows he can prove it.

He might be hot, but I know his type, too cocky for his own good. All bark and no bite.

"Sure you do, cowboy," I reply sarcastically.

Knox laughs delightedly, enjoying the unpredictability.

There's a tense moment where I wonder if I've gone too far and the man is going to get angry. But then he, too, laughs.

"You're funny. I'm Jace," he says, holding out his hand.

"Leah," I reply, shaking it, ignoring how strong and masculine his hands are. I turn my attention to the scarred man. "I don't think we've met yet," I say, extending my hand to him.

He looks surprised to be addressed as if he's usually overlooked in favor of his friends. His gray eyes fix on mine, and I don't even notice anything else. His eyes are like a window to his tortured yet kind soul.

"People call me Rider," he replies, his voice low and so soft I have to strain to hear him.

His fingers are long and slim, the delicate hands of a pianist or painter. It's unexpected, a softness to a man who is otherwise all sharp edges.

"It's nice to meet you, Rider," I reply genuinely, holding his gaze for a moment and giving him a warm smile.

"Well, if there's nothing else I can get you guys, I've got to get back to work," I add.

"Do a shot with us!" Knox demands, jumping up to stand next to me.

He's close enough that I can smell the grease from his bike and the sweet, salty scent of his skin. I have the random urge to lick the exposed spot on his neck where there's no tattoo.

What the hell has gotten into me? Is this pregnancy hormones?

He'd probably delight in the strangeness of such an act, his impulsivity is infectious. I shake that thought away and try and pull myself together. "Uh, no, thanks... I don't drink," I lie, daring to look over at Axel, wondering if he'll help me out here without giving away the real reason I can't.

His eyes slide past me as he notices me looking. Fine. If he wants to pretend nothing happened between us and ignore me, that's on him, I think, feeling wounded nevertheless.

"Come on, you not gonna join us?" Jace teases, leaning back in his chair with his arms and legs spread wide.

I get a glimpse of a large bulge in his jeans, and I immediately look away, my cheeks burning.

I can tell if I give in on this, it's a slippery slope.

I need to keep my distance from these men.

Especially Axel. I don't know what it is about him that keeps pulling me in.

I'm not usually the type to get obsessed over a guy after one encounter.

Not that I'm particularly experienced in that department.

"Not when I'm working," I retort with a roll of my eyes. "Have fun, gentlemen," I say as I pick up my tray and sashay away.

I spend the rest of the night trying my hardest to avoid looking over in their direction.

Only allowing the occasional glimpse to see if they need more drinks and taking them over when they do.

Luckily, it's busy, so I don't have to pretend I'm making excuses not to talk and to get away from their table as quickly as possible.

Throughout the evening, I see several women, who I'm told bikers refer to as club bunnies, come up to the guys.

I try to ignore the irrational green-eyed monster that flares up at the sight of one of them fawning over Axel.

Axel ignores her and grunts in her general direction until she gives up and leaves.

That gives me some satisfaction, at least it's not just me he's being an ass toward.

The women ignore Rider, and he doesn't seem to mind.

Knox and Jace enjoy the attention, flirting back and allowing the girls to sit on their laps.

I remind myself that I don't know these guys, I have no claim to them, nor can anything happen between us.

As the night gets rowdier, a couple of the drunker, more brazen club girls decide to initiate a game of strip poker.

I try not to ogle as Knox removes his first item of clothing.

He goes for the thing you'd least expect someone to remove first—his pants.

He puts his boots back on, leaving him in his boots, t-shirt, vest, and a pair of tight underpants that show off his impressively large bulge.

As I'd guessed, his legs are also works of art adorned with ink.

He catches me looking and flashes me a grin.

“Careful with those four, a nice girl like you—I doubt you could handle them all, and they're known to share,” another waitress tells me when she notices me watching as we bus tables.

“What do you mean, share?”

She giggles, “See, you're too sweet and innocent for this place. If you're lucky enough that they don't find any other girls up for the fun, then, well... you know. All four of them... just one of you...”

My mouth drops open, and I can't help but look back at them.

Even as I tell her I'm not interested in being with any men, I can't stop myself from wondering what it would be like.

It's rare I'm attracted to a man, let alone four at the same time.

The thought never occurred to me that I could be with four men at once.

The idea seems delightfully taboo and undeniably hot. Even if it is only a naughty fantasy.

They're totally forbidden; it's never going to happen, but a girl can dream...

I'm closing the bar. There's no one left except for the group still playing strip poker.

I ignore their laughter, the women's giggles, high-pitched and irritating, and focus on my job.

I head into the back area to lock up the storeroom.

As I return, I don't see the others, they must have taken the party home.

With a sigh, I continue to tidy up behind the bar.

A noise behind me startles me, and I whirl around to find Axel standing right behind me, watching me with naked desire in his eyes. He's shirtless, and his long hair is loose. He looks like a Viking ready to go to battle.

"Jesus, you made me jump!"

"Do I scare you?" he asks, circling closer to me, so close my skin tingles as if he's physically touching me.

"A little," I admit. I don't say it's my attraction toward him that scares me the most.

"You didn't go home with the club bunnies?"

"We told them to leave," he purrs.

"Why?" I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

"I can't stop thinking about that kiss. It's been driving me wild ever since," he says, lazily stroking my hair back off my face.

My breath hitches, and I look up at him, willing him to kiss me again. “Me too,” I reply huskily.

It’s all it takes for him to kiss me again, even more passionately than before. He trails scalding kisses down my neck, and I moan in anticipation. I lose myself in the kiss as he lifts me and wraps my legs around his waist.

When we finally come up for air, I’m panting and hungry with desire, and it takes me a moment to realize that the others are there.

I yelp in surprise, my cheeks flushing with embarrassment at being caught as I spring to my feet and put some distance between us.

But the others don’t seem phased. If anything, they seem as if this is exactly what they were expecting to find, and they like it.

“What are you guys... uh, you came back?” I offer lamely.

Knox comes over, he’s still just in his open vest, boots, and underwear. It would look ridiculous on anyone else, but he looks like a goddamn stripper.

“We never left,” he replies.

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Rider and Jace circle closer, and the four men close in on me as I stand rooted to the spot.

Jace's athlete's body looks exactly as I'd imagined.

The few tattoos he has highlight his broad shoulders.

Rider is still fully dressed, a fact that somehow renders me more intrigued.

He watches me intensely with those gray eyes, and I feel as if he's seeing everything. I let him in.

"Why?" I ask, nervous excitement rippling through me.

"We want you," Jace states, coming closer.

"All of you?" I ask incredulously, looking to Axel for confirmation.

"I'm happy to share if you are," he confirms, his voice thick with desire, and I can see from the bulge in his pants how happy he is at the thought.

"I want to, but... We shouldn't..." I start, but my words are silenced as Axel steals my lips, kissing me as hungrily as the first time.

My resolve disappears as I lose myself to them.

I'm under their spell, helpless to resist. I feel hands all over my body, removing layer

by layer of my clothing until I'm bared to them.

They take turns kissing my lips, my neck, and my breasts, taking my aching, hard nipples in their mouths and teasing them with their tongue.

I'm lifted onto a table and laid down like an offering as they explore every inch of my body.

I lose track of who's doing what. I just focus on the sensations of their skin on mine, their tongues finding my sweet spots and making me moan.

Deft fingers move inside my wet and ready pussy, opening me like a flower.

Greedy tongues lash at my clit driving me closer and closer to the edge as they continually change positions and tempo to drive me insane.

The orgasm ripples through me deep and sensuous, and they're not even naked yet.

"I need more."

I don't even realize I've said the words out loud. Perhaps it wasn't even me. Like a well-choreographed dance, we move as one. We all need more.

Axel is the first to enter me. He fucks with the same animalistic, raw energy as he kisses, driving inside of me hard and fast, making me cry out like a wild woman.

I suck Jace and Knox's cocks while he fucks me, alternating between the two, enjoying the taste of the salty precum and how hard I make them.

Rider watches me, an aloof enigma. I come undone under his gaze.

They each take turns fucking me, each cock filling me a little more each time and making me cum without relenting. They cry out my name as they cum too, it sounds right on their lips.

We're spent and sweaty. My pussy is swollen and pulsing with pleasure as the aftershocks still ripple through me. But I'm not done yet.

"Rider," I beckon. "Please."

For a second, I worry he won't, but then he removes his clothes and comes to me.

I wrap my legs around his waist, pulling him near.

He kisses me softly, handling me as if I'm made of glass.

His gentle touch is the perfect balance to the hard, fast fucking.

Rider takes his time as he gently kisses my sensitive nipples, sparking new sensations.

He pushes inside me slowly, filling me up inch by inch until there's no space left between us.

He holds himself there, not moving, watching me as I writhe underneath him, desperate for release.

I beg, and he finally starts to thrust in and out, agonizingly slowly so I can feel everything.

It's a whole new kind of climax that I can feel growing inside of me.

As we both reach the edge, the others come over. Knox kisses me while Axel's strong expert hands tease my clit and Jace plays with my swollen breasts. With all of them pleasuring me at once, I reach the biggest, most satisfying orgasm of the night. No, in my life.

"Earth to Leah!" a voice drags me from my fantasy.

"Huh?" I say dazedly, as I'm dragged kicking and screaming back to reality.

"You seemed lost in your own little world there for a sec, Hon," she giggles.

"Oh, yeah," I laugh, embarrassed.

I look up and see Rider looking at me. I swear he knows exactly what I was just thinking, and my cheeks flush crimson.

"Why don't you finish up for the night? You've been working all day, we can handle the rest of the night," she offers.

"Thanks," I reply appreciatively.

I race out as quickly as I can, wanting to get back to the safety of my room.

I shouldn't be thinking about anyone like this right now, much less four of the Steel Vipers!

I've got a job to do, one that doesn't involve fantasizing over men I can never have.

I'm kidding myself if I think they'd even want me, too.

They have beautiful women falling all over them.

Why on earth would they want someone like me?

If the IVF was successful, I'm pregnant, and once I start showing they're sure as hell not going to want me then.

They're obviously just flirts, or teasing the new girl, and I'm falling for it.

Sure, they're all hot, but I don't even know them.

From my first impression, Jace is the kind of cocky douchebag I should avoid like the plague, Rider barely spoke to me, and Knox is a wild card and obviously a playboy.

I can't deny that there's a magnetic attraction I feel toward Axel—our kiss wouldn't have happened otherwise, but he has made it perfectly clear that he thinks it was a mistake. He's disgusted by it.

I need to remember that the idea of being with them is just a fantasy, it will never happen, and can never happen.

I'm crazy for even thinking about it, aren't I?

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Leah

The day has finally come when we'll find out if the implantation was successful. If not, we're out of tries and I'm shit out of luck.

In the two weeks I've been working at the clubhouse, I've grown fond of the Steel Vipers, who have welcomed me with open arms. Although I still largely try to avoid Axel, Knox, Jace, and Rider, and they avoid me, we inevitably cross paths.

We've all been on our best behavior. Knox and Jace flirt outrageously, but I think that's just their way.

Axel still more or less ignores me, and Rider and I haven't spoken more than a few words.

The conversations that we've had have been generally friendly and interesting.

If there weren't such blatant sexual chemistry between us all, I would say that we could become good friends.

Of course, the sexual tension could be entirely one-sided.

They might think I'm some sad, horny girl with a pathetic crush.

I try not to listen to that self-judgmental voice too much these days.

Either way, things have been going well.

I don't want to leave, even if I had someplace else to go; I like it here.

We're currently at the doctor's office, where they've taken my blood to see if I'm pregnant. The wait is agonizing.

Zeus and Donna cling to each other, their love so evident that I feel like an intruder watching, and I look away.

They so desperately want this baby. They're good people who have been nothing but kind to me.

I hope I can give them the child they are yearning for, to help bring back a piece of the son they lost too soon.

"Will you tell me about him, your son? And his wife." I ask, trying to distract us all and genuinely curious about the people whose child I might be carrying.

Zeus smiles, the expression softening his rugged face.

"He was one of a kind, our boy. Strong, smart. He did well in school and was great at sports. He was no pushover; he always stood up for what he thought was right and didn't let the big kids pick on the little ones.

When he was seventeen, he enlisted in the army.

Served two tours. He won medals for his bravery and for saving his squad's lives.

He lost a leg saving a little boy's life, a civilian. "

"He sounds like a true hero," I reply.

“He was,” Donna says proudly, tears in her eyes.

“I can’t imagine how hard things must have been for him, losing a leg.”

Zeus shakes his head reverently. “Nothing stopped Levi, he kept right on living life to the fullest. It didn’t even stop him from riding his bike.”

“Nothing would have,” Donna adds. “April used to kid that the only thing that boy loved more than her was his motorcycle.”

“What was April like?” I ask, curious as to the woman who won this man’s heart.

“She and Levi were two peas in a pod. They met in high school, and I think it was love at first sight. Levi was a good-looking young man. All of the girls wanted to date him, but he only had eyes for April. They were childhood sweethearts, married when they were both nineteen after he returned from his first tour. He said he was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen,” Donna relays, her eyes misty as she loses herself in her memories.

“They desperately wanted to start a family and had been trying for years without luck. They’d just started creating the embryos for IVF when they had their accident.”

“I’m so sorry for your loss,” I reply, offering the empty platitude we all say when we don’t know what else to say. “They sound like wonderful people.”

“Thank you, honey,” Donna replies softly, her voice sad, and I wonder if I shouldn’t have brought them up at all.

I allow her and Zeus a moment of privacy as they hold each other close, heads bowed as if in prayer.

The door opens, and we all look up with bated breath.

“Good news. The IVF implantation was successful,” the doctor announces.

“You mean...” Donna starts, not allowing herself to voice her deepest hope aloud.

“We’re having a baby,” Zeus says, pulling his wife into a bear hug as they shed tears of joy.

“Yes. The blood work confirms it. Leah is pregnant.”

I zone out as they start to discuss the next steps.

When we can have the first ultrasound, how frequently we need to come for checkups, and how best to ensure a smooth, healthy pregnancy.

I know I should listen—it’s my body, after all, but I’m doing this for someone else, so I’ll just go with the flow. I’m just so thrown by the words.

Leah is pregnant.

I’m pregnant.

But they’re not my babies. They never will be. I’m just the vessel.

The magnitude of the situation fully sinks in. I know I wanted to do this, want to do this. But I didn’t really ever consider if it was something I could do.

There are so many things that could go wrong. I know women have been giving birth for as long as humanity has existed. But that doesn’t make knowing that you’re solely responsible for another life growing inside you any less daunting.

I'll have to care for this baby, let it use my body as an incubator for nine months, then go through hours of agonizing pain as they're torn from me, only to have to give them up.

It's only been two weeks, but I'm already feeling like I'm part of the family at the Steel Vipers.

Once I've outlived my usefulness, will I be discarded like trash?

They said I'd get lifelong Steel Vipers protection, but Donna and Zeus might not want me hanging around, I'd be a reminder of the fact that their daughter-in-law wasn't the one who gave birth.

Perhaps they won't want the baby to know me.

It already has a mom. Will I lose everything and be all alone again and at the mercy of my ex?

I try to hide these swirling thoughts as Donna and Zeus embrace me, thanking me. I try to share in their joy and summon some of their excitement.

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Leah

As with our previous visits to the fertility clinic, Axel is waiting outside in the hallway for us.

He takes one look at Zeus and Donna's faces, and his permanent scowl breaks into a smile that lights him from within.

Perhaps he broods so much because when he smiles, people can see he's more god than man.

"It's good news?" he asks them.

"The best, Levi's gonna finally have his baby," Zeus says, clapping Axel on the back.

"I'm so happy for you both," Axel replies warmly, squeezing Zeus' arm and hugging Donna.

"Thanks, son," Zeus replies.

I feel awkward watching the exchange as if I shouldn't be there.

"Guess you'll be stuck with us for a while then, Leah," Axel says, finally acknowledging my presence. He doesn't sound too happy about the fact.

I try not to feel too hurt by his indifference.

We shared one kiss that clearly meant more to me than it does to him, and now I'm carrying a baby, so why on earth would he want to get involved with me romantically?

I need to get over this schoolgirl crush and start focusing on the job I've committed to.

I'm about to come up with some sort of witty retort when he earnestly adds, "Thank you. It means a lot to all of us that you're doing this for Donna and Zeus."

I nod in reply, unsure how to respond. I find myself looking into the green pools of his eyes, searching for something; I don't know what. Unsurprisingly, he's the first to look away.

He clears his throat. "Shall we?" he says to the room, gesturing to the exit.

As we leave the clinic, we notice that Rider and two other guys I recognize from the club have arrived on their bikes.

The car that drove me here is nowhere to be seen.

I'd argued that I could drive my truck, but Zeus was having none of it.

"If you're carrying my grandbaby, there's no way I'm letting you drive that rust bucket, I'd sooner have you on the back of Axel's bike.

Either we drive you in one of our cars, or he takes you," he'd insisted.

I'd chosen the car. I'm not sure I could handle being pressed against Axel's muscular back with my arms wrapped around his waist without having all kinds of thoughts I shouldn't.

“What’s going on? Why are you boys here?” Zeus asks now.

“Sorry, Prez, Buzz told us where to find you. We got wind that there’s going to be an attack at one of our places today from the Hellhounds. We came to get you so we can go handle it before they can strike. Jace is gathering our men now,” Rider explains.

“Alright, Donna rides with me, Leah with Axel. Let’s get the women home safely as fast as we can, and we can move out,” Zeus responds.

Everyone springs into action. I want to protest that I don’t want to go on Axel’s bike, that I’ve never been on one and that shouldn’t I be in a car now we know I’m pregnant, but there’s a clear urgency that tells me they’ve been anticipating this, and my words would fall on deaf ears.

Axel tosses me a helmet, and I reluctantly climb onto the back of his bike. I try to keep as much distance between our bodies as I can, not touching him.

With a sigh, he asks, “Leah, have you ever been on the back of one of these before?”

“No,” I admit.

“Well then, hold on tight,” he grunts, grabbing my hands and forcing me to wrap them around his waist.

The protest dies on my lips as he kicks the bike into gear, and all of a sudden, we’re flying.

All I feel is sheer exhilaration as we race along.

The wind whips at us, making me snuggle closer to Axel—something I enjoy far more than I care to admit.

I can see now why they all love riding so much.

Unadulterated joy washes over me as I enjoy the experience.

With Axel's confident, expert riding, there's no room for me to feel afraid.

That changes the moment the other bikes pull up alongside us.

"Shit," Axel mutters over the noise of the engines.

They're a rival club. The insignia on their jacket says 'Hellhounds'. From Axel's tense body and their aggressive riding, I know this isn't a coincidence.

In the distance, I can see more bikes approaching us. We're outnumbered. There's no one else around, and the Hellhounds are hot on our heels. With the rest coming in the other direction, we can't outrun them. We're trapped.

"It's an ambush!" Axel shouts in warning.

"Leave us. Get Leah to safety!" Zeus yells in command.

Axel hesitates only for a moment before peeling off the road, taking a sharp turn off the highway down a small side road.

He's going so fast that I worry we might crash or that my knees will scrape the floor.

The trees grow denser, the road more deserted.

I turn around to check that the others are following and see only Rider's bike behind us.

“Shit,” Alex curses as he notices the same thing in his mirrors.

It takes me a few moments to realize that we’re not being followed by the Hellhounds either. The relief I feel is quickly outweighed by the grim knowledge that if they aren’t following us, there’s more of them for Zeus and the others to deal with.

That’s when the gunfire starts. I can hear it in the distance, and I’m not foolish enough to hope it is just some hunters. The Hellhounds have launched their attack.

“Oh my god, Axel, we have to go back! We have to help them!” I shout.

But Axel doesn’t stop, he speeds up. Away from the danger. Away from our friends. He’s following orders.

“Axel! What are you doing? We have to go back!”

“No,” Axel replies, his voice brokering no argument.

After a while, we start seeing other cars as we head into more populated areas. People are going about their business as if nothing has happened, which to them, of course, it hasn’t. Axel slows his speed, and Rider pulls up alongside us.

“Let’s go to Sal’s,” Axel calls to him.

Rider gives him the thumbs up in response.

Sal turns out to be a mechanic. A red-cheeked man with a strong Jersey accent. He greets us warmly and happily agrees for us to use his office, handing over lukewarm coffee in chipped novelty mugs before leaving to resume his work.

“What are we—” I start to ask, but I’m cut off by Axel.

“Rider, call Knox,” he orders as he pulls out his phone and makes a call to Jace.

The pair relay what happened during their brief calls. From what I can tell, the plan is for them to go with some of our men to help the others while making sure the club is left secure in case of an attack there.

“What do we do now?” I ask.

“We wait,” Rider replies.

“Shouldn’t we do something to help?” I say, feeling helpless and not knowing exactly what it is we should do.

Axel shoots me a glare, one that says he would be doing something to help if it weren’t for me. That he doesn’t like being here, not knowing if his friends are okay, any more than I do.

“No. Zeus ordered us to protect you. Right now, that means we sit here and wait for the others to update us.”

“Do you think they’re okay?” I ask, my voice small.

“Zeus has survived worse,” Axel offers, a speck of hope that I cling to like a life raft.

“Maybe they managed to get away,” I add.

Axel doesn’t reply, and we fall into an uneasy silence. Unconsciously, my hand moves to my stomach as I worry about the fate of the baby inside me. Before they’ve even been born, they have already lost both parents.

Surely fate can’t be cruel enough to take away their grandparents, too?

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Knox

We're too late.

The Hellhounds are long gone by the time we arrive, taking our guys' bikes with them. It's the ultimate fuck you, to kill a man and take his prized possession.

The bodies of my friends—my family—have been discarded on the side of the road like trash.

A choked, strangled sound escapes my lips as I see Zeus and Donna.

I run over to them and drop to my knees.

It's clear that Zeus is dead, his body is riddled with bullets, his eyes wide and unseeing.

Donna is underneath him, I don't doubt that Zeus died trying to protect her, using his body as a shield.

Donna's eyes are closed, and I can see that she's been hit somewhere near her neck. I take her wrist in mine, feeling for a pulse; it's faint but there. My heart swells with hope as I call 911.

I pull Zeus' dead weight off of her, laying him down carefully as I free Donna's limp, unconscious body, trying not to dwell on how much blood there is.

“It’s okay, Donna,” help is coming, “You’re gonna be okay,” I say, attempting to reassure myself as much as her.

I carefully check her body for wounds, trying to assess the extent of the damage. My time in the army tells me it’s bad. That she’s already lost too much blood. I’m vaguely aware of Jace pulling up and assessing the damage, but my focus is on Donna.

“You can’t die, I won’t let you,” I mutter.

I begin chest compressions, willing her to stay alive. I keep going, even when her heart stops beating and the faint, fluttering pulse is gone.

“Knox... she’s gone... we gotta go, the cops are coming,” Jace says gently, bringing me back to the world.

It’s only then that I hear the sirens. I notice my face is wet with tears. Only then do I realize that he’s right. Donna’s dead.

I numbly follow his lead, allowing him to pull me away from the man and woman I view as parents.

The people who raised me when mine were incapable.

If the cops find us here, there will be questions.

We shouldn’t be here. We need to protect the club and retaliate, something we can’t do if we’re stuck in interviews.

The police will come, there’s no doubt about it, but this buys us time and, more importantly, deniability.

We don't bother to speak to Sal, who's busy working when we arrive, heading straight for the office.

Rider is standing in one corner, his eyes on the door, poised and ready for danger as usual.

Leah sits on a threadbare chair, wringing her hands nervously while Axel prowls back and forth.

Axel pauses his pacing as we enter, their eyes all fixed on us.

Relief and concern mingle in their expressions as they ask us silently what no one dares say aloud. The words get caught in my throat.

"They're all dead," Jace says.

His blunt, emotionless words make it real.

Axel and Rider take the news stoically. Neither seems surprised. Leah's eyes open wide in shock, and her hands fly up to her face as she lets out a choked gasp.

"Why the fuck did you leave them to fend for themselves?" I demand, squaring up to Axel.

He stares back at me defiantly. "Zeus ordered us to get Leah out of there safely. We were outnumbered, if we'd stayed..."

He doesn't need to finish his sentence. We both know they could likely have ended up on the side of the road with the rest of our friends. But grief has made me angry. I

need someone to blame.

“You’re two of our best fighters. You could have saved them,” I insist. “The brothers I fought with would never have abandoned another soldier.”

Axel winces at the sting of my words. He’s not one to run from a fight or abandon his friends.

Rider doesn’t give anything away, he’s retreated to himself.

His face is a blank slate. Remaining stoic is his automatic protective stance.

A survival mechanism he learned the hard way.

I know this. But it doesn’t stop me from lashing out.

“Don’t you fucking care? Our friends are dead. Our President is dead. Donna is dead!” I yell, getting in his face.

“You know I do,” he replies calmly.

“Knox...” Jace interjects. A warning, perhaps, that I shouldn’t blame them. I ignore him.

“You cowards left them to die!” I scream, twisting around to face Axel again. I can see that my words are hurting him, but I want to lash out, for others to feel the same pain I do.

“Do you think we wanted to leave them?” Axel snarls. “We had no choice.”

“Oh, yeah, because you had to save Leah,” I reply sarcastically, finally looking at her.

“What’s so fucking special about this chick that you’ll abandon your friends and Prez to die? Cos she’s hot and you wanna stick your dick in her?”

“It was an order, Knox,” Rider explains again calmly.

“So you fucking ignore it!” I snap.

I turn my attention to Leah, who shrinks under my furious gaze.

Normally, I’d feel bad for scaring her. I’ve grown fond of Leah, not just because she’s easy on the eye and is forbidden, I’m dying to break the rules with, but also because she seems like a genuinely nice woman.

The kind of person I could picture being my old lady, if I ever wanted to settle down, that is.

But right now, I don’t care if I upset her.

In my grief, all I can see is that she’s the reason the last of my family is dead.

“What’s so fucking special about you that you get to live and they had to die?” I snarl.

“Nothing,” she replies, her voice a frightened whisper. Tears fall down her face. She’s so beautiful and vulnerable that I have to look away.

“Knox, that’s enough,” Jace says softly.

“No. It’s not. I need answers!”

“She’s pregnant, Knox,” Axel says quietly.

That knocks some of the wind out of my sails. It makes sense now why she moved in and why Axel said she was off-limits. Clearly, he wants to do right by the kid, and there's definitely something between them that he seems to be trying to work out.

"She's carrying your child. Why didn't you just tell us, Axel?"

I can't read Axel's expression as he takes in my words.

"Knox. It's not my child. Leah is a surrogate for Zeus and Donna. She's carrying Levi and April's baby."

His words sink in, and I look over at Leah, who doesn't seem to realize she's placed a protective hand on her stomach.

"How's that even possible? Levi and April have been dead for months," I say with a disbelieving shake of my head.

As Axel explains the whole story, how they had frozen embryos and went in search of the perfect surrogate, all of my anger is knocked out of me, leaving me confused and remorseful. I know that Zeus and Donna would gladly have died to save their unborn grandchild.

I also feel an overwhelming sense of hurt and confusion that I'm only finding this out now.

"Why didn't they tell me?" I ask. A rejected and lonely boy again.

"They didn't want to get your hopes up until they knew for sure that Leah was pregnant."

They knew that this baby would mean more to you than anyone else, maybe even

them.

You were their son, Levi's adopted brother.

They wanted to bring back a piece of what was taken from you all," Axel explains gently.

"And now this baby's lost all of its family..."

"You, of all people, should know family isn't just blood relatives. Zeus and Donna treated you as their own for your whole life, even before making it official and adopting you. We're your brothers, your family, too," Jace replies.

"And we'll be this baby's family," Axel insists.

I look over at Leah, who's evidently in shock.

It's clear that the fact of the surrogate parents being gone and the question of who will now care for the child is only just dawning on her.

Like it or not, Leah is part of this family now.

There's no way that I won't be a part of this child's life.

I'm not letting her out of my sight until the baby is born.

After that, she can decide if she wants to stay or go, but the baby won't be going with her if I have any say in it.

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Leah

They're dead. Zeus and Donna are dead.

I can't believe it. I didn't want to think it before, had hoped there'd be some last-minute reprieve, and they'd escape. But they didn't, and it's all my fault.

Knox is right, if we hadn't run to protect me, they could still be here. His words hit me like a blow. His anger and derision toward me transported me back to memories I'd sooner forget. When you hear you're not special or important enough times you start to believe it.

Now I'm pregnant and the people who so desperately wanted this baby, its real family, the people who were meant to love and raise it, are gone.

How the hell am I meant to go through this without them?

I can't look after a child. How am I meant to provide it with a home, stability, and safety when I have none of these myself?

I zone out as the men reassure me that the original deal I made still stands and that I'll get the money and security I desire. They're keen to assure me that I don't have to be a part of the baby's life, just as before.

But what if I don't want that?

The guys are declaring they'll be the child's family, but are four single guys really

going to want a screaming baby when it arrives? Are they going to do what it takes? And what happens to me then? Sure, I'll be looked after while I'm pregnant, but the moment the baby arrives, what then?

The thought of giving up this child to their loving grandparents, who desperately wanted them, was one thing, but this? I don't know if I can do it.

How can I expect this to work as a family unit to co-parent and raise a child?

We barely know each other, and for the most part, it seems like the guys don't even like me.

Axel mostly ignores me, Knox has made it perfectly clear he blames me for the death of his adoptive parents—a fact I didn't even know until now—Rider barely speaks at all, and Jace is...

well, Jace is Jace, it's hard to tell if he likes anyone, other than himself that is.

"I need a minute," I say, getting up and leaving to find a bathroom.

I feel sick.

Knox opens his mouth to say something, but Axel silences him with a firm hand against his chest as if holding him back from following me.

Within the privacy of the bathroom, I sob.

I cry for Zeus and Donna, for the baby inside of me that will never get to meet them, and I cry for myself.

Perhaps I was naive to think that this was the answer to my prayers, that this crazy

plan would keep me safe from my ex while giving me a home and some money to start a new life.

All I've done is make things even more complicated and drag an innocent soul into this mess.

The baby inside my womb has barely even formed. If this were a natural birth, I probably wouldn't even know of the baby's existence yet. Yet already I feel connected to it, responsible for the life forming inside me.

There's a knock at the door, and Axel's voice floats through. "Can I come in?"

I'm tempted to shout and tell him to go away like a pissy teenager, but instead, I get up and unlock the door.

Axel stands there awkwardly for a moment, unsure of what to say. He clears his throat. "Sorry... for what Knox said. He was just upset, he didn't mean it."

"If that were true, wouldn't he be the one here apologizing right now?" I point out.

"Give him time. He's just lost his parents, he needs someone to blame.

He'll come around eventually. Then, you'll be desperate to get rid of him, this baby...

well, it means a lot to him, to all of us," Axel says with a soft smile.

It's strange but not unwelcome to have this gentler side of him directed at me.

"I didn't know that Donna and Zeus were his parents. When did they adopt him?"

“That’s for Knox to share. But suffice it to say, his biological parents were pretty bad, and he spent a lot of time around Levi’s house. When he was older, Donna and Zeus officially adopted him.” Axel replies evasively.

“Poor Knox. For a child to grow up like that without a loving home...” My voice trails off as I think about the future of the unborn child inside me.

“I’m not sure what’s worse, having terrible parents or never knowing the great ones you should have had...”

This poor baby will never know the grandparents who fought so hard for them,” I say sadly.

“Knox had loving parents, they just weren’t his biological ones. This baby will, too,” Axel insists.

When I don’t respond immediately, Axel looks stricken by a thought that just occurs to him. “You’re not gonna back out of the contract, are you? As we said, the terms can still stay the same... You have to have the baby, please,” he pleads.

I’m thrown off by his passion and concern for this unborn child.

“Of course. Of course, I’ll still have the baby. I just... I guess I’m just worried about the future, what happens after the birth. How can we make this work?”

“We’ve got plenty of time to worry about that. What matters now is that you and the baby are safe, just as Zeus wanted,” he replies firmly.

“Do you wish he hadn’t ordered you to save me? That you could have stayed and fought?” I ask quietly, hoping he doesn’t, but knowing I wouldn’t blame him if he did. After all, part of me wishes it.

“I wish a lot of things could be different, but that doesn’t change the way they are,” he replies with a sigh.

“Is that why you hate me? Because you regret kissing me? Or do you think I’m doing something wrong? That I shouldn’t have agreed to get pregnant and give up a baby for money?” I blurt out, desperate to know why he’s so aloof with me.

“I shouldn’t have kissed you, it wasn’t fair of me to...” he pauses, searching for the right word. “...complicate things like that for you,” he carefully settles on.

I’m not sure what to say. Part of me would like to tell him that I don’t regret our kiss at all, that I can’t stop thinking about it, but he’s right in saying it complicated matters.

“But I don’t hate you, and I definitely don’t judge you, not even a little. I’m grateful you agreed to help. I’m glad you’re here,” he adds for good measure, an olive branch.

“Thank you, I’m glad I am too,” I reply earnestly.

After a heavy moment, both lost in contemplation, Axel asks, “Are you ready to leave? We need to get back to the club and tell the others. I don’t think the Hellhounds will strike again tonight,” he assures me.

“Why did they do this? Why did they kill them?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. We’re rivals, but nothing like this. This kind of attack is completely unprecedented and out of the blue. Whatever the reason, they’ll pay for it,” he swears darkly, his eyes clouding over.

“Good, I hope they rot in hell for what they’ve done,” I reply with venom.

“Oh, I’ll make sure of it,” Axel replies with a conspiratorial look.

Suddenly, I don’t feel so alone anymore.

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Leah

I t's been decided that we will keep my pregnancy a secret from the rest of the club for the time being.

The guys are concerned that there could be a traitor among their ranks—how else would the Hellhounds have known to ambush us there?

Therefore, lies or evasive answers are given when we're questioned by our own.

In the week since Zeus and Donna were gunned down in cold blood, the atmosphere in the clubhouse has been tense.

Despite the guys spending most of their days hunting down those responsible and waging war with the Hellhounds, we're no closer to finding the people responsible for the murders or why they did it.

The Hellhounds have been lying low, or perhaps they're waiting for the club to collapse without its leader.

There's a definite disconnect within the ranks, a new president will need to be elected soon.

As expected, the police came to interview the club members in the days following the attack.

They're no closer to punishing the perpetrators than we are.

My interview was brief. I played dumb, pretending to be just another waitress.

We all agreed it wouldn't help to admit I was there.

Most of the members are cagy and uncooperative, they'd rather dish out their own vigilante vengeance.

The police seem unsurprised, if not a little frustrated, by the lack of help.

With the evidence gathered and autopsies carried out, we can finally bury our friends at a funeral befitting the president of the Steel Vipers.

The sheer number of bikes in the procession is staggering.

People from all over who knew, and respected Zeus have come out for the funeral.

Not just from the club but from neighboring counties and states.

The funeral itself is a somber affair. The church is packed with mourners.

The only clear difference between this and any other funeral is the attire of the guests.

While they're all wearing black, instead of suits, it's leather jackets and vests with the club emblems emblazoned on.

The Steel Vipers are in their full regalia, members showing off their loyalty to the club with pride.

I'm sitting between Axel and Jace in a pew near the front, with Knox next to us. Rider stands off to one side, surveying the crowd. When I asked why he wasn't sitting with us, Axel simply said, "Rider doesn't like to feel trapped."

Since the day Zeus and Donna died, the guys haven't let me out of their sight, working in constant rotation to keep an eye on me while the others are out working.

For the most part, I've kept busy helping out at the club, so I haven't had much time to speak with any of them beyond superficial small talk.

Knox keeps his distance when it's his turn to babysit me; he no doubt still blames me for Donna and Zeus' deaths.

Knox gets up to address the room, he looks tired with dark circles under his eyes.

He pauses for a moment, composing himself before he speaks.

"Thank you, everyone, for coming. I know Zeus and Donna would be proud to know they'd touched this many lives," he says, clearing his throat. "For those of you who don't know me, I'm Donna and Zeus' adopted son."

He pauses before continuing.

"My biological parents were addicts, we spent most of my early years living between crack dens and the streets, and for me, occasionally, foster care. I knew Donna and Zeus through their son, Levi. Levi and I first met at the park when we were young, around eight or so. For those of you who knew Levi, you know how quickly he made friends, especially with an underdog. He took me under his wing and invited me around for dinner, no doubt noticing how malnourished I was. Believe it or not, I was a scrawny little kid back in the day," he says with a small smile.

"Our playdates became a regular occurrence and Levi's home, a sanctuary, in no small part due to the kindness of Zeus and Donna.

When Zeus and Donna realized how bad my home life was, I more or less

permanently moved in with them.

My parents didn't seem to know or care where I was.

They tried to clean up their act when I was a teen and forced me to come home; it turned out that it was just that they wanted me to help them score and provide for them.

The judge took away their custody rights, and Zeus and Donna formally petitioned to adopt me," he explains without a trace of bitterness, simply acceptance.

"It's safe to say I owe Zeus and Donna my life. Without them, who knows where I'd be today? They were taken from us too soon, and the world is a darker place without them," he finishes, taking one last look at their coffins before walking back to the pews and sitting next to us.

I feel the urge to reach out to comfort him, but I don't know how that would be received, so I hold my hands tightly in my lap.

I study Knox's face, noting how he's trying to hold back tears and be strong.

My heart breaks for him, for the little boy he was.

Without thinking, my hand goes to my stomach, thinking of the life inside.

Knox notices me watching him, and his gaze falls to my stomach as if he's echoing my thoughts, wondering what the future holds for this child.

I realize that I'm crying when Axel squeezes my hand and wordlessly hands me a handkerchief.

I smile at him gratefully, he nods before getting up to give his speech.

His strong, commanding voice booms out as he speaks clearly and powerfully.

His message both honors the dead and boosts the morale of the club.

He reassures the crowd that all is not lost. They might be leaderless, but they are not alone.

It's exactly what people needed to hear. To me, at that moment, it's evident who Zeus' successor should be.

Back at the Steel Vipers clubhouse, the wake is a lively affair with people drowning their sorrows and celebrating the lives of our friends.

The other waitresses and I are rushed off our feet, trying to keep up with the orders that keep pouring in.

As people become more intoxicated, it's clear to me that the night is going to descend into chaos.

Across the room, a fight starts, and I notice Axel and Rider quickly and expertly break it up, kicking the men out in a seamless interaction that barely interrupts the flow of the evening.

Knox has been well and truly drowning his sorrows, and when he calls me over and orders yet more shots, I feel the need to say something.

"Don't you think you've had enough?" I say gently.

He narrows his eyes at me. "No," he replies, downing the glass of whiskey in front of

him without a wince.

“Knox...”

“Leah, what makes you think you have the authority to tell me what the fuck I should be doing?” Knox snaps back.

“Fine... drink yourself into a stupor. See if I care,” I reply, storming off to get his drinks.

I slam them on the table in front of him and stomp off without looking at him, which elicits whoops and hollers from the men drinking at his table with him. My back is turned as I bus a table nearby, but I can hear them talking about me.

“Stuck up little bitch, isn’t she?” one of the men says.

“I dunno, I reckon she just needs a good fucking,” another jeers.

“Knock it off,” Knox slurs.

“Ooh got a soft spot for the frigid cunt? I’ll give her the seeing to she needs,” one man boldly declares.

Before I know what’s happening, the man is behind me. The stale stench of sweat and cigarettes overpowers my senses as he comes far too close, grabbing my waist firmly and pressing his dick against my backside. I yelp and try to pull away, but he holds me firm.

“Ah come on, I know you want it, bitch,” he hisses in my ear, and I try not to gag at the smell of his breath.

All of a sudden, he's ripped away from me, and I hear a scuffle. As I turn around, I see Knox has knocked him to the floor and is proceeding to pummel his fists into the other man's face, channeling all of his fury and emotions from the day into the beating.

The man's nose breaks in a sickening crunch as I watch, frozen in shock and horror. The man's friends jump in, and the room erupts in chaos. Axel, Rider, and Jace run in, breaking up the fight and holding Knox back.

"Alright, brother, you got him... that's enough..." Jace says as Knox struggles against him.

Axel stands between Knox and the man who's on the floor, groaning in pain, acting as a physical barrier. "Leah, get out of here," he orders, but I stay put. "What did he do?" he asks Knox. I appreciate that Axel seems to trust that his friend wouldn't attack someone unprovoked.

"He put his hands on Leah," Knox snarls, breathing heavily, his eyes still clouded with rage.

"It's true, he was pressing himself against me and making lewd comments. Knox was just defending me," I confirm, pushing my way in.

Axel flashes me a look of frustration, he doesn't want me here. He nods. "Alright, Rider and I will get him out of here and calm things down. Jace, take Knox to bed—he's had enough. Get Leah out of here, too."

Axel says this strongly and firmly, a clear sign that there's no room for disagreement. Knox doesn't seem inclined to argue. He hangs his head in submission and allows himself to be led away without a fight.

Although I don't like being ordered around, I follow them.

I want to make sure Knox is okay and see if there's anything I can do to help.

Jace easily helps Knox walk the short distance to their house with his arm slung over his shoulder as he half-carries his friend home.

I hover uncertainly in the doorway as they go inside.

"Come on in, Leah," Jace calls over his shoulder as they struggle up the stairs to Knox's bedroom.

I follow behind, taking in the typical bachelor's den. All four of the guys live here, and it shows. There's not a feminine touch in sight, but it is surprisingly neat and tidy.

Upstairs, Jace drops Knox onto his bed, face down, still fully clothed. "I ain't undressing you, brother. You can sleep it off."

"Not drunk," Knox mumbles, slurring his words into the pillow.

"Do you mind if I speak to him for a moment?" I ask.

Jace shrugs, looking as though he doubts how much talking I'm going to get out of Knox in his current state of inebriation, but not bothering to argue with me. "Sure. Want me to wait for you outside?"

"No, I'll be fine, thanks."

Jace nods his approval and leaves, he clearly knows I am safe here.

“Thank you for that, Knox. I know you’re not my biggest fan, but I appreciate you protecting me.”

He might not remember me saying this, but I feel the need to thank him, nevertheless. For a moment, I think he’s not going to say anything, so I turn to leave.

“I’m sorry, Leah, for what I said before... on the day that... on the day Donna and Zeus died. I was hurt, but I know it’s not your fault,” Knox mumbles, surprisingly coherent all of a sudden.

“Thank you, I appreciate you saying that, but you were right. If I weren’t around, or if we’d stayed to help, they might have survived.”

He shakes his head vehemently, attempting to sit up before flopping back down onto the bed.

“No. I was wrong. Chances are, I’d have lost two of my best friends, too, and the baby.

You did the right thing. The baby is all that matters now.

I promise you, I might be a fuck up, but I won’t let anything bad happen to you or this child. Your family now.”

“I appreciate that, Knox.”

“Leah...”

I wait for a moment, wondering what else he’s going to reveal, but then I hear his deep breathing, and I realize he’s fallen asleep. In sleep, he seems peaceful, more innocent somehow. It’s clear there are sides to Knox I’ve yet to see, that for all his

bravado and wildness, he's a good man.

It feels good to know he's fighting in my corner. He called me family.

A foreign and strange concept. Do I want to be part of this crazy, fucked up family?

I think I do.

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Leah

The fight has been forgotten, and the party is in full swing when I return. There's a live band performing, which helps to keep people happy and distracted.

"Everything okay?" Axel asks me, his handsome face furrowing with concern as he comes over.

"Yeah, he'll have a sore head tomorrow, but he's fine."

Axel nods in approval, and we both fall silent, watching the band.

"They're good," I say, gesturing to the band. "The lead singer is something else, he's got some real stage presence."

"Yeah, they're gonna be looking for a new lead soon, though. He's been scouted for a record deal but isn't gonna take the guys along for the ride."

"Wow, good for him. I mean, sucks for the guys, but getting signed is a big deal, it's not easy," I say wistfully.

"You sound like you're speaking from experience," Axel observes, taking a swig of his beer and looking at me.

"I am," I reply, surprised that I'm telling him. My failed music career isn't something I often divulge. "I moved here to try to make it as a singer. But, well, life had other plans."

“What happened?” Axel asks, seeming genuinely curious. “Why’d you stop trying?”

“I just realized I wasn’t good enough,” I say with a casual flick of my wrist, trying to play down the heartbreak that revelation once caused me.

“Who told you that?” he asks, astutely realizing I didn’t come to that conclusion alone.

“What makes you think someone told me?” I throw back, lightly teasing, not wanting to offload just yet.

“You don’t strike me as the kind of person to travel halfway across the country to pursue a dream you didn’t have a chance of fulfilling,” he states seriously.

I’m flattered that he didn’t simply assume that I might actually just be bad.

“My ex,” I admit. “He didn’t like me going out working at all hours in bars when I had gigs or auditions, said I was wasting my time since I wasn’t good enough to make it anyway.”

When I say it out loud now, it sounds so typical, so mundane, a stupid reason to give up on my dreams, and yet that’s exactly what happened. However, there’s still part of me that believes he did me a favor, making me realize it was an unattainable pipe dream.

“He sounds like an idiot,” Axel says bluntly. “Even if you don’t become famous, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t pursue your dream and make a career out of it. Sounds to me like he just didn’t want you to succeed.”

“You’re right, I suppose. He was jealous... controlling. It was easier just to quit than to handle the arguments every time I had a gig,” I admit.

“Well... you’re not with him now. Why not give it another go?”

“It’s complicated...” I explain, not wanting to go into details as to why I can’t.

How can I explain that I need to remain invisible so he can’t find me?

The first place he’d look for me is live music venues.

If I joined a band or pursued a solo career, it wouldn’t take him long to find out about it and track me down.

If I admit this, Axel will know that the only reason I agreed to the surrogacy was for the protection the club offered.

I doubt that he would look kindly upon me bringing trouble to their door, especially since the club is already dealing with enough trouble.

“I’d like to hear you sing sometime,” Axel says.

“You don’t even know if I’m any good or not,” I deflect, feeling hot under his intent gaze.

It’s rare to be the sole focus of someone’s attention. But when Axel talks to you, he actually listens.

“You are. I can tell,” he replies, so confidently that I almost believe it.

How could my ex make me feel like I’m worth nothing, make me so small, and yet just a few words from Axel have the complete opposite effect?

Hiding the blush of pleasure that Axel’s words bring, I simply smile at him but make

no promises. I'm not sure I'm ready to sing for anyone else again just yet, not even him.

"I'd better get back to work."

I return to work, enjoying the music and being around the gig atmosphere again for the first time in a long while. The whole night, I can feel Axel's eyes on me, and when I look over, he doesn't shy away or pretend he isn't studying me with naked curiosity.

It's Axel's turn to stay over in my place tonight to keep an eye on me—despite the overall discomfort we all feel about me living in Donna and Zeus' home without them, we had few other options, their room remains off-limits, and the guys rotate between staying in the guest room so that someone is always close by should I need anything.

It's overkill—I told them as much—but Axel was adamant, and the rest backed him up.

For the most part, I barely notice when the guys are there, but I feel a thrill tonight knowing that Axel and I will be alone in the house together.

It's late by the time we make it back to the house, yet neither of us is ready to go to sleep.

"Would you like a nightcap?" I ask Axel as we hover in the living room.

"I'm not usually in the habit of drinking alone... and you can't drink," he replies, nodding to my still flat stomach.

I wonder how quickly I'll start to show. Will I be one of those women who you can

barely tell is pregnant at six months, or will I rapidly balloon? Seeing as I'm already a curvy girl, will I look obviously pregnant, or will people just think I've put on weight?

"I can have a cup of tea or something," I suggest, wanting the time alone to get to know Axel better.

He considers this, weighing the implications of us staying up alone together. "Alright then."

I fix our drinks, and we sit on the couch together. I feel acutely aware of his proximity, despite the fact that we're not touching, sitting on opposite ends of the couch.

"It was a good send-off," I comment, referring to the funeral and wake.

Axel nods in agreement. "It was, I think. Zeus would have approved. He'd mostly be pissed he missed out on the fun," he says with a rueful smile.

"What happens now? With the Steel Vipers, I mean. How do you decide who becomes the next president?"

Axel's brow furrows as if he's been worrying about this. "Usually, there's a clear successor lined up, but we don't have one. If Levi were still alive, he'd be the obvious choice. A few guys are vying for the position, so it will probably be put to a vote."

"What about Knox? If Levi was the obvious choice, would Zeus' other son not be the next choice?" I ask, curling my legs underneath me and holding my mug in two hands.

Axel shakes his head. “I love Knox, he’s like a brother to me, but he’s not leadership material. He’s too much of a wild card, even he knows that.”

“Okay then, what about you?”

“The guys think I’m the next president, but there are men who have been here far longer who would be just as good at leading the club. It’s a big responsibility,” Axel says cautiously, scratching the stubble on his chin.

“Well, I think you’d be great at it. I think Zeus did, too, that’s why he trusted you with the secret of wanting a surrogate to carry Levi’s child,” I reason.

“Perhaps, but there are those who don’t like me. There are some guys who think we should be more like the Hellhounds, that Zeus made us too soft.”

“Well then, all the more reason for you to be the next president, to uphold the club’s values,” I insist.

“Maybe,” he replies with a small smile before changing the subject. “So, tell me, what’s home like?”

“Another planet compared to here. It’s quiet, peaceful, and very green with rolling hills, prairies, and cornfields—and lots of cattle,” I add with a smile, recalling long walks around our farm as a girl with my grandfather.

“Do you miss it?”

“Sometimes. I miss how green it is. Perhaps that’s why I feel so comfortable around you, your eyes remind me of home,” I muse aloud before realizing with utter mortification what I just said.

My cheeks flush, and I expect him to politely but firmly shut me down. But instead, he smiles at me.

“I’m glad. When we were away serving in the military, the guys were my connection to home, they made it a lot more bearable.”

“You served together?”

Axel nods. “Two tours, Levi, Knox, Jace, Rider, and me. I was our squad leader.”

“Ah, I knew it, I told you you’re a natural leader,” I say with a grin. “That’s why the guys do as you say, they still think you’re the boss. Is that why you get so frustrated with me? Because I don’t automatically agree with you?” I gently tease.

“You do seem determined to do the exact opposite of what I ask you to do,” he says ruefully, his tone light. “Although I do recall you didn’t take much convincing to do what I wanted when we first met,” he adds seductively.

All of a sudden, the energy in the room shifts, becoming charged, and I’m painfully aware of the fact that we’re alone together. During our conversation, we’ve automatically shifted closer together. Now it would only take the smallest of steps to close the gap between us.

I take the leap.

“What makes you think you were the one calling the shots?” I retort, shifting closer so our thighs touch. “Maybe you don’t want to be the one taking the lead for a change.”

“So lead,” he challenges, his voice thick as he wrestles to maintain control while also wanting to relinquish it.

Before I can allow myself to overthink it, to tell myself why it's a bad idea, I follow my instincts and give in to the hunger I've felt since we first met. I'm pregnant, so the rule I had to follow doesn't apply—and even if it did, there's no one to police it now.

I press myself close to his chest, looking into his eyes before kissing him.

He passionately kisses me back, his strong hands snaking around my waist, and I straddle him.

I can taste the whiskey on his tongue. The kiss is every bit as ferocious as the first time, but with no one to interrupt us now, we're not stopping.

I tear my shirt off, feeling grateful that I'm wearing a nice bra and forgoing my comfortable panties today.

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I've gained weight since splitting with my ex, and the bra is on the tight side, my breasts threatening to spill out of the black lace. I'm blessed with an ample chest, something I enjoyed until recently when my ex made me feel as if it's an embarrassment, something to be ashamed of, and hide.

The way Axel beholds them makes me feel like the sexiest woman alive.

He buries his face between them, kissing and caressing every inch, his tongue teasing my nipples through the lace, making them hard like pebbles.

With an expert hand, he unclasps my bra and releases my breasts.

I arch my back and moan as he caresses them, his mouth trailing up to kiss my neck and back down again.

I grind on his lap, through our jeans, and I can feel that he's getting hard.

I stand and quickly remove my pants as he shrugs out of his.

In just his boxers now, I can see the bulge of his arousal straining against the fabric.

He's surveying me, just as I am him, and I want to move quickly so as not to give him time to notice the lumps and bumps of my body, the imperfections.

But the look of desire in his eyes, without a hint of disgust, stops me, and I allow him time to drink me in.

“You’re fucking gorgeous, Leah,” he tells me with complete sincerity.

I’m surprised to find in that moment that I believe him.

I drop to my knees in front of him, stroking his erection through his briefs.

“You don’t have to do that, Leah,” he tells me, sensing my intent.

“I’m in charge, remember,” I remind him before pulling his cock free.

It’s even bigger than I thought, and growing bigger still in my hand.

I taste the salty speck of precum on his tip, eliciting a groan of pleasure that spurs me on.

Emboldened by the effect I have on him, I take him in my mouth.

He’s so big I have to use my hand to help as I run my tongue around the end, licking up and down the length of his shaft.

The lace of my panties is soaked. I can’t believe how turned on I am, and he’s barely touched me yet.

Blow jobs always felt a bit of a chore. Something that was expected of me, but I had to focus entirely on the pleasure of the man, and it often involved my head being pushed.

With Axel, I’m able to experiment, taking my time to discover what he likes without pressure.

Being able to turn him on this much makes me feel sexy and powerful.

Gradually, I take him deeper and deeper into my mouth.

“You keep going like that and I’m not gonna be able to hold myself back,” he warns.

I’m tempted not to stop, but I don’t want this to end, not yet.

I draw back, moving to straddle him, but Axel has other ideas.

In one deft, strong motion, he flips me over so he’s on top and I’m now sitting on the couch under him.

He takes his time, kissing me before moving to tease my nipples, biting and sucking and sending ripples of pleasure through my body.

He moves down, caressing every inch of my skin.

I come alive with his touch, every nerve ending is alight, and the smallest caress feels incredible.

His fingers trace my thighs, and I part my legs, aching for his touch.

When he finally runs his fingers against my slit through my panties, I’m wetter than ever.

He strokes my clit, and I moan as he pushes my panties aside, slipping a finger between my folds.

He moves with expert precision, alternating his strokes in time with my body.

I don’t try to stop him when he buries his face between my legs. All the negative memories and insecurities are forgotten as I lose myself in pleasure. His tongue

circles my clit as his fingers glide inside my wetness.

“You taste fucking incredible,” he growls.

His tongue flicks against my clit, changing the speed and rotation, flicking and sucking as he fucks me with his hand.

I can feel the pressure building inside of me, aching for release.

Each time he brings me close, he pulls back, teasing me in the most tantalizing way.

I moan and writhe, arching my back, pushing my hips up, and burying my hands in his hair, pulling him closer.

He thrusts his fingers in deep, hitting my G-spot as he licks and sucks my clit, faster and faster. My orgasm hits me hard, and I cry out. He holds me firm, snaking an arm around my waist to keep me in place as he continues bringing wave after wave of pleasure as I climax.

But we’re not done yet. I want more. Need more.

“Fuck me,” I demand.

“Not here,” he replies, scooping me up and carrying me up the stairs.

We pause at the top, and he presses me up against the wall, kissing me possessively. I can taste myself, and it’s so unbelievably naughty that I find myself not wanting to wait a second longer.

“Fuck me here, don’t you dare take another step,” I command breathily.

There's a rumble of arousal from his chest, an almost animalistic sound in the back of his throat as he gives in to his desire.

He tears the flimsy material of my panties, ripping them off and discarding them.

I'm so wet and ready for him that he's able to thrust inside me in one motion, despite his impressive girth.

He fills me completely and I find myself cumming almost immediately but I'm still begging for more as he fucks me hard against the wall, holding me up as if I weigh nothing.

"Fuck, Leah," he growls.

It's passionate, sweaty, and we're both hungry for more as we fuck like animals. I've never felt this aching need, this desperation for someone, this reckless abandon. I'm able to completely forget everything and just focus on the moment.

I'm screaming out as he thrusts hard and fast, my breasts bouncing against his chest. Already, I can feel the orgasm, a continuation of the last.

"Fuck yes, Axel!"

We change positions, and all plans of making it to the bedroom are lost as we completely give in and lose control.

I move to all fours, and he takes me from behind, the new angle even deeper and fuller.

It takes me a moment to adjust, and Axel instinctively knows without me saying anything.

He's still inside me, allowing my body to expand and accommodate him before he begins to move.

Soon, he's fucking me hard and fast again.

The sheer naughtiness of being fucked like this in the corridor turns me on even more.

He reaches around to tease my clit with one hand.

I feel senseless with pleasure. I've never had sex like this before.

Never let go so fully. Nor cared so little about my body or if I was doing something wrong.

It's clear he's enjoying this as much as I am.

"I'm gonna cum again," I cry as I feel the climax building inside me. "Cum with me!" I demand.

"Oh god, you're fucking incredible, Leah," he groans as we climax simultaneously.

Panting and spent, a niggles of worry enters my mind. Will it be awkward now we're out of the throes of passion?

Axel stands up, "Come on," he says, holding out a hand and helping me up. "Let's try to make it to the bedroom this time."

"The bedroom?" I ask, confused.

"You didn't think we're finished, did you?" he asks before wickedly adding, "I want

to take my time with you now.”

I allow him to lead me into my bedroom and lie me down on the bed.

True to his word, the next time is slower, more tender, but just as passionate.

When we’re finally finished, neither of us able to continue, both fully spent, I lie with my head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat as we chat about everything and nothing until we both fall asleep.

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Axel

A n unnatural, unexpected sound wakes me suddenly, pulling me into abrupt consciousness, my nerves on high alert.

The pitch-black room is silent and still.

I can hear Leah's slow, steady breath as she sleeps soundly beside me.

It's quiet. Just a dream. It's not uncommon for the smallest of sounds to wake me, especially in a new environment, yet my instincts tell me to trust my body. Something is not right.

Careful not to disturb Leah, I slip out of bed and throw on some pants. The street outside is still, the streetlights illuminating the empty road. The bar is closed up as it should be.

I'm about to tell myself that it's just my overactive imagination when I hear it. The faintest creak of a floorboard.

Someone is inside the house.

Someone who is trying very hard not to be heard.

Stealthily, I move to Leah's side, gently waking her and placing a hand over her mouth so she doesn't cry out. I try to keep her calm, speaking soothingly.

“Leah, shh, it’s okay, it’s me, it’s Axel. Don’t speak. I need you to stay calm,” I say in a hurried whisper. “Someone’s inside the house.”

Her eyes grow wide in the pale light that’s cast on her face through the slit in the curtains, but she nods and remains silent.

“I need you to hide in the bathroom for me. Wait inside and don’t come out until I tell you to,” I order her, gently pulling the sheets back, noticing how her fair skin goosebumps in the cold.

She nods and quietly does as she’s told. I can tell that she wants to ask more, but the protective hand she presses against her stomach tells me our priorities are the same.

The unmistakable sounds of footsteps are coming up the stairs, and I can tell that there are at least two intruders.

I don’t have a gun with me, so I quickly search the room for anything I can use as a weapon.

My phone is downstairs in the living room, forgotten in the passion earlier, and I can’t call the guys for backup.

The door of the spare room opens, the room I should have been sleeping in tonight. There’s a moment’s pause, followed by strange ruffling sounds. Then I hear a man’s whispered words of surprise.

“It’s empty. She must be in the next one.”

I don’t have time to consider who these men are or what they want with Leah, but it’s safe to assume that people breaking in in the dead of night aren’t here for a friendly social visit.

Considering they're still moving around quietly, they most likely don't think they've been heard, which means the element of surprise is on my side.

I have to act fast if I'm to maintain the upper hand.

I stand so that the door blocks my body as the first man enters, pistol drawn.

Using my bodyweight and the door for momentum, I'm able to quickly and easily disarm him, grabbing his gun as I slam the door shut against his arm.

What I didn't account for is the man's trigger-happy accomplice, who somehow, in his surprise, fires off a round into the skull of his friend.

The first man drops down dead, blocking the entrance, while the other, in his panic, continues to fire blindly into the room, not seeming to realize he's in essence fighting himself.

I return fire. Seeming to realize the predicament he's found himself in, the other man turns tail and runs. I give chase, trying to take him down without injuring him so badly that he can't speak. We need to know who these bastards are and what they want.

While he might be a terrible shot, he's fast, and he manages to escape me, jumping onto the back of a waiting bike that tears off into the distance before I can stop him.

"What the fuck?" I ask myself breathlessly as I watch the taillights disappear.

At that moment, Rider, Jace, and Knox arrive.

"What happened?"

“We heard shots?”

“Are Leah and the baby okay?”

They ask in frantic succession.

“Leah’s okay,” I reply exhaustedly, heading back inside.

They follow closely behind, weapons drawn as they quickly check that the house is empty.

“Axel?” I hear Leah’s frightened voice from the top of the stairs. I look up to see her peeking out over the banister. Any irritation I feel that she ignored my command to stay inside the bathroom until I told her to come out is overridden by the sight of her safe and sound.

“Leah,” I choke out, taking the stairs two at a time to reach her and pull her close.

“I was so scared...” she chokes out, her tears dampening the hair on my chest.

“I know, they’re gone now,” I soothe.

“What the fuck happened?” Knox asks. “Who were those guys?”

Any trace of his earlier drunkenness has gone from his face.

Now, he seems alert and sober, his brow knotted in concern as he rushes over to Leah to ask if she’s okay.

I push down the irrational jealousy I feel when I see him place his hand on his stomach and whisper to her soothingly.

It's not like me. Knox is my brother, same as Jace and Rider, we share everything, including women.

I have no idea how Leah would feel about that.

While she's open minded, I don't know if that would scare her off.

"I recognized the one from earlier, it was one of the friends of the guy you decided to beat up," I say, looking at Knox.

"Are you saying this is my fault?" Knox replies angrily.

"No, he wasn't saying that," Leah interjects, sensing trouble is brewing.

"What happened exactly?" Jace asks.

"The sounds of someone breaking in woke me up. The two of them came upstairs and checked my room first. When they found it empty, I heard them mention Leah. I managed to disarm the first man, and his idiot friend blew his head off before running away," I explain, frustrated by the situation.

"Did they say what they wanted with Leah?" Rider asks as he surveys the area.

"No, all I heard them say was 'it's empty, she must be in the other one'."

"It's a good job you were in Leah's room then," Rider says matter-of-factly.

Comprehension dawns as Knox and Jace realize what Rider has already figured out.

If I were in Leah's bedroom, we must have hooked up.

Leah blushes and tries to cover herself, seemingly conscious of her nakedness.

She's only wearing a thin nightdress, her pert nipples visible through the thin silk.

I can tell that Knox is pissed as he looks between the two of us.

It seems that he's been hiding his feelings for Leah, and I'm not the only one who's captivated by her.

Luckily, he doesn't voice any objection, though I know it's something we're going to have to talk about later.

As incredible as Leah is, I never want a woman to get between me and my brothers.

If Knox is interested in her too, I won't stand in his way from letting her know how he feels.

As much as I want her, Knox deserves her more.

"Come on, let's go see who this dead asshole upstairs is," Jace says cheerily.

As always, he's impervious to tension and able to make a bad situation seem perfectly normal. The others nod their approval and follow Jace upstairs. I decided to stay downstairs with Leah, there's no need for her to see the dead man again.

"Are you okay?" I ask Leah, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

She nods bravely, but I can tell the whole experience has shaken her. "I'm okay, thanks to you. God knows what I would have done if you weren't there... what could have happened..." Her voice trails off as she considers this.

The guys come back downstairs, their expressions grim.

“The dead man had a Hellhound tattoo,” Rider confirms.

“So this was a Hellhound attack.”

“It looks that way,” he confirms. “But we still don’t know what they wanted with Leah. Could be simply trying to finish what they started earlier, or it could be something worse.”

“What could be worse than breaking into my house and trying to rape me?” Leah shudders, running her hand through her hair, her hazel eyes wide and fearful.

I grind my teeth together, trying to hold back the rage I feel at the thought of someone attacking Leah.

I hate how scared she is. She might be safe now, but I can’t be with her twenty-four seven.

I’m grateful that the guys are as invested in her safety as I am.

I slowly calm down as I remind myself of this.

“If they were sent by the Hellhounds, then that means they know how valuable you are, Leah,” I explain gently.

“Do you mean they know about the baby?” she asks with fear in her eyes, her hand protectively flying to her stomach.

“I’m not sure how they would know, but we have to act as though they do, just to be safe.”

“Maybe it was an attack against you, Axel,” Knox suggests. “It’s no secret that we’ve been staying here with Leah. Perhaps they assumed that you’d be in your bed instead of fucking the person you’re meant to be protecting.”

I ignore the pointed judgment in his voice. He’s right to be pissed when I’m the one who insisted Leah was off-limits. “Yes, but they specifically said she’s not here. If they were looking for me, why would they care about her?” I point out.

“Let’s not play the blame game. What matters is that you’re both safe, but we need to find out what the Hellhounds want with Leah,” Jace states.

“Agreed. Leah, from now on, I think you should move in with us. It’ll be far safer with all four of us to keep an eye on you.”

“Some more closely than others, “ Knox grumbles under his breath.

I ignore him and focus on Leah. She nods her silent assent, but I can tell from her shell-shocked expression that tonight’s events are sinking in.

“Come on, Leah, let’s go get you a cup of hot, sweet tea from the kitchen while the guys gather your things from upstairs. It will help with the shock,” Jace says soothingly.

I nod my approval, and he guides her toward the kitchen.

There’s no way she needs to see the dead man upstairs again.

We’ll have to decide what to do with the body soon, but my focus is on Leah right now.

Without saying what I had upstairs, Rider and Knox follow behind.

We silently collect her possessions, stuffing them into a bag as well as a few items I have here.

Although Knox doesn't say a word, I can feel the anger radiating off him.

"If you have something to say, then say it."

"What happened to Leah being off limits? We're supposed to be protecting her and helping her raise this baby, not putting our dicks in her," Knox spits.

"It just happened. Leah is a grown woman, she can make her own decisions. Sleeping together doesn't harm the baby. Why should you care? You've never cared who I hook up with before, and you haven't exactly given the impression that you like Leah," I point out.

"Forget I said anything, fuck who you want," he grumbles. "Just seems like you told us one thing and did the exact opposite."

He has a point, but I'm loath to admit it. To do so would be to admit my own weakness when it comes to Leah, that I can't resist her.

"Look, if you want to go after Leah, by all means do, she's her own woman and I don't have a claim over her. It's not like we haven't shared before."

"Fine, maybe I will do if you don't care and she's just a hook up to you."

"Fine."

Leah's far from just sex to me, and he knows it. There's no use bickering over it, though. Knox and I always argue like this, and it eventually works itself out. Sometimes we're both too stubborn and competitive for our own good.

“If you two are quite done, there’s still the matter of the dead body that we need to deal with,” Rider interjects.

“He’s the boss, let him decide,” Knox says before leaving.

I don’t bother to follow him, Knox is going through a lot right now and he has every right to be pissed at me.

“Looks like you drew the short straw, brother, “ I say to Rider.

“I dunno, compared with dealing with one of Knox’s temper tantrums and an upset woman, I think I prefer body clean-up duty...”

I smile, grateful for my friend’s consistent stoic nature.

If Rider has an opinion on me and Leah hooking up, then he’s not voicing it.

I’m glad to have a job to throw myself into, and that I can focus on why the Hellhounds came here tonight and what they want with Leah, as opposed to thinking about what happened between us tonight.

My feelings are confusing and complicated, and I don’t do confusing and complicated.

Throw in the fact that Knox clearly has feelings for her, too, and this whole situation is a nightmare waiting to happen if we don’t figure it out.

Usually, I simply walk away, but after one night with Leah, I know that’s going to be impossible.

If that man hadn’t escaped or killed his friend by mistake, I’d have killed them both

to protect her.

I could tell myself that I'm simply doing what I promised Zeus, but I know my desire to keep her safe is more than just duty. I care about her.

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Leah

It's strange to see Jace like this, his usual cockiness is gone, in its place is only a kind and compassionate man taking care of me.

He watches me carefully, ensuring I drink every drop of the tea he's made for me.

He's right, the drink does make me feel better, less nervous.

I try not to think about the dead man lying upstairs, or how close I came to being attacked by those men.

I wish I knew what they came here for. The thought that if they'd come here to harm me based on some stupid drunken argument earlier is horrifying, yet it's perhaps the lesser of two evils.

If the men were sent by the Hellhounds for me, then it's safe to say they must know about the baby.

There's no other reason why they'd want to harm me.

There's no one else in this world who would have any malice toward me other than my ex, and while I know he has dangerous contacts, he never mentioned the Hellhounds to me.

"Feeling better?" Jace asks.

“Yes, thanks,” I reply gratefully. “What do you think they’ll do about the man upstairs?”

“They’ll take care of it, there’s no need for you to worry about that. So you and Axel, hey?” He says, changing the subject, his tone light and teasing.

“Don’t you start,” I groan. “This whole situation is bad enough without you making me feel guilty, too.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I was just trying to figure out whether or not you’re off the market. Are you and Axel together now, or is there still a chance for the rest of us schmucks?” he teases.

“Ever the tease, Jace,” I quit trying to deflect his question.

In truth, I don’t know how I feel about last night or what it means for Axel and me.

“I’m not hearing no,” he says with an impish grin.

“You can have your pick of women, I’m sure you aren’t interested, regardless of Axel and me,” I dismiss.

“I didn’t ask about my interest, I asked about yours.”

“Jace, I’m not in the mood for joking around,” I snap.

He holds up his hands in defense. “Believe it or not, not everything that comes out of my mouth is a joke.”

“Oh really,” I reply sarcastically. “Prove it. Tell me something real.”

He surprises me by asking me a question. “Is the man upstairs the first dead body you’ve ever seen?”

“No.” My mind goes back to the horror and gore upstairs. The reality of a dead body is far more horrific than it is in the movies. “But it’s the first one I remember. I was in the car accident that killed my parents, but I was too young and too traumatized to remember.”

“Shit. I’m sorry about your parents. It’s probably best that you don’t remember their deaths, so you can remember them as they were. I think the first body you see is the one that haunts you. I know it is for me.”

“Who was it? The first body you saw?”

“My mom, I was nine,” he says in the voice of someone who still suffers from the loss.

“I’m so sorry. What happened? That’s if you don’t mind my asking,” I ask gently.

“She took her own life, an overdose.”

“I’m so sorry, Jace, that’s awful, no child should ever have to see that,” I reply sincerely, my heart breaking for young Jace.

He shrugs, brushing it off. “Where did you go when your parents died? Who did you live with?”

“My grandfather.”

“Is he a good man?”

“The best, I was lucky to have him. Where did you live after your mom died?”

“With my dad. The son of a bitch tormented my mom. He was one of the reasons why my mom did what she did; he drove her to it, made her believe she was worthless and that life wasn’t worth living after years of abuse.

Her death didn’t change him much. The motherfucker just beat on me instead.

The second I could get out of that hellhole, I left and never looked back. ”

“Oh, Jace, that’s horrible.”

He shrugs, “I’ve made my peace with it. My brothers and the Steel Vipers are my family now.

However, the one aspect of my past that stays with me is my default defense mechanism.

I learned early on that the best way to avoid a beating was to keep my father happy and laughing, which I did by playing the clown, cracking jokes, and amusing his buddies when they came home drunk.

I might not be that same scared kid anymore, but clowning around when things get too serious is an inbuilt part of me now. ”

“Thank you for explaining that to me,” I say earnestly.

We fall into a comfortable silence as he makes more tea. He tells me that he’s going to go check on the others and to wait there, which I do gladly, not wanting to see the body upstairs again. After a short while, he returns.

“Ready to go? The guys can handle everything here.”

I nod, grateful to be getting as far away as I can from the dead man upstairs. I don’t want to know what Jace means by handling it.

Following Jace’s revelation, I feel a bond with him and a new level of understanding of who he is. Perhaps I was too quick to judge with my dismissal of him as just a cocky jock-type. It’s clear there’s more to Jace than the person he shows to the world.

When we arrive at the men’s house, Knox is there.

“Leah,” he says, jumping to his feet. “I’m sorry I left, Axel and I… well, that doesn’t matter now. How are you doing?”

“Better, thank you,” I reply truthfully.

I’ve no idea why Knox is so mad at Axel, but it’s not my place to ask.

“We’ll find out what those bastards wanted, I promise. If they were here to harm you or the baby, I’ll hunt them down and make them pay,” he promises darkly.

I don’t doubt his seriousness. Though I don’t want any bloodshed on my behalf, it’s nice to know that Knox will do anything to protect me.

“I keep wondering if those guys came after you tonight because of me…” he says, his eyes filled with anguish.

“No, Knox, you can’t blame yourself. You were protecting me. If they were trying to finish what they started, that has nothing to do with you,” I assure him.

He nods, seeming relieved that I don't blame him.

"You can sleep in my room," Knox offers. "I don't mind sleeping on the couch. Unless you plan to stay with Axel in his room."

He says this with a trace of hurt in his voice that confuses me.

I'm unsure why Knox would have a problem with Axel and me hooking up.

Perhaps it's purely out of concern for the baby.

Regardless, until I've spoken with Axel, I have no idea what he thinks about what happened between us.

With how Axel acted toward me in the past when we kissed, I wouldn't be surprised if he wants to forget the whole thing even happened.

No way am I about to move into his bedroom without speaking to him first.

"No. If you don't mind me taking your room, that would be great."

"She could stay in my room, I wouldn't mind," Jace interjects, his voice insinuating he wouldn't be taking the couch.

Knox shoots him a filthy glare, and Jace chuckles, having gotten the reaction he wanted.

"I'll go get my room ready for you now, Leah," Knox says before heading up the stairs.

Knox is in the process of changing the sheets when I join him upstairs.

“Thanks for giving up your room. I’m not sure that I could stay in that house. It was bad enough feeling the absence of Zeus and Donna, but now...” My voice trails off as I think of what might have happened if Axel hadn’t been there.

“It’s no problem. The room is yours for as long as you need it.” Knox gathers some of his things and turns to leave, stopping in the doorway to look at me. “I’m glad you’re safe,” he says softly. “If you need anything, I’m right downstairs, and the others will be back soon.”

I get the impression that there’s more he wants to say.

But he simply closes the door and leaves.

I hear him and Jace talking quietly downstairs as I take a long, hot shower before climbing into bed.

Dawn is almost breaking, and I think there’s no way that I can sleep after everything that happened; my nerves are too frazzled.

Yet, as the cool sheets embrace me, I find myself drifting off into an exhausted slumber.

With the guys downstairs, I know I’m in the safest place I can be.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:38 pm

Knox

I don't sleep. My mind is filled with thoughts of Leah.

What did those men want with her? If they were there to harm her simply because I reacted so violently against them, then it's all my fault.

However, the logical part of me realizes that, given their connection with the Hellhounds, their visit was likely far more sinister.

As much as I'm pissed with Axel for sleeping with her—doing the one thing he forbade us from doing and taking advantage of her while she's in a vulnerable state emotionally—I'm grateful that he was there to protect her.

I know my anger toward Axel is more directed at myself.

I'm frustrated that I wasn't the one to protect Leah and if I'm being honest, I'm a little jealous that she chose Axel.

Not that she'd want anything to do with me after the way I've treated her.

I blamed her for Donna and Zeus' deaths.

It would be so much easier if I could still feel anger toward her, but instead, I have this burning desire to protect her, to be near her, and I know it comes from more than just wanting to protect my adoptive parents' grandchild.

I think of her upstairs in my bed as I lie there on the couch, staring at the ceiling. Is she sleeping, or is she also lying awake, worrying about what the future holds?

With Axel having hooked up with her, Leah is now more off-limits than ever.

Sure, we share women, but Leah doesn't seem like that kind of girl.

I just hope Axel doesn't see her as just another chick.

Though, given how he broke his own rule for her and the way he looks at her, I can tell he's as smitten with her as I am.

I should back off. My brother deserves this, deserves her, and she deserves better than me, yet I can't stop thinking about her.

I picture what it would be like to hold her and kiss her.

To be looked at the way she looks at Axel.

I imagine what having sex with her would be like, and I can feel myself growing hard.

I know that Rider and Axel won't be back home for hours and Jace is asleep, so there's no chance of anyone walking in on me, and the house is silent.

So, unable to get her out of my head and hoping I can relieve some of the tension I feel, I touch myself.

My hand strokes a familiar path as I think of Leah.

My thick cock is painfully straining in my hand as I try to find release.

Somewhat satisfied but nowhere near satiated, I clean myself up and head to the kitchen to make myself a coffee.

I'm careful to move as quietly as I can. I've no concerns about waking Jace, the man sleeps like the dead; he didn't even hear the gunshots earlier, we had to shake him awake, but if Leah has found some peace in sleep, then the last thing I want to do is wake her.

Although the sun has risen, it's still early.

The majority of the club members who live in our little community aren't early risers, especially not after last night.

Those who heard the gunshots and came to help went back to bed and likely won't be up until late, so I enjoy the peace and quiet.

I'm standing, drinking my coffee, and gazing out of the window at the deserted street when I hear it.

A cry of terror.

Leah.

Immediately, I race upstairs to where Leah is sleeping. How could someone have gotten past me?

I burst through the door, gun drawn, only to find the room empty. Leah's asleep, tossing and turning, the covers thrown aside to reveal a pale leg, her hair disheveled, and her brow furrowed as she's lost in a nightmare.

I perch on the bed beside her, gently shaking her shoulder. "Leah, wake up, you're

having a bad dream,” I whisper soothingly.

I don’t want to startle or scare her more with my presence, but I can’t leave her like this either.

“Knox?”

She’s confused and sleepy, but unafraid of my presence, which is a relief. Seeing her like this in my bed is not an unwelcome sight, and I try to push down the images it evokes, picturing what it would be like to wake up beside her every day.

“You were having a nightmare,” I explain again.

“I can’t get the sight of him out of my head.”

She doesn’t need to tell me what sight she’s referring to. The sight of a man with his head blown off isn’t one you easily forget. Reflexively, I brush away a tear from her cheek. An intimate gesture, one I’ve no right to, yet she doesn’t reprimand me for it.

“The nightmares will stop, in time.”

A white lie that I’m not sure I believe.

The faces of the men I’ve killed and friends who have died in combat are seared into my brain.

Though the nightmares are less frequent, I don’t know if they’ll ever go away.

It does get easier, the burden is a little lighter with time.

Though now the stars of my nightmares are Zeus and Donna, I’m not sure I’ll ever be

able to forget the sight of their bodies, of Donna dying in my arms. Now, I'd take the combat nightmares back if I could.

She nods trustingly. "I'm sorry if I woke you."

"You didn't."

As if she can read my mind, Leah asks, "Have you been having them? Bad dreams about Donna and Zeus?"

"Yes."

Leah looks so beautiful and trusting right now.

I know I should leave now that I know she's okay, but I remain rooted to the spot.

I have the burning urge to take her in my arms and kiss her.

We both seem to become aware of the intimacy of the situation at the same time.

I'm wearing only a pair of sweatpants, my torso bare, and Leah is similarly scantily clad in her thin nightgown.

She makes no move to cover herself, nor does she move away from me.

Her gaze drops to my chest, and her breath hitches slightly before she quickly looks away.

"I should let you go back to sleep," I say, though I don't move.

"I don't think I can sleep anymore."

Is that an invitation to stay? Or simply conversation?

I can usually pick up on women's signals and tell if they feel the same way as me, but with Leah, I can't think straight.

Some part of me thinks I can't be imagining the chemistry between us, the charged air, but the last thing I want to do is make her feel uncomfortable.

"How do you distract yourself from thinking about them? How do you cope with the nightmares?" she asks me gently.

"I'm not sure I have been. I've been getting drunk, but that isn't an option for you. And my past distraction of sex isn't an option for me."

"That's not true," she snorts. "There are heaps of women who regularly throw themselves at you."

"Not the one I want."

"Well, then, either she's crazy or you've not made a move, and she doesn't know how you feel."

Leah's hazel eyes meet mine, and I try to decipher if she's issuing a challenge or genuinely doesn't know how I feel. Either way, I decide to seize the moment and show her. Axel practically told me earlier that he wouldn't mind if I made a move. Leah wouldn't be the first woman we've shared.

Cupping her chin in my hand, I lean closer. She blinks in surprise, her lips parting slightly, but she doesn't pull away. I do what I've wanted from the moment I met her, I kiss her.

There's a moment of hesitation, and I panic that I've read the signals all wrong, that she's about to push me away and ask what the fuck I'm doing, but then she kisses me back.

Kissing Leah feels so right, as natural as breathing.

I wrap my arm around her waist, pulling her closer, feeling the warmth of her body, savoring the smell of her skin, the taste of her.

She pulls me closer, kissing me back passionately, and I know that the attraction isn't one-sided, that she feels something too.

The sound of Rider and Axel returning breaks the spell between us, and we spring apart guiltily. Leah is somehow even more gorgeous with her lips plump from our kiss, and it takes every ounce of my self-control not to kiss her again.

"I should go speak to them and see if they found out anything."

Leah nods but doesn't speak, her mind elsewhere as she puzzles over what just happened.

I've opened a can of worms and made this already strange and complicated situation even more confused, yet I don't regret it. Now I just have to hope Axel is truly willing to share, if that's what Leah wants, of course. You don't give up on a woman like Leah.

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Leah

To say I've been confused since my kiss with Knox would be an understatement.

How can I want two men at the same time? I know I fantasized about all of the guys, but it's different actually sleeping with one and making out with another, isn't it?

I worry that Axel is going to come straight upstairs to see me and that he'll be able to tell just by looking at me what happened.

Thankfully, I can hear Rider, Knox, and him having a deep discussion.

Deciding that a long, hot shower is what I need, I climb out of bed.

At that moment, Jace emerges from his room, lazily strolling past my door.

He's wearing a pair of sweats, his chest bare, revealing his impressive six-pack.

Seriously, do none of these men wear shirts? Not that I mind, but it's bad enough that I'm torn between two men without throwing another into the mix. Even so, I can't help ogling Jace. My cheeks burn with embarrassment as he spots me standing there, staring. He flashes a knowing grin at me.

"Morning. You coming downstairs for breakfast?"

"In a bit, I'm gonna take a shower first."

“Need a hand?”

He leans against the door frame, a slight smirk on his lip as his unashamed gaze roams over me.

I roll my eyes but can't stop myself from smiling. “I think I can manage.”

“If you change your mind, just say the word. I happen to give excellent back rubs...”

Shaking my head ruefully, I head into the bathroom, making a point to shut the door loudly behind me.

“Just so you know, the guys and I are good at sharing...” I hear Jace chuckle as he walks away.

I can always count on Jace to lighten the mood. When he comes onto me, it doesn't feel as pointed as Axel or Knox. He's just a flirt. If I'm honest with myself, I find the attention flattering and unthreatening. It's a fact I chastise myself for in the shower.

My tumultuous thoughts are racing.

What did Jace mean about them sharing? Was he just teasing me, or do they genuinely enjoy sharing one woman? Is that even something I would want?

The idea feels taboo yet exhilaratingly exciting at the same time.

I remind myself to focus on the incredible sex I had last night with Axel, but thoughts of Knox and Jace creep their way in.

The kiss with Knox set me alight in a totally different way from Axel.

Yet I still have feelings for Axel. I wonder how far it would have gone with Knox if we hadn't been interrupted.

Then there's Jace. His handsome, easy grin and light-hearted nature.

After speaking with him and learning more about him, I feel like I understand him better.

I had him all wrong. Suddenly, I'm seeing him in a new light.

I've always found him attractive, but now I find myself imagining what it would be like to be with him sexually.

What the hell is wrong with me? I'm now living in a house with four men, all of whom have sworn to help raise the child I'm carrying, and the only guy I'm not currently fantasizing about and drooling over is Rider.

Even then, that's not totally true since I've definitely thought about it before.

I shove that thought way down, I don't need to add sexy thoughts of him to the list right now.

I can only assume that the pregnancy hormones are turning me into a horny, sex obsessed freak.

Having a reason for feeling like this does little to assuage my guilt or confusion, though. How the hell am I going to navigate my feelings without anyone getting hurt?

I take my time in the shower, washing my hair and standing under the hot stream of water until my mind finally settles a little. When I emerge from the bathroom, Axel is there.

“Hey, how are you feeling?” he says, coming over and pulling me into a warm embrace.

I lean into him, enjoying the solid, comforting feel of his body against mine, and I feel even guiltier than before.

If he knew what happened between Jace and me earlier, when only hours before we’d been hooking up and he saved my life, he’d no doubt hate me, and I couldn’t blame him.

I know he and the guys have shared women before, but I still feel guilty for kissing his friend behind his back.

Knox might have made the first move, but I kissed him back.

“I’m okay,” I lie. “Did you... Is the man...” I can’t bring myself to mention the dead man, but luckily, I don’t have to.

“Yes, it’s taken care of.”

“Do you know what they wanted?”

“Not yet. But we’re gonna visit the Hellhounds’ Prez and find out.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?”

“You don’t need to worry about that. Knox is gonna stay with you.”

“Knox should go with you,” I insist, a little too quickly. “I mean, I’m fine on my own.”

“There’s no way that’s about to happen. Besides, it will do you and Knox good. You need to work things out between you.”

My mind races as I wonder how he knows.

Did Knox tell him? Or has my attraction been that obvious? Is this his way of telling me I need to choose? Or what? Or does he have no idea what happened between us and is instead referring to the fact that up until recently, it seemed like Knox hated me and blamed me for his parents’ deaths?

I open my mouth to try to formulate some sort of response to figure out what he’s trying to tell me, but before I can speak, Axel gently cups my chin and places a soft, lingering kiss on my lips that momentarily wipes all thoughts from my mind.

He pulls away far too quickly, leaving me yearning for more.

“I’ll see you later,” he says, his eyes trying to silently tell me something I don’t understand before he goes, leaving me even more confused than ever.

I slowly take my time getting dressed, feeling anxious to face Knox. Which is ridiculous. It’s not like he’s going to immediately ravage me the second he sees me. A not altogether unpleasant thought, but perhaps not what I should be doing.

When I finally chastise myself to stop being a wimp and go downstairs, Knox is still undressed. It’s only then that it occurs to me that he’s been waiting until I’m out of his room for him to be able to shower and get dressed himself. I curse myself for my stupidity.

“Hey, I was starting to think you were avoiding me,” he says semi-accusingly, offering a forgiving smile. “I made breakfast, if you’re hungry.” He gestures to the table laden with food.

“Thanks.”

I take a seat and dig in. I was never much of a breakfast eater, but since finding out about the pregnancy, I’ve tried to be better at getting three square meals a day. Eating also means I can avoid any awkward conversation for a moment.

“I’m gonna head upstairs for a shower and get dressed. Do you need anything else before I go?”

“No, thanks.”

Knox heads off, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

I’m grateful for the reprieve. With him standing around half-naked, I can’t think straight.

While the last thing I want to do today is work, at least it stops me from being left alone with Knox too much.

I can’t trust myself. Even still, I’m not relishing having to plaster on a fake smile and deal with curious customers asking what happened last night, or worse yet, having to pretend nothing at all happened.

I’m feeling a little less frazzled when Knox returns. He swaggers into the room, looking as handsome as ever in a pair of jeans and a tight-fitting tee with his Steel Vipers leather jacket slung over the top. It’s warm and sunny today, but that doesn’t seem to bother him.

“Feeling up for an adventure?”

“I have to work, remember?” I reply, brow furrowed.

“Not anymore. I figured you deserve the day off after everything you went through. One of the other girls was more than happy to cover for you. We can stay in if you want, but I thought you might like to get out of here. Figured it would do you good.”

“That would be nice.”

He grins at me, pleased that I’ve agreed. “Come on then.”

The offer of getting away and clearing my head is too tempting to turn down.

“Alright, give me two seconds to go change,” I say before darting off.

I come back downstairs moments later in a comfortable and lightweight summer dress that’s an old favorite. I know that it looks good on me, hugging my curves in all the right places without being overly sexy. Knox looks at me appreciatively.

“Nice dress.”

I follow Knox outside eagerly, not even bothering to ask where we’re going yet. Knox leads the way to a sleek red convertible.

“I figured we can take the Mustang with the roof off, seeing as it’s such a nice day.”

“Wouldn’t you prefer to ride your motorcycle?”

“Always, but there’s no way I’m taking you on the back, it’s not safe for the baby.”

“I could drive behind you.”

“A more insecure man might think you’re avoiding being in a confined space alone with me,” Knox quips, having astutely figured out how close that is to the truth. “Get

in. I'm driving."

I do as I'm told, and I try not to move as he leans over to check my seatbelt is secure.

He places his jacket over my shoulders, the warm leather caressing my skin.

I hold my breath as I catch a whiff of his masculine scent.

My treacherous body reacts to his proximity, and I try to fight the attraction I feel toward him.

"It can get cold while we're driving," he says by way of explanation. "It looks good on you, too," he adds approvingly.

We drive in silence for a while as I gaze out of the window, avoiding looking at Knox for fear of the thoughts I might have.

Knox doesn't pressure me to talk, allowing me to simply relax and enjoy the drive.

He connects his phone playlist, the music a welcome distraction, and drives in comfortable silence.

I'm surprised by his eclectic music taste.

I tell him as much, and we happily chat about music for the rest of the journey.

When we arrive at a quiet beach, I can't believe how quickly the hour and a bit drive has passed.

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“It’s beautiful,” I say, taking in the surroundings. “But you should have said we were coming to the beach, we haven’t brought anything practical with us.”

“Why do you think I spent so long at the gas station? I got everything we need,” he declares proudly, heading to the trunk and producing bags of items.

Knox leads the way to a small, enclosed part of the beach that’s completely isolated. There’s no other person in sight. Just us and the ocean. My stomach fills with butterflies at the thought. Knox gets to work placing down a beach mat and an umbrella for us.

I lie back, using Knox’s jacket as a pillow, happily enjoying the warmth of the sun on my skin and the calming sounds of the ocean. Already, the events of last night feel further away.

After a while of relaxing in companionable silence, Knox turns to me. “Fancy a swim?”

I look over at the gently lapping waves with longing. My skin is hot from the sun, with a thin sheen of sweat. A dip in the cool ocean sounds incredible.

“We don’t have swimsuits,” I point out.

“So, there’s no one around.”

“There is no way I’m skinny dipping,” I scoff, raising my eyebrow.

He grins at me suggestively, his eyes undressing me. “I didn’t say anything about getting naked. We can go in our underwear, it won’t take long to dry off. Unless you really want to see me naked...” he teases.

Feeling bold and a little reckless, I decide to just go for it. “Keep it in your pants,” I reply, standing and pulling my dress over my head.

I’m grateful that I’m wearing a supportive and cute underwear set that isn’t too skimpy but not unflattering either.

I notice how my stomach has a slight curve now, and my breasts feel even fuller, thanks to the pregnancy.

A small part of me panics for a second, worrying that he’ll find me overweight and unattractive.

One glance at Knox helps me to push those insecurities down as he gapes at me approvingly.

“What are you waiting for?” I say, nodding at his fully dressed self.

Knox quickly pulls his t-shirt over his head before bending down to pull off his boots, hopping on one leg and nearly falling over in his hurry. I laugh and run ahead of him, the sand squishing between my toes, as I hear him struggling behind me.

“Come on, slowpoke!”

I run into the waves, feeling free and exhilarated as the water splashes against my skin.

Knox comes running after me, trying to catch up as I race ahead.

He quickly catches up to me and wraps his arm around my waist, lifting me up with ease as I giggle and wriggle in his arms. He lets me go, and I immediately spin around and splash him like a kid.

He stands in shock for a moment before chuckling and splashing me back.

“Alright, truce!” Knox says, holding up his hand in surrender.

We stop splashing and laugh, feeling like carefree teenagers.

Knox is so unpredictable. One minute he’s serious, a moody, violent manly man, and the next he’s acting like a harmless kid.

One minute, he hated me, and the next, he acted like he was into me and having fun with me.

It has me reeling, but it’s exciting and unpredictable too.

“Come on, there’s some dark clouds in the distance, we should dry off before it rains,” he says, nodding at the black cloud in the distance.

I nod reluctantly and follow him back to the shore.

I try not to look too closely at the way his wet boxers cling to him.

Knox hands me a towel, and I gratefully dry myself, sitting down and staring out at the ocean, trying not to focus on the warmth radiating from Knox sitting beside me.

The sexual tension between us is impossible to ignore.

“Do you know how beautiful you are?” he says gently.

He moves closer, reaching out to touch a strand of my wet hair. My nipples harden, and I know they must be visible through my wet bra.

What the hell am I doing?

I can't move, can't think. As naturally as breathing, he kisses me, and I kiss him back.

A guilty part of me thinks about Axel, and then I remember what he said before he left.

I feel like that was him giving me permission to explore my feelings for Knox.

I'm not ready to make a decision between the two of them, but perhaps I don't need to.

For the second time, just as I did with Axel, I stop questioning myself or wondering if it's right.

I simply give in to my desire and allow my body to guide me.

He kisses me passionately, moving so I'm lying down underneath him.

His hard chest pressed against me, his strong hands caressing my skin.

He kisses down my neck, burning his head in my chest, licking the saltwater from my skin.

He teases my nipples through my wet bra and removes it.

A brief thought crosses my mind about the possibility of someone catching us, but

I'm too turned on, too lost in the moment to care.

He continues his exploration of my body, his tongue and hands touching every inch of me.

He kisses the sensitive spot on my inner thighs, my pussy clenches and reacts, getting wet with anticipation.

He removes my soaked panties, and I tilt my pelvis to help, fully exposing myself and not caring who sees.

The thought of what we're doing—so exposed, fully giving into our desire and not caring about the sand or risk of being caught—only adds to my excitement.

He buries his tongue between my legs, licking my clit and eliciting a gasp from my mouth.

His expert tongue languidly moves in circles while he feels how wet I am with his finger.

Even though we're outdoors where anyone could walk past at any minute, he seems to be in no rush.

Knox is taking his time, and while there's a primal desperation filling me with need, there isn't the same hungry urgency as with Axel.

I try to push the thought of him away, but my mind wanders, imagining what it would be like if he were here too, which only serves to turn me on even more.

Knox slides his finger in my soaking wet slit, pulling my focus back to him and I groan as he continues to expertly circle my clit while he thrusts his fingers inside me.

I arch my back, enjoying the ocean breeze as it blows over my hardened nipples.

I'm covered in sand, but I don't care. All I can think about is how incredible it feels.

Each time I feel myself nearing climax, Knox changes the tempo slightly, bringing me to new levels of pleasure and holding me back from the edge. My orgasm builds inside me until I can no longer hold back the loud moans that might alert people to our presence.

"Fuck! Knox! Someone's going to hear us!" I cry out, even though I'm the culprit.

"Let them hear, baby."

"We'd have to stop then," I pant, which is the last thing I want to happen right now.

"Well, we wouldn't want that, would we? It's a shame Axel isn't here, I'm sure he'd be happy to occupy that mouth of yours with his cock..."

"That would be so good..." I can't help but blurt out and admit.

"Next time," Knox promises, sending me wild with hopeful anticipation.

The thought makes me even wetter as he delves his tongue back between my thighs, moving his fingers fast inside me and sending me crashing over the edge as I orgasm hard, my legs bucking. "Oh fuck! I'm cumming!" I cry out in pleasure.

He moves up beside me, not seeming to make a move to try to have sex with me.

"You're not done yet, are you?" I reach over, feeling how hard he is. "You certainly don't feel finished."

He lets out a grunt of pleasure, his eyes dancing wickedly as he looks at me. "I don't think you'd be able to stay quiet without a gag."

"So gag me," I challenge, feeling bold and desperate for more.

His eyes gleam with surprised arousal as he growls and moves to hover above me. He kisses me, and I can taste myself on his tongue. "Such a bad girl."

I reach out and pull his boxers down, releasing his impressively large cock that's already hard for me. I'm so wet still that I'm ready for him but even so, as he enters me I'm stretched and he has to move slowly until my body can fully accommodate him.

"Fuck, that feels good," I moan as he thrusts, my pussy clenching around him, still rippling with pleasure from the first orgasm.

"Am I going to have to gag you?"

"Yes!" I pant, eager for the new, taboo experience that is exciting me more than I would have expected.

A wicked grin dances across his mouth as he reaches for his discarded t-shirt and gently places it in my mouth, tying it around the back of my head. "I'd rather watch you sucking a cock while I fuck you, but this will have to do for now."

Oh god. This feels so unbelievably naughty yet so right, so incredible.

Knox fucks me harder before flipping me over onto all fours and entering me from behind.

He fills me, stretching me even further as his cock hits my g-spot and I loudly moan

against the gag.

He reaches forward, teasing my nipples as he thrusts inside me.

He gently pulls my hair, pulling me back to kiss my neck and shoulder.

If you'd asked me before if I enjoyed rough sex, I'd have said no. With my ex, it was painful and all about control. But with Knox, it feels safe, an act of trust. He spans me lightly, taking me by surprise. It sends a new, unexpected ripple of pleasure through me that has me wanting more.

My muffled moans of pleasure encourage him to continue as he fucks me hard and fast now. I'm soaking wet, the juices running down my thighs. I honestly can't say for certain I would stop right now if someone found us. It feels too fucking good and I'm lost in reckless abandon.

"Fuck, Leah, your pussy is incredible, you're so wet," he whispers in my ear, his breath warm as he bites the lobe of my ear and kisses my neck again.

Oh holy shit, that's hot. Fuck. I'm going to cum.

I cry out against the gag. My legs buckle out from underneath me as the orgasm hits me like a tidal wave.

"Oh fuck, yes, Leah."

Knox grunts and thrusts deep and hard and I feel him cumming as hard as I am as he mutually climaxes.

We stay still for a moment, panting and shuddering as the shockwaves of pleasure finish rippling their way through.

He gently pulls out of me and unties the t-shirt from around my head.

I roll onto my back, breathing heavily. He comes to lie down beside me, covering me with a towel just in case and placing a soft kiss on my lips, stroking the hair off my face.

“Wow...”

“Yeah... wow,” he says with a grin.

I can't help but grin back stupidly at him. We've gone and made everything a hundred times more complicated, but right now I couldn't care less.

Jace

The second Leah and Knox walk in the front door, it's obvious that they've hooked up. I can tell from the shit-eating grin on Knox's face and the flush on Leah's cheeks. She looks happy and relaxed. Knox certainly did his job and then some.

"Well, you two look like you had fun."

Predictably, Leah looks as guilty as sin. "We went to the beach."

"I can see that." I nod at the trail of sand behind them. "I hope I can join next time," I add with a wink, enjoying watching Leah squirm. "While you two were off having fun, we've been busy making progress."

"You have?" Knox interjects eagerly. "Do we know what the Hellhounds wanted with Leah?" He frowns, balling his fists, raring for a fight.

"Not yet, but we've got a lead. We're heading out to meet with the guys from the Vagabonds tonight to see what they know. Axel and Rider have already gone ahead to check out the place."

"What about Leah? We can't leave her here alone."

"That's why she's coming with us."

Both Leah and Knox seem startled by my response.

“I am?”

“She is?”

“The Vagabonds are allies, I think it would be good for Leah to meet others like us,” I say pointedly. “We’re meeting on neutral territory away from the Hellhounds. Leah will be safe with us. Besides, there’s some live music night at the bar we’re going to, Axel thought Leah would enjoy it.”

A pained look of guilt and shame flickers across Leah’s face.

It seems that the guys have failed to express to her how unbothered we are by sharing.

Though I suppose it’s not something you can really understand until you’re living it.

So many people who claim not to be jealous are lying to themselves.

“Well, go on and get ready then, we’ve gotta go soon.”

Leah nods and darts off, grateful for the escape. Knox hovers, wanting to follow but trying to play it cool.

“You look like the cat who got the cream,” I smirk at him.

He grins back proudly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You two have all the subtlety of a truck. You might as well go after her. But don’t forget that she’s fair game now, I’m not following the rules if you aren’t,” I say with a wink.

“I’d like to see you try.” Knox challenges with a wide grin that bares his teeth.

We’re always competitive with one another, especially when it comes to women, though we’re more than happy to share, we still try to one-up each other. I hope Leah knows what she’s let herself in for.

The party is in full swing by the time we arrive.

Leah’s eyes light up as she takes in her surroundings.

Her focus lands on the band on stage that is drawing a crowd of people to the dance floor with their popular rock classics.

She smiles and gets a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes as she subconsciously sways in time to the beat, lost in the music.

I can see why Axel wanted her to come tonight.

Leah is somehow even more breathtaking, the music igniting a passion from deep within her that brings her to life.

Like moths to a flame, every person we walk past is mesmerized.

I spot Rider across the room, ever alert, standing next to the booth where the others are sitting.

I take her hand under the pretext of guiding her through the crowd.

I’m reluctant to let her go when we get there, feeling strangely bereft without her

hand in mine as Axel introduces her to the others.

“Leah, this is Diego, Mateo, Rafael, and their old lady, Valentina. They’re part of the Vagabonds motorcycle clubs, allies of ours.”

I watch as Leah processes the information about the polyamorous partnership.

That’s no doubt the real reason why Axel wanted Leah here tonight.

The man isn’t exactly subtle, but at least he’s giving Leah another choice, showing her how things could work out if she wanted them to.

I wonder if that factors in Rider and me.

It certainly would for us, but I can’t tell if Leah likes me or merely tolerates me.

And while Rider is clearly smitten, his love language is aloof silence.

The man has zero game when it comes to women and has hardly dared to say two words to Leah.

Knowing Rider, he thinks that if he ever made a pass at Leah, she’d run screaming for the hills.

I’ve been so busy mulling over Leah’s reactions, I’ve missed the initial greetings.

Knox has also nabbed the seat on the other side of Leah, leaving me to perch on the edge.

Even though it’s completely obvious to me that Axel not only knows but also doesn’t mind that Knox and Leah hooked up, Leah seems uncomfortable.

It seems we're going to have to spell things out for her.

As we make small talk, Leah begins to relax. She and Valentina seem to get along, laughing and chatting. Valentina has a way of drawing people in and putting them at ease. I can tell Leah is itching to ask more about her relationship with the three guys, but is too polite and uncertain of how to.

Despite the turmoil that led us to arrange this meeting, it's good to catch up with the guys, regaling Leah with stories and making the girls laugh and roll their eyes over our stupid hijinks. Zeus was good friends with Diego's father, so we go way back.

"As much as we'd love to shoot the shit all night guys, I'm afraid this isn't just a social visit," Axel says.

The others nod solemnly. "We heard about Zeus and his old lady, they were good people. They didn't deserve to go out like that. Our apologies again for your loss, and that we were unable to attend the funeral."

"We were out of the country, taking the kids to meet their abuela, Rafael's mom, in Mexico," Valentina interjects for Leah's benefit.

No one else but me spots how Knox lightly squeezes Leah's leg, a silent instruction not to reveal her interest in the children by giving away her pregnancy. The Vagabonds are our friends, but right now we don't know who we can trust. It's safer to keep the baby a secret for now.

Axel inclines his head in acknowledgement. "As you are aware, the Hellhounds are responsible for their murders. Last night, two of them infiltrated our bar in disguise and then broke into Zeus' home where Leah and I were sleeping. We want to know what their goal is."

Mateo shrugs. “Isn’t it obvious? They’re making moves on your club, and want to eliminate any threats. You’re the most obvious candidate to replace Zeus as Prez. Either they want to ensure a Hellhound sympathizer takes over, or they want to destroy you completely.”

“True, but the Hellhounds pale in comparison to the Steel Vipers. A move like this before would be suicide, but something’s changed. Not only have they managed to evade us, it looks like they’ve recruited a bunch of new members overnight.”

Leah looks surprised by this information.

We’ve managed to keep the situation hidden from her so far.

Even so, I thought she’d have figured it out by now.

It’s the only reason the Hellhounds are still standing and not immediately crushed by us following the first attack.

It’s another reminder of how Leah doesn’t belong in our world.

We’ll do anything to protect her and those babies, but she has no idea about the lifestyle she’s found herself a part of.

“We don’t know of any new alliances with the Hellhounds, and they can’t have this many new prospects without a serious cash injection.

The idiots that came for us last night were going rogue, the attack was sloppy and largely unprepared, whereas everything else has been coordinated and professional.

What we need to know is who is behind this and why. ”

Diego scratches his beard thoughtfully. “I’ve heard rumors of a crime boss who was looking to buy out an MC.

Most turned him down, he was into some real nasty shit that goes against most of our codes of ethics.

We might be one percenters, but we’ve got our morals.

I didn’t get to meet the man, but he sent some of his guys to propose a deal some months back now.

They were pretty cryptic, but made it clear that in exchange for helping with some serious shit they’d make us more rich and powerful than we could imagine.”

“What kind of shit?”

“The kinda shit we ain’t touching. Human trafficking, even of kids. The real basest shit that only monsters fuck around with,” he spits in disgust.

“Did you get a name?”

Diego shakes his head in disappointment. “Whoever this guy is, he’s a ghost. If the Hellhounds are working for him, they’re no longer an inconsequential rival.”

“Can you do some digging?”

“Of course, brother. If they’re coming for the Vipers, we won’t be far behind. Men like this are never satisfied.”

With the heavy stuff out of the way, I try to lighten the mood, flirting and teasing the girls and generally acting the clown.

Sometimes a little light relief is needed when you're in the midst of a war, and it's become all too clear that this fight between the Hellhounds and their mysterious partner is only just beginning.

Luckily, I'm good at it, and soon everyone is able to push the darkness to the back of their minds and enjoy the rest of the evening as we slip back into easy banter between friends.

"Next up on stage, Mateo," the announcer calls.

Mateo stands, kissing Valentina on the cheek. "Ah, mi amore , a song for you."

She kisses him back, smiling indulgently and watching him as he walks to the stage.

"Wait, is this an open mic night?" Leah asks in surprise as she finally realizes.

"It sure is, why, do you want a shot on stage?"

Leah balks like a deer in headlights. "Oh no... I don't... I couldn't..."

"Sure, you could! A little birdie told me you're a musician, I'd love to hear you sing!"

Leah shoots Axel a filthy glare, but after some wheedling peer pressure from Valentina, I can see that the only thing holding her back when she really wants to perform is her nerves.

"I'd offer to get up with you, but I sound like a drowning cat when I sing. I couldn't be blessed with the voice of an angel as well as the face," I quip.

"I'll get up with you to perform with you, if you want."

Our gazes snap up to Rider in disbelief.

Our silent, stoic friend who hides in the shadows and would rather disappear into the furniture is offering to get up to stand and perform on stage.

Before the war, Rider was a hell of a musician, but the only time we ever hear him play guitar now is at home, when the haunting, melancholy sounds can be heard late at night when he can't sleep.

"You play?" she asks, pleasantly surprised.

"He's incredible," Knox interjects with excited wonder.

"Alright then, I'll go up if Rider comes with me," Leah steels herself determinedly.

Seeming not to trust himself to speak, or perhaps wondering what possessed him to offer in the first place, Rider nods.

"Come on, we can sign you two up now and then find a spot at the front of the stage, Mateo is about to start!" Valentina squeals excitedly, grabbing Leah's hand and leading the way.

Mateo gets the crowd riled up, and Valentina dances provocatively with Diego and Rafael, not caring who is watching.

Any hope I had of a similarly raunchy dance with Leah is dashed as she and Rider lose themselves in a deep discussion about music.

I can't be too gutted that I don't get a chance to show off my dirty dancing moves, though, since this is the most animated I've seen Rider in a long time.

When they finally take the stage, it's clear they're both nervous as hell, but as soon as Rider starts to play guitar, Leah picks up the melody and begins to sing.

A hush descends over the room as people stop to take notice.

They're good. Really good. Leah has a sultry voice with a natural cadence.

She might not hit crazy high notes or sound ultra polished like most artists in LA, but her voice has soul.

A raw talent that works perfectly with Rider accompanying.

My eyes are glued to her and I couldn't look away, even if I wanted to.

She's incredible. I finally look at my best friend, and if I hadn't fallen in love with Leah already, looking at him now decides it for me.

For a brief moment, Rider is the man I thought we'd lost. He's not the tortured, scarred shell, the ghost that returned from the war, but the enigmatic leader who once lit up any room.

The pair lose themselves in the music, performing several songs to the delighted audience before finally finishing to rapt applause.

Leah jumps into Rider's arms, hugging him and planting a kiss on his scarred cheek.

He's so happy he doesn't even flinch. As he places Leah back down, she beams at us before finally taking in the audience.

Only then does her stage fright kick in.

Her eyes widen in horror, and she looks as if she's seen a ghost. Before we can react, she flees off stage and rushes to the ladies' room.

I've no idea how she can be afraid. She's incredible. For a moment, she conjured true magic on that stage.

At that moment, I knew I was lost. Like a groupie and their favorite band, I know I'll follow her anywhere.

Leah

My heart is hammering in my chest, and bile fills my throat as I race to the restroom, barely making it into the cubicle before puking, the vomit splashing against the porcelain as I retch.

Being sick from stage fright isn't uncommon for me, coupled with being in the first trimester of pregnancy, I'd almost say that this was an expected outcome.

I wish that were the case.

But the real reason I'm sick to my stomach is because I saw him.

My ex.

I don't know how or why he was there, but one minute I was on cloud nine having just performed the best I possibly ever have, and the next he was there, staring at me from the back of the room.

How did he find me?

Was it just a coincidence?

Perhaps he's here for some unrelated reason.

But this isn't the sort of place he normally ever comes to.

He hated live music venues like this. He called them dive bars.

He only wanted to frequent the high-end establishments.

It's one of the reasons he hated me getting gigs and performing in bars like this.

As my panic fades, I start to wonder if the whole thing was in my imagination.

With the adrenaline and residual stage fright, is it possible I imagined seeing him, the one person I was most afraid to see?

The person who has held me back from performing.

Could the man I saw have simply looked similar?

It's a dark club, and he was all the way across the room, perhaps my imagination is getting the better of me.

"Hey, chica, it's Valentina, you doing alright in there?"

With the nausea gone, I clean myself up and emerge from the stall. "Yeah, I'm okay, thanks." I offer my new friend a weak smile.

"How many weeks?" she asks, nodding at my stomach and giving me a sympathetic grimace. "I was sick as a dog for the first three months with both of mine."

I contemplate denying it before realizing it's pointless lying. "It's early days, only a few weeks or so."

"Do you know which of your four is the father?"

“Oh, we’re not... I mean... I’ve only slept with Axel and Knox,” I offer. I stop myself from revealing the baby’s true parents.

Valentina studies me curiously. “Something tells me that Jace and Rider would be interested in joining the relationship too. Are you not interested? Or are you still figuring out what you want?”

“Something like that,” I admit, struggling to find the words. “I guess it never occurred to me that I could date more than one guy at a time without anyone getting hurt.”

Valentina nods understandingly. “I get it, it’s not easy, and as women we’re often told not to want too much or that having feelings for more than one person is shameful or makes us a whore, but at the end of the day, the heart wants what the heart wants.

The way I see it is, if me and my guys love each other and we’re happy with our relationship, who gives a fuck what anyone else thinks. ”

“I admire your attitude, but it’s not hard to see why your men would be happy to share you.

You’re gorgeous, vibrant, funny, kind, and smart.

But what on earth do the guys see in me?

Sure, they might want a bit of fun, but I can’t believe that all four of them would want anything long-term or serious like what you have.

I’ve seen the sort of women who hang around the club, I’m nothing compared to them. ”

“You’re too harsh on yourself. It’s blatant from where I’m standing that all four of those men are like lovesick puppies, you’re the one with all the power here.

And don’t you dare put yourself down! They’d be lucky to have you, and they know it,” she chastises me, turning me to face the mirror and look at my reflection.

“All of those things you said about me are exactly what everyone else sees when they look at you. You’ve just gotta see it for yourself, chica. ”

“Thanks, Valentina, I’m glad to have met you, I hope we can become good friends.”

She beams at me, pulling me into a perfumed hug.

I’ve not got many female friends, and it feels nice to have made one who helps me to feel a bit less shameful for having feelings for all four of the guys.

Because if I’m being honest with myself, I’m physically and emotionally attracted to each of them.

Performing with Rider tonight opened a window into the heart of the man he hides, that I can’t deny I found alluring.

I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want to get to know each of the guys more.

Now I can consider that actually being a possibility without feeling guilty for wanting it in the first place.

By the time Valentina and I emerge from the restroom, chatting like old friends, I’ve all but forgotten my ex.

As I glance around the room, I don’t see any sign of him, and I convince myself that

it was all in my imagination.

I resolve to enjoy the rest of my night without letting that man take up another second of my thoughts.

It's late when we arrive home, but I don't feel tired.

I'm filled with nervous energy as I wrestle with my decision.

While I now think that the guys may be open to sharing, it's a whole other level to go from knowing that information to actually doing something about it.

I also know that the guys would never force me into it.

If I want this to happen, I've got to be the one to make the first move.

Almost as if they sense my hesitation, they hover around in the living room uncertainly.

"Valentina and the guys are nice," I offer casually. "Their relationship is interesting... What do you guys think of it?"

"The time for coyness is gone, I think, Leah. So why don't you be a big girl and ask us what you really want to ask?"

I ought to have realized that Knox, being the wild card, wouldn't let me get away with tiptoeing around saying what I want.

His eyes dance with a feral, taunting energy.

I know what he's getting at. If I can't talk about this candidly, without embarrassment or shame, then how am I supposed to become sexually involved with all four of them without it getting messy?

The baby is the most important thing, as much as I want the guys.

I need to know that if we do this, no matter what happens next, it won't negatively impact the baby.

Taking a deep breath, I straighten my spine and meet each of their eyes in turn. "I think it's pretty obvious that I'm attracted to all of you. You've mentioned that the four of you have shared women before, so I guess I'm wanting to know if you want to share me..."

For a brief moment, I want the ground to swallow me whole as I wonder if I've completely made a fool of myself, but then the guys slowly move closer.

Axel places his hand on my hip and tilts my chin up gently with the other, so I meet his gaze.

My breath catches as I see the burning desire in his eyes.

"We'd be only too glad to share you, beautiful, but I'm gonna need to be sure we're talking about the same thing here," he murmurs, challenging me.

I feel a surge of confidence, almost as if he knew that making me demand what I want and not be afraid of how it sounds is making me embrace my deepest desires.

I hold his gaze, showing no hesitation as I leave no room for misinterpretation. "I want all four of you to fuck me right here, right now."

A shiver of wicked excitement runs down my spine.

Like I've spoken the magic words out loud, the sweet, charming, sometimes even gentle guys I've come to know finally reveal the dark sides they've kept hidden from me.

Now they look every inch the rugged, masculine, and downright dangerous yet sexy men I want to ravage me.

"I thought you'd never ask," Axel purrs, pulling me in for a passionate kiss.

I run my hands across the hard planes of his chest, tearing at his clothes.

Knox moves behind me, his fingers reaching up my skirt to stroke my pussy through the lace of my panties.

I let out a gasp of surprised pleasure as he teases me while Axel pulls my dress over my head.

With his spare hand, Knox expertly unhooks my bra, and in perfect sync, Axel removes it.

My aching breasts spring free, and I feel a jolt of pleasure at the groan of appreciation the sight pulls from Jace's lips.

My focus switches to him, and I watch as he stands there enjoying the view while Axel licks and sucks my nipples which harden like pebbles.

Knox buries his fingers in my hair, pulling my head back and kissing my neck while he lazily strokes my clit.

My panties are slick with arousal, and I can feel his erection straining against his pants as he presses against my side.

I reach back and place my hand on it, stroking Axel's cock with my other hand.

Someone's hand, I'm not sure whose, guides my panties down, leaving me bare.

"No fair, I'm the only one who's naked," I pout.

"You heard the lady," Jace says with a smile, slowly removing his clothes.

It's clear to see why he's not shy, his body looks like it's carved from marble and his cock is thick, long, and straight, hard and ready for me.

He guides me over to the sofa while the others remove their clothes.

Knox and Axel look every bit as sexy as I remember.

Rider hesitates for a moment, seeming to be surprised to find himself included as he hangs back.

The others waste no time in moving around me and continuing their sexual exploration.

Jace drops to his knees, confidently spreading my knees wide and burying his tongue in my pussy.

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I let out a moan of pleasure as his tongue dances over my clit.

For some reason, I'd imagined Jace was the kind of guy who didn't give oral sex and was more about his own pleasure, but the way he throws himself into the task with enthusiasm lets me know just how wrong I'd gotten him.

Axel and Knox move to either side of me, both teasing my nipples.

The feeling of all three of them pleasuring and touching me at the same time, while I can feel Rider's focus on me, is driving me wild.

I reach out to take both Knox and Axel's hard cocks in each hand stroking them as they strain and get even harder.

"Fuck, that feels good," I gasp as Jace fucks me with his tongue, delving deep inside as his finger teases the entrance of my ass sending ripples of new pleasure through my body.

I've always been intrigued by ass play but my ex acted disgusted as though it was filthy. Now the thought of what it would be like to have every hole filled or to be able to fuck all four of the guys at once enters my mind.

I take Axel in my mouth, tasting the salty precum as I lick his tip before opening my mouth wide and taking him as deep as I can.

I twirl my tongue around his edge, using my hand to cup his balls and work his shaft as he slowly thrusts in and out of my throat.

Knox pinches and licks my nipples, alternating between sharp and soft, pleasure and pain that is driving me wild.

Every sense is on high alert, and my body is in overdrive.

“Fuck, Leah, you’re incredible,” Axel growls, pulling his cock away as he tries to stop himself from cumming too soon.

I move my focus to Knox, taking his cock in my mouth next, giving Axel a moment’s break before alternating between the two.

It feels so incredibly naughty, and yet so right at the same time.

Soon, I find it harder to focus on what I’m doing as Jace drives me insane with his tongue, bringing me closer and closer to the edge.

I’m dripping wet and so turned on that my ass eagerly takes his finger as he delves another into my slit and strokes my clit with his thumb and his tongue in tandem.

“Holy shit!” I cry out as the men’s focus hones in on me, their own pleasure momentarily forgotten as they all work toward the goal of making me orgasm.

Knox and Axel both take a nipple in their mouths, teasing and licking them, sending ripples of sensation right between my legs.

“Oh my god, I’m gonna cum!” I scream as I feel the orgasm hit me like a tidal wave.

Jace moves to position his hard cock at my entrance, I nod my consent, unable to formulate words as waves of pleasure still ripple through me.

He thrusts slowly into me, filling me up inch by inch until I can feel everything.

I'm so wet and turned on that he easily slides inside.

I don't think I've ever been this turned on.

Jace is a far more sensual lover than I expected, but it's building the anticipation and driving me wild with thoughts of what's to come.

"Fuck, Leah, you feel even better than you taste, and you taste fucking delicious," he growls, leaning forward to kiss me so I can taste for myself.

The others sit back and enjoy the show, lazily stroking themselves as they watch Jace fuck me. My gaze drifts to Rider, who still hasn't joined in yet but is watching intensely. He's still fully dressed, and I wonder why, though he touches himself inside his pants.

"Come here, Rider."

"I'm not sure you're ready for Rider just yet, baby girl," Knox tells me. "He plays rough."

Now that I've given in to my urges, I want everything. I want it all. Everything they can give. I'm hungry for more, no matter how wild or dirty it is. I tell them as much.

"Baby, we've hardly even taken the training wheels off."

"Then give it to me, I want all of you at the same time," I insist, panting as Jace continues to fuck slowly and lazily, taking his time and making me feel every inch of him.

"So greedy," Jace teases.

“Let’s try three of us first and go from there,” Axel growls.

“Yes, please,” I beg, desperate for them to fuck me at the same time.

Jace wraps my legs around his waist and easily picks me up while his cock is still buried deep inside me, he lies back down on the couch, finding the perfect angle where I’m on all fours on top of him with my ass sticking in the air.

Jace grips my hips and bounces me up and down his cock while Axel comes to stand at the end of the couch so I can take him in my mouth.

From behind me, I can feel Knox teasing my ass with his finger.

I let out a moan of surprise, the vibrations against Axel’s cock making him groan too as I feel Knox’s tongue against my ass.

I’m so lost in the pleasure that I only notice Rider has gone for a moment before he returns and hands something to Knox. A moment later, I feel the cool, wet sensation of the lube as Knox rubs his cock against my ass, teasing me but not entering.

Holy shit, this feels so insanely bad yet so good at the same time.

“Do you want me to fuck your ass, Leah?”

“Yes, god yes,” I groan before taking Axel back in my mouth.

Slowly, he enters me from behind, allowing my body to accommodate him fully before he starts to move.

With Jace in my pussy too I feel the fullest I’ve ever felt, every part of my body is being claimed, and I can barely think straight.

Almost immediately I know I'm going to cum.

It's as if with every inch of me taken up, the pressure of another orgasm is building, and like a volcano, I'm about to erupt.

I completely lose myself to the pleasure I feel.

The feeling of Rider's intense gaze, watching me as he pleases himself, only turns me on more.

Even my darkest imaginings weren't as good as this.

Now I feel as though I'm being dragged along by the current as if I've given over to some deeper, instinctual side of me.

"Shit, I'm going to explode!" I scream as I feel the orgasm hit me like a ton of bricks.

Everything clenches and spasms as the most intense orgasm of my life roars its way through my body.

"Ah fuck, Leah, I'm cumming too," Knox gasps, unable to hold himself back as he cums hard inside my ass.

I'm still shaking as the guys move positions with Jace's cock now in my mouth and Axel taking me doggy style from behind.

As the first time with Axel, he fucks me hard and fast, the animalistic passion between us is there again and exactly what I need.

I want more and need more. I want whatever they think I can't handle.

I'm tired of being the good little girl everyone thinks I am, that my ex wanted me to be. It's time for me to be bad.

They fuck me hard and fast as we lose ourselves in pleasure. "Shit, baby, I'm gonna cum," Jace moans as I suck his cock, taking it all the way.

He moves to pull out, but I stop him. "I want to taste you." With those words, he can't hold back any longer, and I taste the salty, sweet taste of him on my tongue.

Axel flips me over to sit on top of him, facing backward, so I'm looking right at Rider.

He watches me with hungry desire while Knox and Jace tease my nipples and clit as I bounce up and down on Axel's cock.

I don't take my eyes off Rider's. I want him so badly because of the fact that he's the last one I've been denied.

But he doesn't move. He shakes his head slightly. A refusal, at least for now.

When the guys bring me to orgasm yet again, I feel the last of my energy fading as Axel and I cum at the same time.

I'm panting and spent, my whole body utterly depleted.

My gaze falls back onto Rider as I wonder what it is that they're holding back and why he didn't join in.

A rush of excitement runs through me at the thought of how much better it could be with all four of them.

Like an addict, I'm itching for my next hit already.

My entire world has been turned upside down in a sexual awakening.

But I know this once wasn't enough. Now I've had a taste, I want more.

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Rider

N ow that we've given in to our attraction and embraced this unique situation, we have been unable to keep our hands off of Leah, well, the others have, I've been rather more 'hands-off' in my approach.

I've been taking great pleasure in watching the others driving Leah wild and fucking her senseless.

However, I haven't progressed beyond observing.

I can tell that Leah's blaming my reluctance to take things further on herself. I'm sure she's wondering if perhaps I am not attracted to her. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Surely, she must realize that isn't the case, else why would I join in at all?

It's frustrating that I can't simply tell Leah the truth, that it has nothing to do with her and everything to do with me, but how do I even begin to explain my feelings to her?

For now, the guys and I agree that Leah's got her hands full as it is with the three of them.

We're all concerned about the baby and the strain on her body that all this sex could cause, especially if she has rough sex.

Given my proclivities toward rougher, more risqué sex, it's for the best that I steer well clear.

Besides, I can only imagine that I'm the pity fuck.

The token extra, that nobody really wants to be there.

Leah might want to sleep with me now, but the second she sees me naked, that would change.

The thought of watching her try to hide her disgust at the sight of my disfigured body has held me back from joining in. I couldn't bear it.

It seems the pregnancy hormones are making her entirely insatiable.

Watching her give in completely has me fantasizing about all of the things I'd like to do to her if things were different.

I imagine how she'd taste, and feel, how my name would sound on her lips, how her beautiful curves would look tied and bound, wrapped up like a present for me.

What can I say? Pregnancy suits her.

Whether it's the pregnancy hormones or being with us, Leah's acting like a whole new person.

Her confidence has increased in spades, and not just in the bedroom.

Since the night she and I got up and performed on stage, she's been singing again.

Listening to her is the highlight of my day.

Every day when she comes to my room to ask if I want to jam with her, I can't believe my luck that she wants to spend time with me.

I look forward to those moments more than she could imagine.

It gives me the perfect opportunity to spend time with her, to be in her presence, without the need for awkward small talk. We can simply enjoy music together.

The others and I have been encouraging her not only to perform at the Steel Vipers clubhouse but also in some other places. For the most part, I push her to perform alone, but occasionally she wears me down and I get up with her. For those brief moments, I feel like the old me again.

The other day, Leah was offered her first paid solo gig performing at the grand opening of a posh new restaurant in town.

As it's such an exclusive VIP night, she's only allowed to take one person with her.

The guys have been squabbling over who gets to accompany her ever since.

I've not even dared to hope she might want me to go with her.

Although we share a love of music, I'm hardly the first person you think of as being a dream date.

I stand out like a sore thumb, and I'm the opposite of a sparkling conversationalist. I wish Leah could have known me before the army.

"So, Leah, today is the day of the big gig. Have you finally made up your mind about which of us you want to take with you?" Knox asks as we sit down for breakfast.

She's been struggling to make up her mind ever since she received the invite and the plus one. Typical Leah, she's worrying about hurting our feelings and doesn't want us to feel like she's picking a favorite.

“Not you, dude, you’d scare half the patrons away,” Jace points out, poking Knox in the ribs, though it’s all in good fun. “They’d take one look at you and probably refuse you both entry. I can’t imagine there will be any other people with tattooed faces there.”

He’s not wrong. I’m pretty confident Knox knows this and won’t be upset if she doesn’t pick him because of that. It’s not exactly his scene, either. Plus, he’s such a wild card especially if he’s had a drink and I doubt she’d want to risk missing out on potential future work if he acts out.

“He’s got a point, there’s probably some kind of dress code,” she says, politely rebuffing him with an apologetic shrug.

Knox sighs theatrically, clutching his heart as if wounded, before laughing and winking. “No problem, babe. I wouldn’t want to distract from your big night.”

“Well then, that puts the other two out of the running, too. Axel stands out like a sore thumb, and Rider isn’t exactly a dazzling conversationalist,” Jace says. “Come on, Leah, you know that I’m the best choice. Put me in a suit and I’ll pass as one of them. Plus, I’m a mean dancer.”

Jace is right, he’s the most logical choice, and despite our previous joking and arguing over who should be my plus one, we all agree. The guys are also too kind to point out that my face is even more likely to result in them refusing us entry than Knox’s.

“I want Rider to come with me. If it wasn’t for him performing with me that first time, none of this would have happened.”

It takes me a moment to register what Leah’s just said.

Does she really want me to go with her, or is she just offering out of a misplaced sense of obligation?

“Are you sure? Jace is right, he’s the better choice.”

Despite trying to convince myself I didn’t even want to go, now that she’s invited me, I feel like the kid who never gets picked for the team being asked first. Bewildered, delighted, and mildly suspicious.

“Yes, I insist. So, will you come with me?” She looks up at me with wide, earnest eyes, as if she’s seeking my approval and acceptance, not the other way around.

I search her expression for any doubts, and seeing none, I nod in sheepish agreement. I feel a wave of relief that she doesn’t seem appalled by the prospect of spending the evening alone with me.

I silently process the new development, trying to remember where the hell I stored all my suits.

It’s been so long since I’ve needed to wear one.

I didn’t even need one for the funeral. The guys fall into easy banter as we eat breakfast. We’ve all got busy days ahead of us, so we finish quickly and go get ready.

These days, the war between the Steel Vipers and the Hellhounds is escalating, keeping us all occupied.

It doesn’t help that the club is still leaderless, which makes everything take ten times longer.

With the new president still undecided, the longstanding officers vote on all the

decisions during church, but they never seem to agree on anything.

We all think Axel just needs to take control and proclaim himself the new Prez.

But he doesn't want to rule by tyranny—the club is a democracy, and he wants to be elected fairly.

Still, things can't continue like this forever.

If we have any hope of defeating the Hellhounds and ending this feud for good, we need to be united.

Work passes quickly, and before I know it, it's time for me to go home and get ready for the evening.

After getting dressed, I'm standing uncomfortably in a suit, as I wait anxiously at the bottom of the stairs. The guys are all waiting with me, as eager to see Leah dressed up as I am.

I feel ridiculous, as though I'm trying to pretend to be Prince Charming when, in reality, I'm the beast. Despite my embarrassment, I've done my best to make myself look as presentable as possible.

I had a fresh haircut, my short back and sides have been cut with military precision, and my beard is neatly trimmed.

If only it weren't for the huge, noticeable scar that slashes its way through my eye and across my cheek, I'd say I look good.

If not handsome, then at least presentable.

My mouth practically hits the floor when Leah appears at the top of the stairs.

She looks radiant. Pregnancy suits her, her skin is glowing, and she has a serene beauty that comes from within.

She's starting to show a little, even though she's only ten weeks pregnant, but she hides it well.

The cornflower blue dress highlights her full breasts and skims over her stomach with flowing draping material.

"You look beautiful, Leah," I manage to say, feeling tongue-tied.

Not that I'm the most talkative person anyway.

"Thank you, you look very handsome yourself."

"That's generous of you," Jace teases, nudging me playfully. I'm inclined to agree. Leah's too nice to say otherwise, though. "It's not too late to change your mind, Leah. It'd take me five minutes to throw on a tux."

She simply shakes her head and smiles at him ruefully.

"You look beautiful," Axel chimes in, coming over to kiss her. "Take care of her," he tells me, shaking my hand.

While we've all shared women before, I can tell that for Axel, it is different this time.

I think it is for all of us. Leah's different.

Perhaps that's why I'm so scared to take the next step.

If I screw this up what would that mean?

The guys are my brothers. I know I could never lose them, we've been through too much for that, but I wouldn't want to make things awkward either.

How mortifying it would be if Leah rejected me and only me.

"If the posh fuckers give you any trouble, call us and we'll be right there. You're gonna blow them away," Knox says confidently, kissing her hand.

I can tell she feels overwhelmed by the support.

I get the impression that Leah isn't used to having unconditional support.

She can't seem to get her head around how neither Axel, Jace, nor Knox are jealous or upset that they can't come with us.

They're just as proud and excited that it's happening.

I hope tonight confirms for her that she's exactly where she should be and with people who truly care about her and would do anything for her.

We finish saying our goodbyes, and head out.

Leah and I remain in neutral conversational territory on the drive there, talking about music and the gig tonight.

I'm sure that she's hoping bringing me with her tonight means she can get to know me better.

The problem is, I'm not sure she'll like what she finds if she chips away at some of the hard, protective shell that I have around me.

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Leah

A bout two-thirds through my performance, a couple of big, burly security guards quietly approach Rider and say something to him.

Immediately, I'm on high alert, trying to watch what is going on without the audience noticing I'm distracted.

Rider doesn't seem overly concerned, which helps keep me calm.

He nods and gestures for the men to lead the way before looking up and catching my eye.

He gives me a small, reassuring smile and holds up his hand, fingers splayed wide to show he'll be back in five minutes before he follows the men across the room and through a door that's marked 'staff only'.

I manage to make it through the next couple of songs, assuming that perhaps he needed to move the car or something. But the longer he's gone, the more worried I'm getting. The second I finish my set, I hurriedly pack up my equipment and beeline in the direction Rider went.

"Excuse me, Miss, the owner would like a word with you," a formidable security guard says, blocking my path.

I'm torn. I'm worried about Rider, but I could be overreacting, and he's perfectly capable of handling himself. While I want to find him, I also don't want to jeopardize

my career by pissing off the boss. I reason that I can ask about Rider, say a quick hello, and then make my excuses.

“Right, yes, of course. I don’t suppose you happen to know where your colleagues escorted my friend to? The tall gentleman with the scar on his cheek?”

“No, sorry.” He doesn’t sound particularly sorry.

“I really need to—”

The words die on my lips, and I forget what I was saying as we near the VIP table. Seated behind a pillar where I couldn’t see him, but had a perfect view of the stage, is the one person I hope I’d never have to see again.

His name falls from my lips in hushed disbelief. “Tony.”

My ex.

My legs turn to jelly, and I freeze. The bouncer firmly grips my elbow and steers me toward the table. I can’t run.

“Leah, long time no see. Please, sit,” Tony says, his voice cordial but firm. “Please, hand over your purse and phone to my colleague here, he’ll look after them for you.”

There’s no point in refusing him. He always gets what he wants, one way or another. He used to relish telling me how I’d chosen the hard way.

“Where is Rider? What have you done with him?” I demand, forcing myself to look into his reptilian eyes.

“Sit,” he says, his voice cold and firm.

The brute of a bouncer moves toward me, and I quickly sit before he can put his hands on me and force me to.

Tony nods approvingly, seeming pleased that I've not forgotten his 'lessons'.

Tony dismisses the rest of the people at the table with a disdainful flick of his wrist. The two scantily clad young women shoot daggers at me as they leave.

I want to tell them that they're welcome to him, or that they should run now while they have the chance, but I don't.

"Where is he?"

"Your grotesque friend was putting my customers off and making the place look bad, so I had my men escort him somewhere private."

Fury boils in my veins. I refuse to rise to his taunting, defending Rider's looks will only serve to anger him or make him resort to even crueler remarks.

"That doesn't answer my question."

"I'll have my men take you to him shortly. But first, I wanted us to catch up. It's been too long. It took me a long time to find you. Where have you been hiding?"

"That's none of your business."

"Well, now, that's not strictly true, is it? After all, I'm your employer currently. I'd say I have a right to know about your previous employment, don't I?"

I snort at him with derision. "If I'd known this was your club, I wouldn't have accepted the gig. I certainly won't be working for you again. Now, where is my

friend?”

Tony sighs as if I'm a particularly irritating child who won't do as I'm told. "He's fine. I'm trying to have a conversation with you, Leah. Can we not obsess over this nobody, who is he to you? You're not sleeping with him, are you?"

"That's none of your business." I fold my arms, stubbornly refusing to play his game.

"You're beginning to sound like a broken record, Leah. If it weren't for the fact that I know my girl better, I'd be concerned that you're romantically involved with this disgusting loser. But of course, that would be ridiculous since you're mine."

I almost blurt out everything about my relationship with the guys just to see the look on his face, but I hold myself back.

Tony is wildly possessive, jealous, and dangerous.

Who knows how he'd react? Until I know where Rider is, I can't risk angering him.

I need to find out how Tony found me and how much he knows about my relationship with the Steel Vipers.

"If I thought that this... man," he sniffs as if Rider barely qualifies as human in his eyes, "had any romantic intentions toward you, I'd have to make an example of him. People need to know what happens if they touch what's mine."

"No. No, he's just a friend," I stammer.

Tony once blinded a man for looking at me the wrong way.

I can't let myself forget how cruel and dangerous he is.

He's also good at reading me, and I'm thankful that I haven't slept with Rider, because I think if I had, then neither of us would be safe.

He nods, seemingly happy to accept it, at least for now.

I dread to think what might have happened if one of the others had come with me. Tony is so shallow that it wouldn't occur to him that I'd be attracted to a man with a scar. One look at any of the others and he'd fly into a jealous rage.

"Let's cut the crap, shall we, Leah?"

I nod, not trusting myself to speak. This pleases him, mistaking my silence for compliance.

"That's enough running around now. You've had your space, and you've gotten yourself in trouble. I know all about the people you've been hanging around with. They're not the sort of people a person like you should be associating with. You're mine. It's time to come home."

I want to laugh at how deluded he is. Does he really think I'm going to come back to him? I don't bother to tell him that I don't want to be with him. Anything negative I say about him will fall on deaf ears.

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I will help my new dogs destroy the Steel Vipers, starting with your new friend, Rider."

I don't doubt that Tony is deadly serious.

His family is the largest crime family in LA.

If he wants to destroy the Steel Vipers, he can easily do it.

The mention of 'dogs' makes my heart drop as I realize what this could mean.

Is Tony working with the Hellhounds? I feel sick to my stomach at the thought that he might have been involved in Zeus and Donna's deaths.

Could the real reason they were killed be because of me?

But if that's the case, surely that must mean he knows about the baby.

There's no way Tony would tolerate me being pregnant with another man's child, even if that man is dead and never laid a finger on me.

I have to pray that he doesn't know about the baby yet.

I push my concerns to the back of my mind.

Right now, I need to focus on getting Rider out of here.

If he doesn't leave this building with me now, he never will.

If Tony kills Rider and takes me captive now, it won't take him long to figure out I'm pregnant.

I don't allow myself to think about what he will do when he finds out.

"Alright, let's say I agree to come back. I need you to make me some promises so we can do this the easy way," I say, using his own words against him.

He raises an eyebrow in amusement. Thankfully, he decides to humor me. "Go on..."

“Let me and Rider go now. I need to leave to get my things and say goodbye to my friends and quit my job at the Steel Vipers club.” Before he can refuse, I quickly explain.

“If I don’t go home tonight, they’ll think I’ve been taken against my will, and Rider won’t leave without me.

You’d have to kill him or keep him captive.

The Steel Vipers are bound to come for us both.

If you’ve killed one of theirs, they’ll want revenge.

It will be messy, and people will get hurt.

But if you let us go now. I can quit my job and tell them I’m leaving.

If I go of my own free will, there will be no repercussions, no one following me or causing trouble. ”

Tony considers this. For a moment, I worry that he’s going to refuse, but apparently, my logic wins out over his desire to be back immediately. “Fine, you have twenty-four hours. If you don’t come to mine by then...”

He doesn’t have to finish his sentence for his threat to be clear. It will be the hard way.

“I have to work a notice period,” I try to argue to buy more time to come up with a plan.

“No. I’ve waited too long for you. It’s been driving me crazy.

It took me months to find you, and then I found out you'd had to resort to living in that disgusting den of filth with those brutes.

I wanted to rescue you right away, but I was worried about what those monsters might do to you if my men didn't get to you quickly enough, or that you might be caught in the crosshairs.

No, it was safer to have you come to me. ”

“How long have you known I was there?”

My mind goes back to the night that the Hellhounds broke into the house looking for me. Could Tony have sent them?

“Since you performed on open mic night with your disfigured friend. I've been frequenting all the disgusting, low-life wannabe musicians' bars for months, trying to find you. I knew eventually you wouldn't be able to resist showing off on stage again.”

A wave of relief floods through me. I'm not the reason the Hellhounds started the war.

“You can imagine my surprise when I discovered that not only were you parading yourself around on stage like a whore, but you'd also managed to get yourself tangled up with some motorcycle gang.

It wasn't hard to find out about their little war with the Hellhounds and to offer my resources in exchange for their loyalty. ”

However, I am the reason why the Hellhounds weren't immediately defeated. Thanks to me, the Hellhounds have gained a powerful supporter and the Steel Vipers a deadly

enemy. If I do as he asks, perhaps he will lose interest in the Steel Vipers and leave them alone.

“You did all this for me?” I say, playing on his ego.

If I act like I’m impressed, as if I find his actions protective and romantic rather than controlling and evil, perhaps I can convince him that he’s winning me back.

If he has what he wants, perhaps I can keep the Steel Vipers safe and end the war.

At the very least, I can get Rider and me out of here safely so we can come up with a plan.

“I would do anything for you, Leah. You’re mine, no one else’s.” He reaches over and cups my chin in his hand, gripping it so tightly it hurts. “If you try to pull any stunts, there will be consequences. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes,” I squeak, my throat dry. I’m well aware of the lengths he will go to get what he wants.

“One day. I’ll be watching,” he promises before kissing me hard on the lips.

I struggle to hide my revulsion, keeping my expression neutral as he pulls away.

“Please take Leah to her friend and escort them out of the building,” he orders the security guard. “I’ll see you soon, my love,” I hear him say as I walk away, his words a promise.

I feel as if I’ve made a deal with the devil. What will these twenty-four hours of freedom cost me?

Leah

The guard leads me into the depths of the building until we reach an emergency exit.

“I’m not leaving without Rider.”

“He’s in there,” he says, pushing the door open.

Instead of opening out into the street, the door opens into a small room. It’s pitch black, and it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust as the light from the corridor streams in. I notice Rider, huddled over in the corner.

“What did you do to him?” I demand, rushing over to his side to check for injuries.

“Nothing,” he snorts in disgust. “Maybe your pussy biker boy is scared of the dark.”

He’s right, there are no obvious signs of injury on Rider, but he seems terrified, flinching, and cowering away from me.

“Rider, it’s me, Leah. Come on, let’s get you out of here.”

“Leah,” he says, really seeing me for the first time.

He allows me to lead him outside, and I instruct him to get into the passenger seat.

He’s in no fit state to drive. I drive home steadily, stealing glances at him the entire way.

He returns to his almost catatonic state, and I feel sick with worry.

What did they do to him? Did they drug him? Or injure him in some way I can't see?

"Axel," I shout as we enter the house. "Knox? Jace?"

The house is silent, they're not here.

Shit. I need to figure out what's wrong with Rider alone.

"Perhaps I should take you to the hospital?" I ask.

"No. No hospital."

I'm so grateful that he's speaking, I don't argue with him.

"Rider, please tell me what's wrong. Did they hurt you? What happened?"

He takes long breaths, slowly calming himself down. "Come with me." He manages to say the words with an effort as he fights off whatever internal struggle he's battling.

I follow him upstairs to his room, where he turns on some music. In his familiar environment, with the music soothing him, he begins to calm down, and his breathing becomes less rapid. It occurs to me that he might have been having a panic attack.

"Talk to me, Rider, what happened? What did they do to you?"

"Absolutely nothing," he says, his voice filled with disgust at himself. "They tricked me and locked me in that room in the dark."

“So why... why did...”

“Why did I react like a baby? Because I freak out when I’m trapped anywhere. The last time I was held captive, this happened...”

He pulls his jacket off and unbuttons his shirt.

He winces with disgust at himself, unable to meet my eyes as he removes it to reveal his bare chest. Every inch of his skin is covered in pale scars that shimmer in the light.

I gasp at the sight, there are so many scars, each varying in size and depth, but it’s clear that whoever did this to him tortured him for a long time.

He mistakes my gasp for disgust and moves to cover himself. I place my hand on his, stopping him. He flinches but doesn’t pull away.

“No. You don’t need to hide them from me.”

He looks almost mythical, like an immortal being who’s survived countless wars. I can only imagine the pain he’s suffered, the mental fortitude he must have to go on. He watches me curiously as I trace the lines on his body, each scar telling a story.

“Do they hurt?”

“Not anymore. The mental damage is the only thing that affects me now. PTSD, according to my shrink. I was held captive by enemy forces,” he says by way of explanation. “If my squad hadn’t rescued me when they did, I wouldn’t have made it. I owe them my life.”

“I’m so sorry,” I say softly.

He shrugs. “I just hate that it makes me weak. They did nothing to me tonight, and I went to pieces and curled up in the corner like a fucking coward.”

“Did they say why they locked you in there?” I ask, curious as to what Tony’s plan was.

Perhaps they were just holding him out of the way while Tony spoke to me. I should be grateful that Rider is unhurt, but it’s not Tony’s style. I fully expected his men to beat Rider up to send a message.

“No, they’d told me I needed to move the car and led me to the door. I stepped through, and they shut it on me before I could react. By the time I realized I was trapped and the door wouldn’t open from the inside, it was too late. What did they say to you?”

Now’s my chance to tell him everything, to come clean about Tony, so we can come up with a plan.

The words get stuck in my throat.

If I tell him, I’m admitting that I’ve brought trouble to their door. I’d have to tell them that the Steel Vipers have a new, more powerful enemy than the Hellhounds because of me. I don’t want to do what Tony asked, but maybe it’s the only way to keep them all safe.

“They just said some bullshit about how you weren’t the kind of clientele they wanted in the club and that they’d left you someplace that you couldn’t cause trouble until I was ready to leave.”

The lie rolls easily off my tongue, and I hate myself for it, especially as Rider accepts it without a doubt. I’ve added to his belief that he’s a monster who isn’t welcome. I

feel like shit, and I just want him to know that I don't see him like that at all. So, I show him the only way I know how.

I kiss him.

Rider freezes for a second and I worry I've made a huge mistake, that I've ruined the tentative trust we've built.

But then he kisses me back like a suffocating man being given oxygen.

He kisses me like his life depends on it.

It consumes me with a passion that feels almost ferocious.

I place my hand on his chest and his hand whips out, grabbing my arms and pinning them behind my back, his grip firm.

A small moan of surprise and arousal falls from my lips and he pulls them tighter, holding them firm with just one hand.

He uses his last shred of control to pull back. He looks at me, his eyes ablaze.

"Leah, I can't... I don't want to hurt you," he chokes out, his voice filled with shame and an animalistic side of him he's barely holding back.

"You won't. Please, I want this, tell me what you need."

"I need to tie you up. I can't... I can't be an equal with you, I need to be in complete control."

"I trust you."

Still, he can't look at me, he's breathing heavily, trying to control himself, to talk himself out of this.

"Rider, look at me." He finally looks into my eyes, and I try to convey just how serious I am. "I want this. You won't hurt me."

Finally, he gives in. He kisses me with a passion that takes my breath away. My arms are still pinned behind my back but he's applying just the right amount of force to hold me firm without hurting.

"I'm going to need both hands," he mutters. "Stand up. Take off your clothes. Don't move," he demands.

I do as I'm told, enjoying this authoritative side of him.

"Have you heard of shibari?" he asks me.

"I think so? It's bondage, right?" I reply, a thrill of excitement rushing through me.

"A type of bondage, yes. It's where one partner is tied up using rope and special knots."

"And that's what you're into?"

"Among other things. It's the safest one I'm willing to try with you... if you want to. You can say no... I won't mind."

"I want to try."

He nods and moves to get the rope. He gently and firmly commands me, moving me and positioning me until I'm tied up, completely unable to move.

I watch his face as he works, deep in concentration, like a sculptor creating a work of art.

His touch is gentle, which combined with the sensation of the rope against my skin and the fact he isn't touching me sexually yet while I'm completely naked, serves to turn me on more than I would have anticipated.

The rope hooks between and around my breasts forming a type of harness, and my nipples are hard and aching to be touched. The harness then holds my arms tight in place behind my back, I can't move or touch him. I'm completely at his mercy.

"We'll start like this with your legs free for now," he says as he attaches my harness to a rope that hooks up to the ceiling.

While I like the idea of trying more, I appreciate him easing me in.

"Do you mind if I blindfold you?"

I want to watch Rider. For him to know how much I want him, and that not only do I not mind his scars, but I think they're attractive. But I know that he needs this.

"No, I don't mind."

He carefully secures the silk blindfold around my head, blocking my vision and making me rely on my other senses.

My skin tingles with anticipation as I listen to him moving around me.

I'm completely at his mercy, an idea that both thrills and scares me.

Not because I am scared that he'll hurt me, but because I've never given myself over

so completely before.

His fingers gently trace their way along my chin, exploring down my neck, over my breasts, skimming just past my nipples without touching them, which somehow feels more arousing, the lack of contact.

He continues to explore my body in the same way, caressing me everywhere yet nowhere at the same time.

When his mouth finally finds my nipple, nipping and sucking it hard, I let out a moan of bliss.

His warm, strong hand cups me between my thighs possessively, as if to say, 'You're mine.

' As he strokes my slit the heat builds and I lean heavily against my restraints, wanting to touch him too.

He slides a finger inside me, and I push back on him, burning for more.

"You have no idea how perfect you look like this, Leah," he growls, his voice low.

I moan and grind myself on his hand, every sense is on overdrive and I'm desperate for more, but he keeps me wanting, taking his time.

He's in control. My pussy is slick with desire as moves his fingers in and out of me slowly, his thumb circling my clit.

Abruptly, he stops, moving away from me completely.

I can hear him standing close, watching me.

The cool air of the room caresses the damp voids that were burning under his touch seconds ago. It only makes me want him more.

“Don’t stop,” I beg. But he’s the one in control now and he’s going to take his time.

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I almost feel like I might explode from anticipation as I can hear him removing the rest of his clothes, his breathing getting heavier as he watches me and I know he's touching himself.

Oh god, I want him.

His warm breath tickles my inner thigh as he sinks to his knees before me and my core tightens in anticipation.

He takes one leg in his hand, lifting my foot to rest on his shoulder, exposing me.

I'm completely on display, bared to him.

His tongue delves between my folds reigniting the fire within me.

His tongue expertly dances against my clit, drawing small circles and alternating the speed and pressure, driving me wild when suddenly he pulls back, leaving me begging for more.

My hands strain against the ropes reminding me that we're doing this his way.

He's waited a long time to fuck me and he's in no rush now. He's savoring every moment.

I take a leaf from his book and try to relax into it, not to rush.

Once I do, the sensations heighten. I swear I can feel the nerves throughout my body

pinging in response to his touch between my thighs.

As his fingers delve inside my soaking wet pussy my legs feel weak and I'm glad for the supports holding me up.

"Fuck, Rider!" I scream as he fucks me with his fingers, his tongue lashing against my swollen clit.

I grind my hips, riding his hand. He slips a finger inside my ass, and I gasp with surprise and arousal as the sensation sends me over the edge, and I feel myself gushing on his fingers. He laps it up eagerly, licking me as if I'm a delicious treat.

He moves away and his absence feels final. I've waited so long for him. The last thing I want is for him to stop.

"Fuck me, please," I beg, eager for more.

I hear the sound of him removing his belt, the leather snapping, and I bite my lip. Is he going to spank me with it? The idea is exciting. His pants drop to the floor, and I imagine what he must look like now he's naked.

My obvious arousal makes him chuckle. "Such a bad girl, spanking's meant to be a punishment. Do you want me to punish you?"

He moves behind me as he says this, gently rubbing the leather of the belt against my ass cheeks. He punctuates his question with a light tap against my clit and my pussy eagerly tenses in response.

I'm so turned on I can barely think. I manage to gasp out a response, my voice wheedling. "Yes."

He angles me so that my ass is thrust back, my legs spread wide to allow him access.

With one hand he slowly strokes my slit from behind.

I can feel his erection pressing against my thigh, he's as turned on as I am.

He continues to tease me, getting me wetter as I lose myself in his caress.

When the sharp slap of the belt comes it takes me by surprise, and I let out a little yelp.

The pain is brief and only serves to heighten the pleasure I feel as he continues to tease me.

"You like that?"

"Yes," I moan.

"I'm going to fuck you now."

The way he says it is so confident and commanding, yet he's still giving me a choice. I do not doubt that, even though I'm totally at his mercy right now, if I said stop, he would immediately. It only makes me trust him more. I want whatever he is going to give.

"Yes..." I say, the word coming out as a request.

I feel his huge, erect penis slip between my legs, brushing against my slit without entering me. He rubs his tip along the length of me, tapping my clit before moving to settle at my entrance. I arch my back, straining against my ropes, willing him to fuck me.

Slap.

The belt hits me again at the same time as he thrusts into me and I cry out in pleasure.

He's so big that even though I'm turned on, it's almost too full taking him in one deep, hard thrust. He doesn't move for a moment, allowing me to breathe and accommodate his girth.

While he stays still inside me, his hands snake around to tease my nipples.

Then he starts to fuck me. He moves in and out of me in confident, even thrusts.

His hands move to grip my hips as he fucks me harder.

It feels incredible, exactly what I've been craving.

As incredible as the sex is, the others are so worried about the baby that they hold back.

Mind you, I get the feeling this is Rider holding back too.

"Fuck, yes, Rider, fuck me harder!" I cry.

Slap.

The sting of the belt is his response.

"Who's in charge here?"

"You are," I pant, my pussy dripping with arousal at the role-play.

As my punishment, he slows down, pulling out so only the tip of his cock is inside me. I buck my hips, trying to angle deeper, but he pulls away, taunting me.

“Please,” I gasp, my nipples hard and my pussy on fire as I physically ache for more.

He obliges me, thrusting in slowly so I can feel every inch of him filling me. He continues to fuck me, teasing my clit and spanking me lightly with the belt, driving me wild as I can feel the orgasm building inside.

“Fuck, Rider, I’m cumming!” I scream.

At that moment, I hear the door open. After a brief pause, I hear someone approaching. Rider doesn’t say a word, and he isn’t stopping, so I know it must be one of the guys. But which one?

They stay silent, perhaps enjoying the fact that I don’t know who it is.

I feel them getting close, and a strong, calloused finger slowly trails its way up my thigh, landing on the rope around my body, before circling my breasts, squeezing each nipple, and making me gasp.

He kisses me, flicking my clit as Rider fucks me from behind and my orgasm comes shattering through me.

Jace

We could hear Rider and Leah fucking the moment we walked through the front door.

“Took them long enough,” Knox says with a grin.

Axel’s brow furrows in concern. “I hope he’s not being too rough.”

He doesn’t need to mention the babies for us to know that he’s worried about the effect on Leah’s pregnant body.

“I’m sure he’s being careful,” I assure them.

“Come on, let’s go to the bar and give them some alone time,” Axel says.

We reluctantly follow him. Walking away from the sound of Leah’s cries of pleasure is as hard as escaping the lure of a siren’s song. I don’t even manage to finish my drink before her spell draws me back.

Pretending I’m going to piss, I sneak out and head back to the house. The others will figure out pretty quickly where I’ve gone. They can decide if they want to join or not. I know I should let Rider have his alone time, the man’s waited long enough, but I just can’t resist.

Hey, I’m weak, what can I say?

Any lingering doubts I have vanish the moment I open the door and see Leah in all her glory.

She looks so unbelievably sexy, tied up with Rider fucking her hard from behind, I get hard immediately.

Her breasts look incredible, pushed together in the makeshift rope harness, her nipples hard and just waiting to be sucked.

Rider briefly looks up at me, a small nod of permission to join them.

I can tell Leah knows I'm there. She bites her lip in anticipation as I approach.

I try to hide who I am for a moment, staying silent as I caress her.

I suck her pert, hard nipples, eliciting a moan from her that makes my cock twitch.

I stroke her clit and enjoy watching her cum hard, losing herself as she orgasms on Rider's cock.

My turn.

Rider moves to the side to watch, and I take a moment to admire Leah.

She really is something else. I've never fully understood Rider's shibari obsession, until now.

Leah's breasts heave as she breathes heavily, the rope showcasing them in all their glory.

I grow harder as I look at her, the soft swell of her stomach and the fullness of her

hips, she's all woman. Our woman. My woman.

I remove my clothes, enjoying how Leah wriggles with impatience. Always hungry for more. The woman's insatiable. I love it. My cock is just as eager, standing to attention, a slick of precum at the tip. She's not even touched me. That's the effect this woman has on me.

I place my hands on her ass, lifting her with ease and wrapping her legs around my waist. With the harness bearing some of her weight I know I can fuck her standing like this.

I can feel her dripping against my cock which twitches and grows ever harder in response.

Leah moans and grinds herself against me, begging me without words to fuck her.

I gladly oblige. I slip inside her, feeling how her tight pussy expands to allow me in, squeezing and relaxing as her body processes the sensations. With a firm grip on her peachy ass, I bounce her up and down on my dick, her boobs bouncing up and down as I fuck her.

"Have you figured out who it is yet, Leah? Or don't you care?" Rider asks.

A small smile dances across her lips. "It's Jace."

We can't get anything past our girl, she knows us well. I'm glad that she knew it was me. Wouldn't want the others to get the credit for the amazing orgasm I'm about to give her.

"Hey, beautiful," I say, pulling her closer to kiss her.

At that moment, Axel and Rider enter the room.

“Thought we’d find you here,” Axel says to me.

“Looks like we’re missing out on quite the party,” Knox quips.

“Then you’d better come join, hadn’t you?” Leah moans.

“Do you want us to untie you?” Axel asks. The most cautious out of us, I know he’s worried about how bondage might impact the baby. Plus, from a practical point, how Leah’s currently suspended from the ceiling doesn’t really lend itself to group play.

“No. But maybe move me to the bed?”

We do as she suggests, leaving her tied up but able to move a bit more freely as she lays on the bed.

She could remove her blindfold with her bound hands now if she wanted but she chooses not to.

It seems we might have a bondage convert on our hands.

I wonder if she’d be up for trying some more.

The thought of Leah dressed up in PVC and playing a dominant role is an appealing one.

I move to the head of the bed where Leah obligingly opens her mouth wide for my cock.

She’s definitely enjoying the submissive role as she sucks me, using her bound hands

to stroke my shaft.

It feels fucking incredible and I have to focus on not blowing my load right away.

Only Leah can make me feel like an inexperienced college kid.

My balls twitch as she caresses them, toying with them in her hands while I fuck her mouth.

“You’re so fucking good at that,” I groan.

I’m not even aware of what the others are doing, my sole focus is on the pleasure Leah is giving me with her mouth. I’m glad that she’s having just as much fun as I am though. Her moans are muffled by my cock and the vibrations from her cries of pleasure only serve to make it feel even better.

All too soon, I can feel the pressure rising and I know I’m about to cum. “I wanna cum on your tits baby, is that okay?” I ask.

I’m suddenly desperate to see her in this new, erotic way, tied up and covered in my seed.

“Oh god, yes,” she moans, as turned on by the suggestion as I am.

I release my load over her, painting her breasts in my semen.

It’s a sight to behold, one I know I’m going to masturbate over for a long time.

Just as I will over the picture I get to witness now as Knox and Axel fuck Leah and bring her as much pleasure as they can.

The sight of her orgasming multiple times is one I don't think I'll ever grow tired of.

She's fucking perfect for us.

I don't know what we did to deserve her or what piece of divine intervention brought her into our lives, and I don't care. All I know is, now she's in my life, I'm not letting her go without a fight.

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Leah

I wake in the middle of the night, desperate to go to the bathroom which seems to be one of the less pleasant side effects of my pregnancy.

I dread to think what it's going to be like when the baby starts pressing on my bladder.

I can't have been asleep long, I can hear the sounds of the late-night stragglers at the club, still partying.

No doubt they'll be drinking until the sun comes up from the sounds of their drunken chatter.

I climb out of bed, feeling deliciously sore from last night's sexual antics.

Now that we've done that, I know I want to explore more of the darker sides of sexual play with Rider and the others.

I want to try it all, to fully explore my kinks and indulge theirs.

Of course, being pregnant makes that a tad tricky, especially the more heavily pregnant I get.

Luckily, we've got nothing but time, I think smugly to myself.

As I climb back into bed, I quickly check the time on my phone. My blood runs cold

when I see the unread message on my screen.

Lying whore.

It's from an unknown number, but there's no doubt in my mind as to who it is from. Tony. I can only assume that he's found out that he's no longer the only man I've slept with. The message is dated a couple of hours ago, not long after we'd finished having sex and gone to bed.

How could he possibly know? Or is the timing coincidental?

My phone screen flashes, another incoming message. It's from the same number.

The deal's off.

For a moment, I feel relief. He doesn't want me anymore. Not now he knows another man has had me. I'm tainted goods.

But then the next message comes.

Whore's love it hard. So I won't make this easy. My Hounds and I will see you soon, Leah.

Fuck.

With shaking hands I type back a response.

I don't know what you're talking about, Tony. I haven't broken my promise. I'm still coming back to be with you tomorrow.

I feel sick just typing the words. But I have to keep up the lie, if I can convince him,

then I still have time.

I can go wake up the guys right now and tell them everything.

I should have done so hours ago. I curse myself for wasting precious time that could have been spent solving this.

Burying my head in the sand isn't going to make Tony go away. My phone buzzes with another message.

I love you so much, you're mine. Say you still love me too?

From the tone of his texts, he's drunk. I have to be careful here, to play to his ego and tell him what he wants else he is likely to do something dangerous.

People get hurt when Tony is drunk and maudlin.

He needs to believe there's still a chance between us, or else god knows what he will do.

However, I can't bring myself to say the words back to him.

You know how I feel about you.

I hope that Tony's ego will mean he reads this as a confirmation rather than the hatred it truly conveys. But then another message comes.

I'll destroy everyone who touched what's mine. I'll blow everything up for you. I promise.

With those ominous words, there's suddenly a deafening explosion and a bright flash

of light.

In dazed horror, I rush to the window and look toward the sound.

The bar is engulfed in flames. The sounds of screams echo from inside and I see one man on fire desperately running around in the forecourt outside.

It's like something from a nightmare. This can't be happening.

I shake my head, wanting to rub my eyes like a cartoon character, but the sight doesn't change.

It's really happening. Someone's blown up the bar.

The timing isn't a coincidence. Tony is behind this. Bile rises in my throat, and I rush to the bathroom to throw up.

When I finally regain control of my body, a terrible, insidious thought occurs to me, were any of the guys there? They didn't say they were going out when I went to bed, but it's not beyond the realm of possibility.

I race out of the room, screaming their names at the top of my lungs.

Their bedrooms are empty, the doors thrown open, blankets crumpled, I try to tell myself this means they were sleeping and they've just left to help after hearing the explosion, but that niggling evil voice tells me they were in there.

That they're trapped in the fire, or worse.

I rush down the stairs, flinging the front door open wide, and running down the street, barefoot in just my nightgown.

Tears stream down my face, and I scream out their names, my voice growing hoarse.

This can't be happening.

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Axel

The fire is already raging by the time I reach the clubhouse.

The sound of the explosion woke me, and I rushed to help as quickly as I could.

Rider was emerging from his room at the same time as me and I shouted to him to wake Jace as I ran down the stairs.

Knox was just seconds ahead of me, running down the road.

Spotting his bare feet, I decided to throw on my leathers and boots.

Already planning to go inside and brave the flames to try to get people out.

Knox seems to realize his mistake when I arrive.

Dressed only in sweats, he's helpless to go inside and try to save our friends who we can hear crying out for help from within.

He's busy helping the ones outside who were lucky enough to have escaped.

Vic is badly burned, and his old lady, Betsy, is unharmed but sobbing uncontrollably.

A short distance away there's a burned body lying face down, I can't see who it is, but I know from my military days that they're beyond help.

A couple of club bunnies and some guys I don't recognize stand coughing, staring at the flames in horror.

"Call the fire brigade!" I shout to them, and they nod, pulling out their phones in a daze.

"Who else is inside? How many are trapped?" I frantically ask, turning my attention to Betsy.

"I don't know... I... um... there's Shelly on the bar, and then I think there was Tank, Brewer, and a couple of prospects and a few of the club girls..." she says, dazed.

"Are those the prospects and club girls over there?" I ask, pointing to the ones that made it out.

She nods uncertainly, "I think so. Maybe there was one or two more. I dunno, they weren't with us."

"Alright, Betsy, you did good. Help is on the way."

After speaking with the others, they confirm that no one is missing from their group. They inform me that they escaped through the emergency exit, which means the others left inside must be trapped, unconscious, or it's blocked off now.

Knox looks at me. "We can't wait for the fire brigade. The rate that fire is burning it will be too late..."

"I know. That's why I'm going in."

"Me too," Jace says, coming over with Rider beside him. Like me, they thought to put on their clothing for protection. They also had the added idea of bringing some

soaking wet towels with them.

I nod, turning my attention to Rider and Knox. “You two stay out here and help everyone who made it out.”

“No. I’m coming in too,” Rider insists.

“No, you’re not. I’m sorry, brother. I know you mean well, but if you freak out on us in there, we’re all dead.”

I feel like shit for saying it. But Rider is no longer warzone-ready, and this is a warzone. He doesn’t argue with me. He knows I’m right. Knox starts to argue that he can come, he just needs to change.

“There’s no time,” I say, cutting him off. ‘Let’s go,” I bark at Jace who follows me into hell.

Covering my mouth with one of the wet towels, I head inside with Jace close by my side. “Shelly, Tank, Brewer!” we shout in unison.

“Over here!” I hear Tank call out from behind a wall of flames, his voice hoarse from coughing.

I brace myself for the intense heat that licks at me as I brave the flames. When we come through the other side, only a second later but it feels like forever, we’re unharmed.

Immediately my eyes land on Tank who’s pinned under a large wooden beam that’s fallen on his leg. “Fucking thing’s trapped me good. I can’t lift it myself,” he says, almost ashamed.

As his name suggests, Tank is a giant of a man, but he's getting on in years, and isn't the formidable strong man he once was.

"It's alright brother, we've got you," Jace says, clapping Tank on the shoulder.

With great difficulty, the two of us manage to lift the beam off Tank's leg.

I'm grateful that Jace is here, I don't think I could have done it alone.

Tank's leg is badly wounded, the white bone sticking out from below the knee, and below it, his calf is a mess.

He'll probably lose it. There's no way he's leaving here on his own without help.

"Thanks, my leg's fucked but at least I ain't dying today," he grunts, trying to make light and hide his fear and pain as we help him to his feet.

"Where's Shelly and Brewer?" I ask, knowing we don't have much time as the bar collapses around us.

"Went for some one-on-one time in the toilet," he coughs, his eyes closing as the shock and blood loss kick in.

"Jace, get him outside, I'll find the others."

I can tell he wants to argue that I should go with them, but we don't have time and Tank needs help urgently. He doesn't want to leave our friends behind either and he knows I have to at least try to save them. He nods and heads out with Tank while I forge ahead.

More debris has fallen in front of the toilet door, blocking the people inside.

Feeling light-headed from the smoke inhalation I work quickly to remove it until I'm finally able to get inside.

Both Brewer and Shelly are lying on the floor unconscious.

I quickly move to check their pulse. Shelly's is there, but weaker than I'd like.

I can tell before I check that Brewer is gone.

He was a heavy drinker and smoker, despite being asthmatic, it's clear that he's dead.

The smoke inhalation no doubt triggered an asthma attack which killed him.

There's nothing I can do for my friend now, and I can't even take his body out with me. I can only pray the firemen can put out the fire before it gets to his body. Without a moment to waste, I throw Shelly's unconscious body over my shoulder and once more head out into the bar.

The fire is raging strong now, fueled by the spirits behind the bar, I can barely see in front of my face, and I know I don't have long before I succumb to the thick, dark smoke that engulfs the room.

Coughing and spluttering, I fumble my way across the room where the fire isn't as bad.

My lungs feel like they're on fire and I struggle to walk under Shelly's deadweight.

I begin to worry we won't make it, the wall of flames seems never-ending.

What if I'm going in circles? My first thought is of Leah, and how if I die here, I'll never see her again.

I'll never be able to tell her that I love her.

I know it's too soon, but I can't lie to myself, not now when I'm about to die.

I love her. I want to raise this child with her as a family, as more than just co-parents, but as her life partner.

All of a sudden, the flames part and we're outside, being pulled into the arms of our friends. I hear the sound of Leah screaming my name. Shelly is taken from me, and Knox administers CPR. In the distance, I can hear the wail of sirens.

I stumble forward, my vision clouded as I fall to my knees and cough up my guts. I fall back onto the floor, chest heaving as I try to catch my breath.

Then she's there, wrapping me in her arms, crying my name, her hands soft on my face. Through bleary eyes, I see her, a vision in a white nightgown, like an angel.

"Leah."

"Shh, don't speak, it's okay, an ambulance is on the way. Axel, I was so scared, I thought we'd lost you..."

She covers me in gentle kisses, her tear-stained face coming away smudged with soot.

"I love you, Leah," are the last words I utter before the inky black pull of oblivion drags me under.

Leah

I insist on traveling in the ambulance with Axel to the hospital.

I hold his hand and whisper platitudes to him the whole way.

He's got some second-degree burns, and they can't tell yet what kind of damage his lungs may have suffered from smoke inhalation.

However, the paramedics assure me that he'll be fine.

That doesn't do anything to assuage the guilt I feel. It's my fault he's hurt, that the bar was attacked. It's my fault that people got hurt, that good people are dead. Because of me. I need to tell them about Tony.

Despair, hopelessness, and shame flood me.

I should never have involved myself in the Steel Viper's lives.

Not only have I brought danger right to their front door, but I'm also bringing a new innocent life into this mess.

This poor, orphan baby has lost its family before it's even born and now is being born into a community in turmoil and danger.

If Tony has done this, who knows what else he's capable of?

But what can I do?

If I stay, I'm putting the baby, the men that I'm falling for, and the Steel Vipers at further risk.

But if I go, I'm putting myself and this unborn child at the mercy of Tony.

I've managed to hide from him before, but is that a chance I'm willing to take now there's a child involved?

Also, the thought of leaving the guys behind feels like a vice in my chest. I don't want to leave them.

Finally, I have found something good with them. I'm not ready to lose that.

My turbulent thoughts are interrupted as we arrive at the hospital. As they wheel Axel into the ER, the others pull up and we head in together. At the insistence of the nurses, Jace allows himself to be taken to see a doctor, he too has suffered some minor burns and smoke inhalation.

The hospital is a hive of activity as doctors and nurses rush around, trying to deal with the sudden influx of patients. The rest of the injured victims have already arrived and been rushed into treatment rooms ahead of us as they were more severely injured.

After ascertaining that Rider, Knox, and I don't need urgent medical care, the kindly receptionist directs us to the waiting area. We sit on the row of uniform, uncomfortable chairs, silent and numb with shock as the events of the night sink in.

Knox wraps his arm around me and it's only then that I realize how inappropriately we're all dressed for a hospital.

My cream silk nightgown is covered in dirt and soot, though thankfully I'm not completely exposed since Rider slung his leather jacket over my shoulders before I climbed into the ambulance.

The soft leather hugs itself close to me, keeping me warm and feeling safe.

It smells of him, comforting and masculine.

My bare feet are filthy and grazed. Knox is similarly underdressed in only a pair of sweatpants that are covered in blood that isn't his own.

We sit there in silence, unable to find the words to express our concern for our friends and our disbelief over what's happened. I know I need to tell them what I know, but the words are trapped in my throat.

I don't know how much time has passed before a nurse approaches us.

She looks familiar and I realize that I know her from my prenatal appointments.

"Excuse me, I thought you might like to get cleaned up a bit?" she says, holding out some hospital scrubs and slippers.

"I'd like to give you both a check over, just to treat your cuts," she adds, nodding to mine and Knox's feet.

"I'm fine, thank you," Knox says. "I can clean them up and bandage them myself."

"Me too."

"Not a chance," he insists with a shake of his head.

The nurse smiles approvingly at him before turning her attention to me. “Given your condition, I think we should give you a proper check-over,” she says, nodding to my visible bump. “Just to be safe, you’ve had quite the shock.”

I feel like the world’s worst mother. How did it not occur to me that all of this stress could have harmed the baby? My hand flies to my stomach protectively and I nod. “Right, yes, of course.” I push myself to my feet with some difficulty, my sore feet protesting.

“Come with me then, ma’am.”

Both Knox and Rider both get up to follow and the nurse seems a little surprised by this. “They’re coming with me,” I say, my voice brokering no disagreement.

After getting cleaned up and changed I’m feeling a little better, but I can’t quell my rising panic over the baby.

As the nurse performs the ultrasound, Knox holds my hand tightly while Rider stands like a sentry, alert and ready for danger.

The fire has put him more on edge than usual, he’s going to be seeing danger around every corner.

The nurse moves the wand around on my stomach, her brow furrowed as she looks intently at the screen. I crane my head, trying to see it, too. There’s no sound. Shouldn’t there be sound?

My eyes dart to Knox and I squeeze his hand tightly as the panic rises in my throat.

My voice comes out strangled. “Is everything okay? Is my baby okay?”

“Just let me... I... I’m sorry, but there’s no heartbeat.” She looks at me with pity in her eyes before glances fearfully at the men. She’s afraid of them.

My brain can’t seem to comprehend what she’s saying. I stare blankly at her in disbelief. Surely, she shouldn’t be telling me this. Where’s the doctor?

“What are you saying?” Knox asks the question in my mind. He sounds as shell-shocked as I am.

“I’m saying she’s lost the baby.”

I go blank. My mind shutting down completely, as I try to cope with this shatteringly horrific news. It can’t be.

No.

I’m vaguely aware of Knox shouting at the nurse, getting irate, of Rider having to calm him down before he’s escorted off the premises by security.

The nurse apologizes again before leaving.

Knox and Rider pull me into their arms, trying to comfort me.

I barely feel it. I feel as if I’ve left my body.

“I need some air,” I finally manage to choke out.

“Okay sure,” Knox says, getting ready to come with me.

“I need to be alone, please,” I beg.

I need to wrap my head around this without looking at the crushing weight of the pain in his eyes. If anyone is more devastated by this news, by the loss of this baby, it's Knox. I can't bear to look at him.

"I'll be fine, I promise. I'll be just outside. Please," I beg, my voice breaking as tears start to fall.

"Alright. But don't be too long, okay?"

I nod my agreement before stumbling my way along the corridor and heading toward the elevator. I can barely see where I'm going through my tears.

Finally, I find myself in the parking lot.

I can't breathe. I feel like I've failed.

I've failed to keep this baby safe, my only job.

This baby that was so desperately wanted by so many people.

The last shot at Zeus, Donna, Levi, and April getting the baby they fought so hard to bring into this world.

The child Zeus and Donna died protecting.

My thoughts go back to earlier in the evening, did I do this? Is this all my fault?

Hunched over, hands on my knees, I try to catch my breath. I'm so lost in my grief that I don't hear the footsteps approaching.

I feel a hand on my shoulder as the person pulls me close. For a moment I think it's

Rider or Knox, come to check on me. But then I tense when I realize who it is.

Tony.

I try to pull away, but he holds me firm.

“It’s okay my love, I’m here now,” he murmurs sweetly but my blood turns to ice.

I freeze, fight or flight mode kicking in.

What should I do? What can I say that will keep me safe?

Tony was always unpredictable, but now he’s more volatile than ever.

One wrong word could put everyone I love in danger.

I don’t know which Tony I’m speaking to.

The one who calls me a whore and is violent toward me and anyone who comes near me, or the one who whispers sweet nothings in my ear and tells me I’m the most important woman in his life.

“What are you doing here, Tony?”

His face darkens and I realize I’ve said the wrong thing. “Aren’t you happy to see me?”

“Of course,” I soothe, falling back into old habits of saying what he wants to hear to placate him. “I just mean, how did you find me?”

“I told you, I’ll always find you. Now, come on, let’s go home.

” Sensing my hesitation, Tony plays his trump card, making sure I go willingly and without fuss.

“It’s not safe here. The security is terrible, anyone could waltz in and plant bombs without being seen.

Just recently I read about a madman with a gun who went on a rampage in a hospital, seeking revenge against the men who fucked his wife. ”

We both know the threat he’s making. Come with me willingly or I’ll attack them . He won’t care what innocent bystanders are hurt in the process.

“If I come now, this stops. There’s no need for any more fighting. It’s the only way we can move on together. We need to forget about the past and only focus on the future. Our future,” I insist, praying that I can convince Tony to spare them.

If I sacrifice myself, at least they’ll be safe. The war will be over. No one else will get hurt.

“Of course, my love, you know I hate violence,” he says smoothly, kissing me on the lips.

The scary part is, I think some twisted part of him genuinely believes that. He thinks he’s a good guy who only does what is necessary.

“Okay, let’s go.”

With that, I allow him to guide me into the SUV and drive away.

Drive me away from the men I love. From the future that I so desperately dreamed of.

In one fell swoop, I've lost everything. My child. My lovers. Myself. For I know the Leah that Tony thinks he loves isn't me. The woman I will have to become to please him, to keep myself and the people I care about alive, isn't anything like the real me.

As we drive back to the prison he calls home, I can't help but feel as if this is punishment for failing to keep my promise. My hand cradles my stomach where there should be life. I should have known that I can only bring death.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:38 pm

Axel

When I wake, the guys are around my bed, looking stone-faced.

“Where’s Leah?” are the first words from my mouth as I notice her absence.

“She’s gone,” Knox says, with hurt and betrayal in his eyes.

“What do you mean she’s gone? Where?”

Panic floods me as I wonder if he means she’s dead. But that can’t be possible, she was fine when I saw her. She didn’t go near the fire. My lungs feel as if they’re burning as I try to sit up. The others share a look as they try to decide how to break the news to me.

“God damn it, tell me what’s going on!” I shout, causing heaving, racking coughs to come out of my chest.

“A nurse here performed an ultrasound to make sure the baby was okay. It...” Knox can’t finish his sentence, he can’t even bring himself to say the words. I know then that she lost the baby and my heart breaks.

“She lost the baby,” Rider says softly, taking over for Knox who’s too overwhelmed with emotion to speak. “She said she needed some air, that she wanted to be alone. She went outside to the parking lot and when we went to look for her she was gone.”

“Well, why the fuck didn’t you go after her? She must be devastated.”

Knox's face twists in anger. "We did. Rider went back to the house to see if she was there. He didn't find her, but he found her phone.

I stayed here and spoke with the security guards to see if anyone saw her leave, she didn't have a car so she couldn't have gone far.

What we found on her phone and on the hospital security cameras was evidence enough that she doesn't want to be followed. "

I can only assume that Jace is staying quiet because he was being treated for his injuries, same as me, while this was all happening. His arms wear similar bandages to mine.

"What did you find?" I ask, looking between Knox and Rider.

Without a word, Knox hands over his phone.

On the screen, there's a video recording, taken from the CCTV cameras in the hospital parking lot.

I watch the footage of Leah, bent over crying, following the news of the miscarriage.

A well-dressed man I vaguely recognize approaches her, pulling her into an embrace.

Jealousy and hurt wash over me as I notice she doesn't pull away.

She allows him to comfort her as they speak.

Her body language changes as she becomes a sweet, pliant girl in his presence.

She looks into his eyes, asking him something, I wish I knew what.

He agrees, kissing her on the lips, and my heart breaks a little to see she allows it. It's clear they know each other well.

Who is this man? I rack my brain.

Leah nods and climbs into the SUV he arrived in. The footage ends as they drive away. She's really gone. She's left us for another man.

"I don't understand. Why would she do this?"

"There are texts on her phone. She was planning to leave us for him all along. Perhaps losing the baby was a blessing in her eyes," Knox says bitterly.

Rider hands over the phone and I read the texts.

"The bombing was him? He did it because Leah slept with us?"

"It certainly looks that way," Rider concedes.

"He must be Leah's ex. She didn't tell me much, but from what she did mention, it sounded like he was controlling, maybe even abusive."

"Can't be that bad if she went back to him," Jace interjects.

"I'm sorry, are you guys seriously suggesting that Leah would willingly leave with a guy she knew blew up the Steel Vipers club, injuring and killing her friends?" I ask incredulously.

How can my friends be this dense?

"You saw the video, looked pretty willing to me," Knox stubbornly insists. His pain

is making him blind.

“Guys, you know Leah, if she thought that going with him willingly would protect others she’d do it in a heartbeat.”

“No, she wouldn’t do anything to risk the baby,” Knox says without thinking.

“...The baby she just found out she lost,” Rider says quietly, realization dawning on him.

“Rider, are you fucking forgetting who this guy is? She knew him. We were sleeping with the fucking enemy, a Hellhounds spy!” Knox shouts.

“What are you talking about? Who is this guy? He’s not Hellhounds.”

“He is. He’s fucking Tony Jackson, Mafia kingpin, and the Hellhounds’ new master. He’s the reason why we haven’t been able to take them down.”

“How do you know this?”

“We did some digging into who he is after watching the video, and from there it wasn’t hard to connect the dots between him and the Hellhounds.

Don’t you recognize him? He approached Zeus a while back and tried to get the Steel Vipers on board with his fucking disgusting business trafficking people, Zeus told him to go to hell. Seems he died for it...” Jace explains.

“And Leah fucking knew him! She was his goddamn girlfriend, probably a plant to get close to the Steel Vipers and take us down from the inside, feeding them information. How else did they ambush Zeus and Donna that day? They knew exactly where we were gonna be,” Knox spits.

My mind is reeling as I try to process this information. It can't be true. Yet all of the evidence seems to point that way. I think back over everything Leah said and did while she was with us, was it all a ruse? Was she playing us all along? I can't believe it. But maybe I should.

The Leah I know wouldn't be capable of such cruelty. Knox is even suggesting she may have intentionally caused the miscarriage, I can't believe she would do something so heinous. Not when she knew how much this baby was wanted.

It can't be true. Can it?

"Look, I agree that it looks bad, that Leah shouldn't have hidden who her ex was from us. But I have to believe Leah isn't capable of this, that she didn't know."

"Axel, the fucking guy mentions his 'Hounds'. How can you believe that?" Knox says, clenching his fist.

"I don't know. But Leah at least deserves the benefit of the doubt for us to look into it more."

"She betrayed us, she doesn't deserve a thing," he says, storming out of the room.

"What do you suggest?" Rider asks with a sigh, turning his attention back to me, and folding his arms across his chest.

"I think it's high time we pay the Hellhounds a visit. Either way, this ends now."

Leah

Tony's grand tour of the mansion I'm doomed to reside in ends with a beautifully decorated bedroom with an ensuite and walk-in wardrobe.

It's like something out of a fairytale, every girl's dream, except mine.

It's too gaudy and ostentatious, all marble and gold with rich mulberry velvet drapes, not my style at all.

Of course, most troublingly is the lock on the outside of the door.

"This is your room, my love," he declares proudly.

"It's beautiful," I lie, trying to sound suitably awed. "Thank you so much!"

"You've not even seen the best part yet!" he exclaims with glee, acting like a loving partner rather than a kidnapper.

Dear god, I hope I don't get Stockholm Syndrome. I always want to remember what a monster he is. The devil that lurks under his charming facade.

He strides across the room and opens the wardrobe.

Inside, it's filled with clothing for me.

He's taken the liberty of buying me a whole new wardrobe, filled with expensive

designer clothing I hate.

Not one of them is my style. There's not a single pair of pants in sight.

Tony likes his woman to dress like a proper lady, or so he says.

Dutifully, I ooh and ahh like a dumb schoolgirl. "Oh, but they're a little small," I say, noticing how everything is a dress size too small.

"Oh, you'll soon lose the weight and fit into them," he declares confidently.

My diet will now be strictly controlled by him.

He'll watch every morsel that crosses my lips and chastise me if the weight doesn't fall off fast enough for his liking.

I've no idea what he thinks I'm supposed to wear in the meantime.

How would I have ever hidden a pregnancy from him?

Mind you, if I hadn't lost the baby, I would never have come with him.

I'd have found a way to escape him. But there's only my life I have to worry about now, and it doesn't feel like one that's worth living.

It's just then that I notice none of Tony's things are in here. My heart soars at the prospect of not having to share a bed with him. At least I'll have some time alone.

"Where are your things?"

"Oh, my room is just across the corridor. I'm afraid we won't be sharing a bed, my

love, not for some... oh, seven or so more months,” he says casually.

What does he mean? Does he know about the baby but not about the miscarriage?

Can I use this to my advantage to buy myself time?

My biggest fear was that he was going to want sex from me.

I'd been bracing myself for the horror that not only is he going to rape me, but I'm going to have to pretend to like it.

If he thinks I'm pregnant, maybe he won't touch me?

The confusion I feel must show on my face as he elaborates gleefully, taking pride in having more knowledge than I.

“Yes, I know all about your pregnancy. How could I not with that disgustingly fat stomach you think you're so clever hiding?

I wasn't sure, but my suspicions were confirmed today.

Of course, I'm not happy about you carrying another man's baby.

The only child in your belly should be mine.

Which one of them knocked you up? Or don't you even know? ” he says in disgust.

It occurs to me that he doesn't know the baby was Levi's, not any of the guys, or that I've miscarried.

“On second thought, don't answer that, I don't want to know. It's enough to know

that once the babies are born, they'll be useful leverage against the Steel Vipers. Of course, I could use them as leverage now, but I'm not about to give you up."

What is he talking about? Babies? He doesn't know about the miscarriage, should I tell him? No, hiding it buys me some time before he touches me. My bulging stomach repulses him.

He studies me and shakes his head. "I'm disappointed in you, Leah, hiding things from me already. Tell me what you're hiding?"

There's no use lying, he'll know, and he'll beat it from me.

I have to tell him something. But pretending the baby is still alive keeps me safe.

If I can pretend the guys and I aren't romantically involved, perhaps he won't try to hurt them.

It's in his interest to keep them alive now, but I know eventually his jealousy will get the best of him and he'll go after them.

Telling the truth about the baby's parentage will keep them safe.

"I was telling you the truth when I said I wasn't sleeping with any of the Steel Vipers. I haven't been with anyone but you, ever," I lie, willing him to believe me.

"Oh so you're the virgin fucking Mary? Or do you expect me to be stupid enough to believe that those brats are mine?"

"No. Of course not. I'm a surrogate, the pregnancy was by IVF. I was working for Zeus and Donna, the president of the Steel Vipers and his wife. They wanted me to be a surrogate for their dead son's child."

Mercifully, he believes me. A huge grin breaks out on his face.

“Well, I have to say that it’s a relief to know you didn’t get knocked up the old-fashioned way, as much as I don’t like you being pregnant, at least the father is dead.

Though it does mean that the babies aren’t as useful to me to use for leverage since their family is all dead.

I’ll make the arrangements for the abortion as soon as possible.

” He says this cheerfully, as if he’s discussing something perfectly reasonable rather than the forced termination of a woman he’s kidnapped.

I balk at the suggestion, I have no idea what the medication will do to my body now I’m no longer pregnant. Plus, knowing Tony, there’s no way to know if he’d even do a safe procedure and not some backyard style that could leave me infertile or worse. I have to tell him I lost the baby.

“There is no baby. I found out at the hospital before I saw you that I had a miscarriage,” I admit, my voice breaking along with my heart as the wound freshly opens.

He laughs, enjoying my pain. “Oh yes, of course, you don’t know. The nurse was hired by me. She lied to you. The babies are perfectly fine.”

There’s that word again, babies.

“What? How? Why?” I stutter, struggling to comprehend.

“Because I didn’t want those thugs following you. I figured that they’d knocked you up and the only thing they care about is the pregnancy, a little heir to carry on their

legacy. They won't follow if they think you miscarried. You didn't think you were special to them, did you? he snarls.

His words hit me like knives, but I can't help but believe him. I've brought nothing but trouble to the Steel Vipers. After this there's no way they'd want me. They'll probably be pleased that I'm out of their hair.

"I didn't—"

"Don't lie. I know you fucked all four of them like the whore you are. Just because the babies aren't theirs, doesn't mean I believe you when you say you didn't fuck them."

I decide to ignore his accusations, I don't want the conversation to get sidetracked by his jealousy. I'm far more concerned with why he keeps referring to the baby in the plural and whether or not he's telling the truth.

Is it really true? Is my baby alive, and what's more, am I carrying twins?

"Tony, why do you keep saying babies and not baby?" I ask hesitantly.

"Oh yes, like the prize fucking bitch you are, you're giving birth to a litter. Not one but four babies. Like an animal." His eyes land on my stomach in disgust, no doubt imagining how it will look when my bump pops.

I can't believe what I've just heard.

"I'm sorry, did you say I'm carrying quadruplets?"

My knees feel weak, and the room starts to spin. I sit down on the chair in the middle of the room, with my head in my hands.

“That’s right. It seems that your IVF was almost too successful. Not that the little bastards will be around much longer.”

Can it be true? Have I not lost my baby but gained three more?

Horror dawns on me as I realize he’s still planning to kill my babies now he thinks that he can’t use them as leverage.

“Don’t kill them, please!” I beg, my hand flying to my stomach protectively.

His eyes flash with envy and I realize that he’s jealous of my love for them. A love that’s as natural as breathing that I could never give to him. “Why should I let my woman give birth to four, useless bastard children that aren’t even her own?”

“Because you can still use them as leverage against the Steel Vipers. Knox is the adopted son of Zeus and Donna, these babies are his family, he wants them more than anything, they all do.” My voice is high pitched and pleading.

I grab his hand, holding his gaze. My eyes are wide and filled with desperation as I wordlessly implore him to believe me.

He thinks about it for a moment, studying me. He sighs and shakes his head. I stop breathing, my heart plummeting as I think he’s about to refuse me.

“My sweet, innocent girl is still in there, despite what they did to you. I know the truth, you can’t bear to harm these children, even though they’re not yours.

You’d rather birth them and return them to the monsters who forced you to carry them.

You’re an angel. You’ve been through so much.

Those Vipers manipulated you, took you away from me and took advantage.

Do you really want to carry their children? ”

“Yes... please, don’t kill them,” I beg.

He sighs and shakes his head. I stop breathing, my heart plummeting as I think he’s about to refuse me.

“I can’t say no to you, Leah, even when you have treated me so cruelly.

I know that you were under bad influences, and I promise I’ll make them pay for what they’ve done to you.

You don’t need to be afraid anymore, you’re home, you’re safe now.

” He pulls me into his arms, and it takes all of my self-control not to pull away.

I want to scream at him, but I hold that inside.

Psychopathic Tony is terrifying, but when he’s like this, thinking I’m some poor naïve woman at least he doesn’t hurt me.

And maybe I can use it to my advantage. His moods are like the wind, though, if I can’t continue to manipulate them, I’m in trouble.

Right now, he still sees me as an innocent, mindless doll.

If that changes, who knows what might happen.

“You saved me,” I whisper girlishly, hating the sound of my own voice, necessary

though it may be.

My life and the lives of four innocent babies are now in the hands of a madman and the only way I can protect us is by playing his game.

“So, my love, I need you to rest up and focus on birthing those little pawns. I’ve heard quadruplets are born early, so at least we won’t have to wait long.

Perhaps we can even start trying for children of our own once these ones have served their purpose.

” He kisses me on the nose and I smirke approvingly.

“But first, you need to shower, you smell like shit,” he says, shoving me away from him.

His mood swings are nothing new. He used to make me feel as if it was my fault, that I was doing something to make him be that way. Now I see it for the manipulation that it is. I say nothing, allowing him to take the lead, just as I always did. Only now I’m not the one being played.

He guides me to the bathroom and instructs me to wash myself.

He stands watching, making cruel comments the whole time about things I need to change.

But mercifully, he doesn’t touch me. My mind goes blank as I just focus on getting through it.

The whole time, one word is rattling around my brain. Babies.

My baby is still alive, no, my babies. I'm having quadruplets.

I've made a huge mistake coming here. I've put them in danger. Tony might agree to let me keep them now, but he could change his mind on a dime. He's so unpredictable. I need to find a way to let the guys know. I have to protect these children and get the hell out of here. Whatever it takes.

Knox

Every eye is on us as we walk into the shithole the Hellhounds call a bar. We've not been foolish enough to wear our Steel Vipers cuts, but we stick out like sore thumbs anyway. Even if they don't know who we are, everyone in here can tell that we don't belong.

With the baby gone and Leah having betrayed us, nothing is holding me back from getting my revenge on the Hellhounds.

Axel might be here to try to negotiate or do his little Sherlock Holmes act, but I'm here to fight.

I don't give a shit if we're out numbered, they've got to pay for what they've done.

Axel can get his answers. Once we've confirmed what I already know—that Leah betrayed us and there's no hope left, I'll start my revenge by burning this place to the ground. An eye for an eye.

I'm dealing with the pain and hurt I feel over losing the baby and Leah, by getting angry. Destroying the Hellhounds is all I have now.

We saunter up to the bar, unintimidated and unafraid.

"Four beers," Axel says to the bartender.

The man looks at us through piggy eyes and sniffs, folding his tree-trunk arms across

a barrel chest. He's taken his loyalty to the Hellhounds rather literally, choosing to embellish his skin with a motif of a three-headed hellhound with a large, mean-looking devil holding its leash. "Why are you here?"

"Didn't you hear? Our bar exploded. We need a place to drink," Jace quips, sitting down on a barstool as if he has every right to be there.

"We don't want no trouble," the man says.

Didn't peg him to be chickenshit.

"Shoulda thought of that before you killed our Prez and blew up our clubhouse," I snarl.

Axel shoots me a warning glare. This is a recon mission.

We aren't here to fight. Not when we're outnumbered and unarmed in the middle of enemy territory.

As is customary, we had to prove we were unarmed or hand over our weapons on entry.

We have the same rule for visitors at the Vipers clubhouse.

Not that I need a gun to kill every fucker in here. The Hellhounds are a bunch of pussies.

"There won't be any trouble. We just want to have a beer and speak to your Prez," Axel says calmly.

"Lucifer isn't here, he's away on business," the man declares haughtily.

I can't help but snort at his name. It gets me every time. The man doesn't come close to earning the title of the king of hell. Like I said. Posers.

"Where?"

The man fixes him with a stern gaze. "That's none of your business, Viper. Now, I think you boys best be on your way. You ain't welcome here."

"Here's me thinking dogs were meant to be friendly." My voice is light, but my body language is anything but. Anyone with eyes can see the barely controlled violence, shifting under the surface, waiting to break free.

The guys can immediately sense that I'm barely holding it together. Rider places a firm hand on my shoulder, a warning.

Axel inclines his head. "You let Lucifer know we need a little chat. You know as well as I do that we can't let his actions go unpunished. I'd hate for things to escalate further than they already have."

The man lets out a snort of laughter. "The way I see it, your club's the only ones suffering. You ain't done shit to us."

I'm dying to wipe the smirk from his ugly face, but I can't give our plan away by revealing what we've got in store for them.

"Just be sure to let Lucifer know he has until the end of the day to get in touch else he'll regret it," Axel says before turning his back and motioning for us to leave.

Finally finding their balls, a couple of the guys jeer at us as we go. Axel moves to grab hold of my other arm and steer me outside. They practically carry me as I try to get away and beat up every last fucker in here.

“Hey, where do I recognize that chick from?” Jace says, pointing out a woman who’s just getting off her bike.

I take a closer look. Damn. “It’s the nurse who performed the ultrasound on Leah, the one who told us about the miscarriage.”

She’s almost unrecognizable out of her uniform now that her tattoos are on display.

She’s squeezed herself into a pair of cutoff denim shorts and a corset.

Proudly draped over her is a leather Hellhounds jacket two sizes too big for her.

Her greasy blonde hair has been straightened within an inch of its life and her eyes heavily circled with kohl.

“What the fuck is she doing here?” Jace says.

“That’s exactly what I’d like to know,” Axel mutters, striding toward her.

It can’t be a coincidence that the nurse who was involved in Leah’s prenatal treatment just happens to be coming to a club owned by the Hellhounds. She has to be involved in this.

Her eyes widen with alarm as we approach.

“Good, you recognize us. That will make this go a lot quicker.” I grab her roughly by the arm, clamping my hand around her mouth so she can’t scream and steering her around the corner and down a dark alley.

She struggles, but she’s no match for me.

When we're out of sight of the club, I let her go.

"Scream and you won't like how I shut you up. "

The others look at me judgmentally but they don't say anything. They want answers as much as I do.

"We're not gonna hurt you, we just want to know why are you here," Axel asks, taking over. He speaks gently, the good cop to my bad.

Relaxing slightly, she opts for defensiveness. "Can't a woman enjoy a drink after work?" she huffs, folding her plump arms across her chest.

"Yes, but it's not all that common for nurses to hang around MC clubhouses, especially not one as shady as the Hellhounds."

She looks as if she's about to deny it before it must occur to her that there's a fucking Hellhound insignia on her jacket with non-other than Lucifer's name above it.

"You're Lucifer's old lady," I point out.

"Yes," she admits.

I grab her roughly again, dragging her further down the alley to where our bikes are parked, ready for a quick getaway should things get hairy. "You're coming with us."

"Wait, what, no!" she says panicked as she struggles against my grip.

"Knox," Axel growls, "Let her go."

I stop, yet don't remove my hand from her.

“We’re not taking you anywhere, Miss. We just need to ask you some questions.”

“Like fuck we aren’t! You think the Hellhounds have taken Leah, I say we take Lucifer’s old lady. Like for like, a bitch for a bitch. Or better yet, they killed our Prez and his old lady, why shouldn’t we kill theirs?”

Her eyes widen with terror as she struggles fruitlessly. “Please, please don’t kill me, I’ll tell you anything! I promise I didn’t want to lie about the babies, but they made me!”

That gets all of our attention. “What lie?”

“They said if I told you that the babies had died, then it would keep us all safe, that you wouldn’t come after her.”

Time seems to stand still as her words sink in. “You mean... the baby is still alive? Leah didn’t have a miscarriage.”

The woman shakes her head vigorously, eager to save her skin by telling all. “No. All four babies are alive and well.”

“I’m sorry... did you say four babies ?”

We all look at her, slack-jawed and dumbfounded, struggling to process what she just said. Not only is Leah still pregnant with Levi’s kid, but she’s having quadruplets.

“How is this possible? Why didn’t anyone tell us before? Does Leah know?” The questions tumble from my lips.

Stammering, she explains. “The doctor implanted four embryos, Donna and Zeus wanted to be sure they’d get a grandchild. And no, Leah doesn’t know, or at least she

didn't when I told you all the other day."

This changes everything. Whatever Leah's involvement is, I don't care, I'm going to move heaven and earth to get her back, to get those babies back.

Leah

My stomach growls audibly as I hunch over in bed, trying not to focus on the gnawing pangs of hunger.

Tony's strict, calorie-controlled diet is barely enough to keep me away from the brink of starvation, let alone the four fragile lives growing inside of me.

No matter how much I beg and plead, he doesn't give me anything more.

I may have convinced him that their lives are worth keeping, for now, but that doesn't mean he wants to risk me getting fat.

It's sickening. Just when I think I can't hate him anymore he reaches a new level of sadism that makes me despise him all the more.

I've lost track of time. I have no idea how long I've been shut away in this room.

Tony is the only other soul I see, and his visits are becoming fewer and farther between.

My food is shoved through a slot in the door like in a prison.

Which just reinforces my initial thoughts that this place will be my jail.

With every passing day, my situation feels even more hopeless. No one is coming to save me.

Tony was right. The guys aren't coming to save me, not when they think I'm no longer pregnant.

They didn't really care about me, it was always the baby.

The sex was probably just a bit of fun for them.

Did I actually believe four guys would simultaneously fall for me?

Sure, I thought I heard Axel say he loved me, but I must have been mistaken.

Either that or he was delirious or saying things on the spur of the moment since he came so close to death.

The only thing keeping me going now is these babies. They're all I have to live for.

I'm so scared that even if the nurse in the hospital was lying, the stress and near starvation is harming them.

I try to stay as calm as I can, singing songs to them, my voice echoing in the empty room.

I wish I was further along in my pregnancy, then they'd be kicking and I'd have a sure sign that they were alright. All I have now is hope.

I don't even bother to move when I hear the door open. I know who it is, after all.

A tentative cough followed by a female voice. "Sorry to disturb you..."

Surprised, I turn around to face the door. Standing there is the nurse from the hospital, the one who told me I'd miscarried. I narrow my eyes at her, clutching my

stomach protectively as if she means to harm the babies.

“Why are you here?”

I’m so exhausted I can’t even summon the malice I want to express.

“Tony sent me to give you another ultrasound,” she says tentatively, hovering in the doorway, using her medical trolley as a barrier.

She’s dressed in the same blue scrubs as last time, though now she isn’t wearing a long sleeved, high-necked top underneath, revealing her tattoos. It dawns on me that she must be affiliated with the Hellhounds.

“You’re not fucking touching me. Tell him to send someone else. Anyone else,” I snarl, ready to bite like a beaten dog, protecting her puppies.

She looks pained, as though I’ve actually struck her.

Even so, she doesn’t back down. Instead, she comes into the room, shutting the door behind her softly.

She speaks in a soft, sad voice. “I don’t expect you to forgive me for lying to you.

And I don’t expect you to believe me, but I was told that I needed to lie to save you.

I was told you were being held against your will by the Steel Vipers and that the only way you could escape was if the men who were holding you believed you were no longer pregnant.

I know now this wasn’t the case and I am so sorry for the pain I caused you. ”

“Tony told you that?”

She shakes her head. “No. I mean he did, but I heard it through Lucifer.”

I stare at her like she’s insane.

Is she telling me the devil told her to lie to me about my babies?

She must realize how it sounds as she clarifies.

“Lucifer’s the Hellhounds’ Prez, he’s my old man.

It’s all my fault. I told him I saw members of the Steel Demons at the prenatal clinic.

He’s been wanting a way to destroy the club, and I gave him an opening.

I wish I’d kept my mouth shut. I’m going to end things with him soon, after what he made me do to you.

” She comes close to whisper this and I recoil away from her.

“Why haven’t you already?”

While she seems genuine, I’m not ready to forgive and forget that easily. Nor am I going to risk letting my guard down and falling for a trap.

Her eyes dart nervously to the door, as if worried someone might burst in at any moment. “Because I want to help you.”

I huff, thinking that she could have helped me sooner by simply doing nothing.

“Why?”

Again, she seems nervous to speak, and it dawns on me why. The room must be bugged. Tony probably has the whole place kitted out with cameras and mics. My skin crawls at the intrusion, and I curse myself for not realizing it sooner.

I nod, trying to convey my understanding. “Never mind, it’s not like you can tell the truth. Let’s get on with this.” I hope that to anyone listening it sounds like I’m simply calling her a liar but that to her, she’ll understand my meaning.

A palpable look of relief crosses her face as she nods and comes closer, pulling the ultrasound machine behind her.

My heart hammers in my chest. I don’t think I could handle more bad news.

If I have to hear those words again, it will kill me.

She seems to understand how scared I am as she gently goes about her task, her eyes trying to convey her remorse.

For a moment, it’s quiet and I think I might break. But then there’s the unmistakable distorted, fluttering sound of heartbeats.

They’re alive. They’re okay!

She studies the monitor carefully before turning the screen around to face me. “All four babies are alive and well,” she says happily, pointing them out to me on the monitor.

I sink back against the pillow, relief and joy flood through me as I stare, enrapt, at the screen.

“Do you mind if I run some tests on you? Nothing major just blood pressure and

such.”

I’m so happy I simply nod my approval. She proceeds to do her tests and as she’s finishing up, she carefully slips a folded note into my pocket. Her eyes pleading with me not to say anything.

“You’re a little malnourished and your blood pressure is low. I’m going to recommend some vitamins and increasing your calorie intake,” she says out loud.

“Sure.”

I’m doubtful that Tony will give me more food, but perhaps a medical professional can convince him.

“How did you get involved in all this? With the Hellhounds?” I blurt.

“I met Lucifer and fell head over heels, he was my first serious boyfriend. He supported me in going into medicine. Turns out that qualified doctors and nurses who are willing to turn a blind eye when healing certain wounds are invaluable to organizations like his.”

I almost feel sorry for her. Similarly to me, she got in with the wrong guy when she was young. I remember when I first fell out of Tony’s spell, she has the same look now.

“My name’s Ashley, by the way.”

I don’t respond, I might not hate her as much right now, but I’m a long way away from forgiving her.

Even if the note in my pocket is somehow the key to my salvation, it wouldn’t look

right for me to be too nice anyway.

At least that's what I tell myself to assuage the guilt I feel when looking at her hangdog expression as she leaves.

Now a new dilemma faces me. How the hell do I read the note without being spotted by the cameras?

I decide it's not worth the risk, but I have an idea.

Although it's the middle of the afternoon, I don't think my crawling under the blankets will raise alarm bells.

After all, I've been pretty depressed during my time here, and seeing the woman who lied to me about the death of the babies I'm carrying is bound to upset me.

With the blankets as my cover, I pull out the note, squinting in the dim light.

Leah,

I saw Axel, Knox, Jace, and Rider. They told me everything and I know the truth now. You were never their prisoner, but you are Tony's now. We're going to get you out.

This morning, at 3 AM, we need you to pretend you're having stomach pains. I will be called for. Please, trust me, and go along with everything I say.

I'm sorry. Please let me try to make it up to you.

Ashley.

I read the note several times, wishing it contained more information.

When did she see them? Does this mean they're trying to find me? That they know I didn't leave them willingly and the babies are alive? Should I trust her? Or is this some elaborate ruse created by Tony to test my loyalty?

I stroke my stomach as I consider my limited options.

Either I stay here and nothing changes, I'm still Tony's prisoner, at the mercy of his whims. Or I go.

If I go, one of two things could happen.

One, it's a trap and Tony becomes enraged, doing who knows what.

He could harm the babies out of spite, or beat me so badly he hurts them inadvertently.

Or two, she's telling the truth and she could get me out of here.

But then there's no way Tony would let me leave without him, even if he buys her lie.

I wish she'd mentioned how we were going to deal with that problem.

I presume that she has a plan, but it's risky. Maybe too risky.

The reward is so great, so tempting, it's almost too good to be true. Staying is the safer option. If we get caught, or if it's a trap, I'll pay for it. But if she's telling the truth and by some miracle we escape without being caught...

I'd be free. Safe. I'd be reunited with the men I might love. Because if I'm being honest with myself, as crazy and unbelievable as it might be, I'm falling for all four of them.

Do I dare take the plunge? Am I brave enough?

Honestly, I'm not sure anymore. I need to do what's right for the babies.

I have to believe that Tony won't harm them, not when he thinks they're worth something.

And then when they're born, they'll be sweet, innocent babies, surely Tony isn't so much of a monster to hurt them when they're actual living, breathing, babies? Maybe staying is the safest option.

But...

My mind whirls around, going back and forth on what I should do.

When bedtime rolls around I'm still none the wiser on what I will do.

Stay or go.

Do I put my faith in the hands of the woman who got me into this mess in the first place, who I know lied to me?

I look at the clock on the nightstand. Uncertainty paralyzes me as the hour ticks ever closer.

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Leah

I decide to go. God help me, maybe I'm being a fool for trusting Ashley, but if there's even the slightest chance that she's telling the truth, I have to take it.

When three AM rolls around I put on my best, Oscar-worthy performance.

I start to moan and groan, softly at first, then getting louder.

I stumble out of bed, clutching my stomach, and head to the bathroom.

I go to the toilet, feigning checking my underpants for blood.

I continue to wince and moan as I stumble back into the bedroom.

"Tony!" I cry out, my voice panicked and needy. "Tony! Help me!"

No answer.

I head toward the door, making a great show of it, being sure for it to seem difficult and painful, just in case I have an audience. I try the door and, unsurprisingly, find it locked. I bang on it with my fist.

"Tony! Please! I think there's something wrong with the babies!"

Still nothing. I place my ear against the door, straining to hear. It's quiet.

What should I do? What if no one comes? If Tony is testing me, watching the cameras, and I go back to bed, he'll know I was faking. I've got no choice, I have to commit.

"Tony, please!" I scream, panicked now as I bang on the door as hard as I can. "I need a doctor!"

After continuing to cry out for help, being sure to add some moans of pain, I eventually hear footsteps down the corridor.

"What the fuck, Brute, can't you hear her?" Ashley says.

The relief I feel to hear her voice is palpable.

"Boss said not to open the door, no matter what," a deep, rather dim-witted-sounding man replies. Brute, I presume.

I continue my charade. "Please, is someone there? Help me! I think I'm losing the babies, it hurts!" I scream.

"I don't think that applies, given the circumstances. What do you think Tony will say if she dies or loses his insurance policy on your watch?" Ashley says, using a bossy, commanding voice.

He hesitates. "I don't know... the boss said..."

Jesus, we're dealing with an idiot that only does as he's told. Is the plan going to fail because of Brute's stubbornness?

"Will someone fucking help me!" I scream angrily. It feels good to get it out and given the circumstances, I think it's called for.

“At least let me go in there and check on her,” Ashley reasons.

Perhaps my demand did the trick, either that or Brute is sick of listening to me wailing. “Alright. But any sign she’s pulling a fast one and we lock her in again.”

“Of course,” Ashley replies, the ‘duh’ implied.

The door opens and I throw myself at them. “Thank god you’re here. I think there’s something wrong with the babies.”

Brute looks exactly as his name suggests. A great brute of a man with a clueless expression. He physically recoils from me, as if I’m a leper. Knowing Tony’s strong warnings over what happens to any man who touches me, I’m not surprised that he’s terrified to do so.

“Alright, calm down, let me take a look at you,” Ashley soothes, leading me toward the bed. I moan and cry out as we do so. “You’re doing great, just breathe.”

To Brute her words are harmless assurances all nurses say to panicked patients, to me, they’re words of encouragement to keep doing what I’m doing.

Ashley proceeds to check me over, asking me questions to which I reply in the affirmative to all of them.

She turns to Brute, brow furrowed. “We need to get her to a hospital, I can’t treat her here.”

“The boss said she can’t leave,” he repeats.

Exasperated, Ashley points at me. “Look at her, Brute. She needs the hospital and she needs it now. Do you want her to die? Do you want four innocent babies to die?”

I look at him pleadingly, trying to make myself look as pitiful as possible.

“No, of course not,” he replies, aghast. “I wouldn’t want no babies to die.”

“Well then, help me get her to my car. I’ll drive her to the hospital, we don’t have time to wait for an ambulance.”

He nods but doesn’t move to touch me. “I should tell the boss...”

“You can afterward. First, I need to get her out of here.”

I think we’re going to have to continue to argue but Ashley adds another sharp, “Now!” which finally jolts Brute into action.

To my surprise, he hoists me into his meaty arms, cradling me like a baby. I want to protest but, to be fair, this is the quickest option as he easily strides down the corridor carrying me as if I weigh nothing.

“It’s okay, lady, your babies will be okay,” he tries to assure me.

He might be a lumbering brute, but he seems to have a kind heart. I can only assume that Tony’s manipulated him into working for him and taken advantage of his almost childlike nature.

Thankfully, we don’t encounter anyone as we leave the building, and I realize that Tony must be out.

That must be why Ashley chose tonight as our escape.

With a limited staff and only easily manipulated Brute guarding me, it was our best chance of escape.

It's hammering down with rain outside, but Brute doesn't seem to mind.

The bright security lights guide our path to Ashley's flatbed truck.

Brute carefully seats me on the passenger side, going so far as to strap me in.

"Thank you, Brute."

He opens his mouth to say something just as Ashley plunges a needle into his neck from behind.

Confusion crosses his face as his jaw goes slack, and he crumples to the ground like a great oak tree being felled.

In the dark, stormy night it's like something from a horror movie.

A terrifying thought crosses my mind, that it was a trap after all and Ashley is about to murder me for reasons unknown.

"What did you do to him? He was helping us!" I admonish.

"He'll be fine, it's just a mild sedative. I needed to buy us time. If he calls Tony straight away, which I know he'll do, then Tony and his men could catch up to us before we reach the safehouse where we're meeting the guys," Ashley explains as she climbs into the driver's side.

"We can't leave him! He'll catch pneumonia lying outside in the rain!"

"Pneumonia doesn't work that way, it's an old wives' tale," she mutters.

"Whatever. He'll get soaked," I protest.

“How am I supposed to move him? He must weigh about two hundred and fifty pounds and he’s dead weight.”

She’s got a point. But still, I’m not about to abandon the man who helped us like that.

“We have to try.”

“It will take time we can’t afford to waste.”

“Then we at least have to cover him or something. Do you have a tarp in the truck?”

With a sigh, Ashley unbuckles her belt and opens the door, bracing herself for the rain. “Stay there,” she commands as she gets out and goes around back.

A few moments later she covers Brute with a big, blue tarp before returning to the car wearing a raincoat that she must have acquired from the trunk. “Happy?”

“Yes, thank you,” I reply back, equally as snippy.

She pulls off, her muscles tight with frustration. After a moment she huffs out a big sigh through her nostrils. “Sorry. You were right, we couldn’t leave him to the elements. I just don’t think you realize how dangerous the situation was. If Tony or any of his men found us...”

“We’d be dead. I’m well aware of what Tony is capable of,” I reply bluntly.

We continue to drive in awkward silence.

I should thank her, but I can’t find it in me to do so.

She’s only getting me out of the situation she put me in.

Plus, I still don't know that we're actually going where she says.

It still could turn out to be some sort of trap.

Though I'm finally allowing myself to hope that I'll be reunited with the guys soon.

Just the thought of seeing them again, of being in their arms makes my heart soar.

She watches me out of the corner of her eye as she drives. I can tell she's thinking of the right words to say.

"Leah, I really am sorry. For all of this. I just want you to know that. I should never have told you such a horrible thing. No matter the reason. To believe you'd lost your child...

what I did was terrible and goes against everything I believe in as a nurse.

I just got so lost, so tangled up in Lucifer's web.

I completely lost who I am. Who I was. I'm not sure I even know anymore..."

She looks so sad and her words resonate with me, it's exactly how I was with Tony, that I extend an olive branch.

"I understand that feeling. It's how I was with Tony... before I got away. It took me a long time to get over him, to finally start seeing a future where I could be happy. To even believe that I deserve happiness."

"How did you do it? Get away from him, I mean."

"Getting away was surprisingly easy. It shouldn't have been, Tony watched me like a

hawk.

I sure as hell couldn't simply break up with him and walk out of the door.

But then it was almost like fate, the opportunity presented itself and I took it.

One day we were in a restaurant with a restroom that had a back exit.

I didn't really even think about it, it was as if some subconscious part of me took the wheel, I just walked out the door, hitched a ride, and left.

I left everything I owned behind. I made sure to only go to places I knew he'd never set foot in, I changed my appearance, and I barely went out at all other than to work.
”

“He didn't look for you?”

“Oh, yeah, you can bet he did. But I knew him, I knew how to hide. Or at least I thought I did. I knew he'd find me eventually though. It's why I decided to stay with the Steel Vipers, I thought they could protect me. But all I did was bring trouble to their door.”

“They don't see it that way,” she says softly. “They really love you.” Her voice is wistful, longing, no doubt she sees in them what she hoped she'd get from Lucifer, the love of a deadly yet loving bad boy. Only Lucifer was a little more deadly than loving.

I smile, hoping that she's right. “I love them too,” I say, placing a hand on my belly and picturing a future where we live together and raise these babies. Could it really be possible?

But then I remember that, while I might be escaping, Tony won't give up.

He'll try to find me. Am I making the same mistake again?

Am I bringing danger to the door of the people who have been nothing but good to me?

But I have no choice, I have to protect the babies.

They're the most important thing. I know the guys will agree.

They would risk their lives to protect them. I just pray they don't have to.

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Rider

The rain continues to hammer down, droplets hitting my face like icy needles.

The road is pitch black and slick as my tires struggle to maintain their grip.

I've got some added stability due to the sidecar fixed to my bike—we weren't sure if Leah would be in a condition to ride pillion—but the extra weight kills my ability to corner tight.

We push the pace anyway, too fast for these conditions.

We're already late for the rendezvous thanks to the weather.

I can barely see my hand in front of my face.

It's the worst possible weather we could have had, most bikers wouldn't dream of going out in this.

I curse myself for not suggesting we leave earlier, I'm sure the others feel the same.

I know Leah will be fine at the safehouse, but I don't want her to worry, to think we aren't coming.

Ever since we discovered the truth about the babies all we've wanted to do is rush in, guns blazing, and rescue her.

As always, Axel was the voice of reason.

He suggested we use Ashley to our advantage to get Leah out of there without a fight.

If we attacked, the risk of her getting hurt was too great.

After finding out that Leah had been lied to and was being held captive by her ex and the head of the most prominent crime family in the city, Axel knew the time for being passive was over.

He finally stepped up and took his place as the Prez of the Steel Vipers.

Those who objected were invited to leave or fight him for it.

A few left, no one wanted to go toe-to-toe with the infamous brawler and seasoned vet who once took down an entire enemy squad single-handedly.

With his position secured, Axel set to work.

It's time we take down the Hellhounds for good.

The entirety of the Steel Vipers club is out on missions tonight.

The majority are paying a visit to the Hellhounds clubhouse to return the favor of their little gift to us.

Me, Axel, Knox, Jace, Wolf, Fastman, Chuck, and Chug are riding together tonight to meet the women at the safehouse.

The four of us would be more than enough normally, but Axel isn't taking any chances tonight.

He decided we needed backup just in case Ashley went rogue on us, or Tony somehow found out.

Maybe it's just the rain, or maybe it's some sixth sense I have, most likely it's my usual overcautious paranoia. But for some reason, the hairs on the back of my neck stand up and I get the overwhelming feeling that something bad is about to happen.

I scan the dark abyss all around us as we drive down the deserted highway.

There's nothing there. I have a sense of deja vu from the day Zeus was killed.

Sirens are going off in my brain, telling me that there's an ambush coming.

But I can't see any sign of one. The road ahead is empty.

Any enemy bikes would be seen or heard from a mile away, even with the poor visibility, and no one is insane enough to drive in this weather without their lights on, are they?

There's a screech of wheels and Fastman's bike suddenly skids out of control, and he veers off the road.

He desperately tries to regain control but it's impossible and he crashes into the guardrail.

Inevitably, both rider and bike come apart in a crunch of metal and he's tossed like a ragdoll.

The crash is bad. Possibly fatal. Wolf brakes suddenly, causing Chuck and Chug to do so too.

Chug is riding too fast, he's going to collide with them, so he chooses to abruptly steer his bike to the right, causing him to lose control and crash, too.

As quickly and safely as we can, the rest of us all slow and turn around, heading back to the crash site. Chuck has pulled up and is rushing over to Chug's side while Wolf is tending to Fastman by the time we stop.

"Jesus Christ, is everyone okay?" Jace yells over the sound of the storm.

"I'm okay, Chug's hurt pretty bad," Chuck calls.

"Go help them, me and Rider will help Wolf and Fastman," Axel says to the others.

He starts to stride over to where Wolf is crouched over Fastman's prone body. His back is to us, so we can't see what he's doing properly but it looks like he's giving CPR. I hold out my arm, blocking Axel across his chest.

"Wolf did it," I say in his ear quietly, my back to Wolf so if he happens to look up, he won't see.

Immediately on alert, Axel asks. "How do you know? You saw it?"

"No. Not all. But enough. I think he did it deliberately. He was close to Fastman when it happened, too close. Then all of a sudden, he braked hard, the others almost crashed into him. He knows better than that."

"What are you saying?"

"I thought it was strange that Wolf didn't leave when you took over—or even object.

He was one of the biggest, most outspoken supporters of us operating more like the

Hellhounds and allying with them.

Then, all of a sudden, he's your biggest fan?

Why did he volunteer to help tonight and not at the clubhouse? ”

“He didn't. I asked him to come. I wanted to keep him close. I didn't trust him over there.”

“We shouldn't have trusted him here either,” I mutter, eyes narrowed as we continue to approach him, hands on our guns.

“Is he okay?” Axel asks Wolf.

Wolf shakes his head, standing before turning to us. “He's dead. Some gnarly crash... did you see what happened? He was right behind me.”

He's gauging to see if anyone saw what he did .

In just moments, our numbers have gone from eight to six and we're now stationary targets on a deserted stretch of highway. We're sitting ducks.

This is an ambush.

Leah

The safehouse is an unassuming farmhouse, miles away from any neighbors. It's quaint if not a little rundown. Ashley produces a key from under the doormat and lets us in.

"Huh, the guys should be here already." Noticing my panicked expression she reassures me. "Don't worry, I'm sure it's just the rain slowing them down, hardly suitable riding conditions. Come on in and get dry."

This does nothing to calm my fears that something has happened to them. What if one of them crashes? Ashley's right, this isn't the sort of weather they should be out on their bikes in.

I follow her into the dark house, the floorboards creaking underfoot.

It has that musty, unlived-in smell. Switching on the light, Ashley gets to work lighting the fire that sits in the corner by the large, floral couch and armchairs.

Based on her familiarity I wonder if she's been here before and ask her such.

"Yes, the guys and I met up here to discuss plans. I've actually been staying here," she admits.

A sharp pang of jealousy runs through me imagining her here playing house with my men.

Though they aren't mine anymore.

Are they?

Oblivious to my spiraling thoughts she continues, "Once we decided on the plan I didn't feel like I could pretend with Lucifer, I was terrified I'd give something away and spoil everything.

The guys told me I was welcome to stay here.

I told Lucifer I had to go visit a sick aunt.

He's been so busy building his empire with Tony and focusing on taking down the Steel Vipers that he hardly noticed me leave or cared. "

She says this bitterly and part of me worries that she's still under his spell, that if he were to call her up now and show her even the slightest hint of affection, she'd give me up in a heartbeat if it meant winning a scrap of his approval.

The guys' absence feels even more worrying with this revelation.

If Ashley is lying to me, if this is a trap, I've walked right into it and I'm now alone in the middle of nowhere with this woman I hardly know.

But what would her end goal be? Tony already had me.

There'd be no need to trick me into coming here.

Jittery and on edge I begin to pace around the house, trying to get a feel for my surroundings, and more importantly, where the exits are should things go south.

I don't like my chances if I am right about Ashley.

I'm soaking wet, pregnant, and tired. But at least thinking about ways to get me and my babies to safety makes me feel like I have some control in the situation.

"When will the guys be here? Have you heard from them?"

"Like I said, they should be here by now, I haven't heard from them since they left, but I wasn't expecting to.

It isn't safe for us to communicate too often," she says as she stokes the fire, the amber glow casting a long sinister shadow behind her.

Satisfied that the fire doesn't need further stoking, she stands up and turns to me.

"Why don't you go take a shower and put on some dry clothes?

There's a bag with some of your things upstairs for you. "

While that sounds amazing, I'm still wary.

I'd be even more vulnerable in the shower.

Perhaps it's the flashes of lightning sharply bathing the room in harsh light, or the ominous sounds of thunder and torrential rain, but I can't shake the feeling that I'm in some sort of horror movie.

The remote location and missing friends do nothing to assuage that fear.

Every horror movie has the heroine being attacked in the bathroom.

“I’m okay, I think I’ll just sit by the fire and wait for the guys to arrive. You go on up first.”

Ashley raises an eyebrow and puts a hand on her hip. “Leah, your men are nothing if not protective, and when they come and find you in those old clothes, soaking wet, and filthy, I’ll be the one getting blamed. I promise, by the time you come back down, they’ll be here.”

When I still don’t move, tense like a fawn in a hunter’s sights, understanding crosses her face. She softens, her face crumpling with sadness as she realizes that she’s the villain in this narrative I’ve created.

“Leah, I swear to you, I don’t mean you any harm. I want to protect you and the babies. I promise nothing bad will happen to you up there.”

I sit there unmoving.

“Look, if I wanted to hurt you, I could have done it already,” she says.

While that’s not the most comforting thing to hear, she’s right. Again, I decide to trust her. Even so, I can’t shake the deep feeling of dread as I head to the staircase.

“The bedroom with your things is the first on the left, the bathroom’s at the end of the corridor,” she calls after me.

The stairs creak and groan as I ascend, something which comforts me, at least I’ll hear her, or anyone else, coming.

The first door at the top of the stairs opens to a cozy yet simple bedroom with just a bed, covered in a checkered quilt, two nightstands, and a wardrobe.

There's a duffel on the bed which, on closer inspection, contains some clothes.

To my relief, the guys have chosen exactly what I would have if I'd been asked.

Basic comfortable underwear, warm socks, yoga pants, an oversized t-shirt, and a thick knit sweater.

Picking up the duffel with a smile at how well they know me, I continue to the bathroom.

I can't resist peeking in the other rooms as I go.

There's a small box room with a single bed, another with twin beds, and then a fourth room that's almost identical to mine.

This is clearly the room Ashley's been staying in, her belongings neatly put away in their correct places.

I find the bathroom at the end of the hall as she'd said.

Like the rest of the house, it has an old-fashioned charm.

There's a large, claw-footed tub with a showerhead over it that dominates the room as well as a toilet and simple sink with a medicine cabinet above it.

The wallpaper above the tiles is peeling slightly, but otherwise, it's clean and tidy.

The pipes groan as I turn on the faucet and wait for the water to get hot before climbing in.

I move slowly and carefully, the last thing I need is to slip in the tub and crack my

head open.

The warm water soothes my chilled and aching bones.

I'd like to stay under the comforting stream longer, but I'm eager to get dressed and downstairs again as fast as I can, still feeling on edge.

As I'm pulling on my t-shirt, I hear a knock at the door. I smile to myself about my earlier paranoia. They were just held up, like Ashley said. But then I realize I didn't hear any bikes...

Maybe the rain drowned them out. But the instinctual part of me, that ancient, buried part that senses danger deep down inside, tells me something isn't right.

Creeping as quietly as I can, I move along the corridor, listening to the sound of Ashley's footsteps and her pulling the chain on the door back.

I'm tempted to call out to tell her not to open it, to ask who's there first. But what if she already knows?

"I was starting to get worried—" I hear her gasp as the person standing there isn't who she was expecting. "What a surprise," she says, her voice shaking slightly despite her efforts to sound light and jovial. "I wasn't expecting you."

I dare to peek over the banister, trying to catch a glimpse of our mystery caller.

Ashley is holding the door firmly, blocking my view, her body language implies she's contemplating slamming the door in the face of our guest. A foot pushes its way in, against the door, as if aware of what she was thinking.

Even before I hear his voice, I know who it is. Has he realized I've gone missing

already?

“No, I’m sure you weren’t. But when Lucifer told me about your sick aunt, I just had to come and visit. Where is she?” Tony asks.

Did Ashley tell him where the safehouse is? I can’t believe she’d be that stupid.

But then another thought crosses my mind. One, that’s far more likely. This is all Tony’s little cat and mouse game. He let us have our fun, thinking we’d gotten away and now he’s here to enact his revenge. To her credit, Ashley doesn’t miss a beat. “She’s upstairs, sleeping.”

“Of course,” he agrees, going along with the charade. For now. But I know him, it won’t be long before he strikes. “Aren’t you going to invite me in?”

“How did you find me, Tony? I don’t recall ever telling you where my aunt lives,” she asks casually, not budging an inch, and ignoring his question—but answering mine as to whether she’d told him where she was going.

“I make it my business to know everything there is to know about people who work for me. When Lucifer told me how sick your aunt was and that you were going to be out of town for a while I felt it was my duty to see how I could help. After all, imagine my surprise that you’d not mentioned this aunt to me, nor that you’d need time away from caring for my pregnant wife. ”

Tony’s voice is slick, smooth, and calculated.

He knows exactly what he’s doing, the web he’s weaving.

I feel sick to hear him refer to me as his wife.

To him I might as well be, all that's missing is a piece of paper.

If I fall back into his clutches, it won't be long before he makes it official. Then I'll truly be trapped.

"Sorry, yes, I was going to tell you, and I'm not far away so I can still come to attend to Leah when I'm needed," Ashley says shakily.

She's still hoping that by some miracle, he hasn't found out that I'm missing.

Perhaps he really is here on Lucifer's behalf to check if her sick aunt is real or not.

But I know Tony too well. I'm under no illusion that he knows everything and the real reason that he's here. He's come for me.

"Well now, that's where we have a problem, Ashley. You see, Leah's missing."

"Missing?" she replies, doing her best to act surprised. I wish I could tell her how pointless this all is, that she should just slam the door in his face and run. I stand rooted to the spot with indecision. If I do something to let him know I'm here, then things are only going to get worse.

All I know right now is that Tony is somehow here and the guys aren't. That can't be a coincidence, can it?

A sharp bark of laughter escapes Tony's mouth. "You're good, Ashley, I'll give you that. Now, where is she?"

"I told you, my aunt is asleep upstairs, there's no one else here."

Tony sighs as if he's growing tired of playing now. Suddenly, in a sharp, violent burst

of energy, he pushes the door with all his might, catching Ashley off guard and knocking her to the ground. Tony strides into the house confidently.

His voice is calm and collected as he looks down at her. “Ashley, I know you were at my house tonight. And though Bruce was still unconscious when I left, I’m sure that once he wakes, he’ll confirm that you were the one who kidnapped my woman. The only question that remains is why?”

She scrambles to get up, “I didn’t—”

Smack!

He slaps her hard across the face with the back of his hand. The sound is so loud that I wince.

‘Don’t lie to me. Why help the Steel Vipers? What did they promise you?’

“Nothing. I swear, Leah isn’t here.”

All my doubts about Ashley’s honesty disappear. She really was telling me the truth. I should go down and help her. The old Leah would. But now I have four lives to worry about other than my own. Tony hits her again, harder this time and I swear I hear bone crunch.

Where are the guys? They need to get here, and fast.

He punches her again, almost knocking her unconscious. She won’t last long like this.

“The truth,” he demands.

“Okay, okay,” she replies, spitting blood. “I’m not lying when I say that I’m not

working with the Steel Vipers, nor am I lying about Leah not being here. But you're right, I did take her. But only because Lucifer asked me to."

She's caught his attention now. Mine too. Is this the truth? Or has she thought of some way to buy us time? If she was working with Lucifer, why lie about me still?

"And why would Lucifer do that?"

"Because he wants an insurance policy against you. Lucifer doesn't like being second to anyone, not even you. Leah is your one weakness, he wanted to use her against you for more power."

If it's a lie, it's a damn smart one. Tony will believe it, I'm certain.

"If she's not here, then where is she?" he asks coolly.

"With Lucifer."

I can't see his face, but I can only imagine the triumphant gleam in his eyes.

"Well, now that, Ashley, is a lie because I happen to know that Lucifer is in the process of ending the Steel Vipers once and for all. One of their own betrayed them. That's right, the cavalry isn't coming.

Those four brutes everyone seems to love won't be coming to the rescue, you're all alone. "

I feel sick with worry. As much as I don't want to believe he's telling the truth, I don't doubt him. They'd be here by now if something hadn't happened. Help isn't coming.

We're on our own.

Knox

We didn't realize it was an ambush until it was too late.

Wolf betrayed us. He pulled his gun on Rider the moment he realized our observant friend saw past his lies.

Axel jumped in front, taking a shot to the shoulder, a shot that was otherwise destined for Rider's chest, and barreled his way toward the man, pulling his own gun and firing off a shot that met its mark, hitting Wolf in the gut.

It wasn't until we heard the shot that the rest of us realized what was happening.

From where we're standing, tending to Chug's wounds, I can't hear what Wolf is saying to Axel.

But the rumbling of motorcycles in the distance tells me it's nothing good.

If we stay here, we're inviting a shootout.

If we get on our bikes now, we stand a chance of outrunning them.

But Chug and Fastman are too injured to ride.

Rider and Axel come running over. Axel barely seems to notice the bullet wound in his arm. They fill us in on everything that Wolf told them.

“Fastman’s dead. I think Wolf finished the job if the crash didn’t kill him,” Axel says grimly.

“That has to be the Hellhounds coming to finish the job Wolf started. What do we do?”

Axel considers my question, his face grave. “The way I see it, we’ve got no choice. Chug can’t ride and we’re not leaving him behind.”

“Like fuck you ain’t,” Chug groans. His sentence is punctuated by a coughing fit, a trickle of blood remains in the corner of his mouth, highlighting just how injured he is. He needs medical attention, and fast.”

Chuck already called an ambulance, but it won’t get here fast enough.

“What about Leah and the babies?” I ask. As much as I don’t want to abandon our friend, my worry for Leah is stronger. “Could Ashley be in on this?”

I haven’t trusted Ashley this whole time. I never liked that the rescue plan relied so heavily on her. What if Wolf wasn’t the only one who betrayed us? Hellhounds could be headed for the safehouse right now.

“I don’t think so...” he replies, though he doesn’t sound entirely certain.

We’ve got seconds to decide, because the Hellhounds are on their way.

Luckily, they’re not out in full force, I can only assume it’s because our attack on their clubhouse is keeping them occupied.

I pray that our men are handling themselves.

Though knowing we had a traitor in our midst, now I realize it's likely they knew about our planned attack, and any element of surprise would have been lost.

"Prez, we need you to make the call," Jace says, his eyes darting between the approaching vehicles and Axel.

"Fuck," he mutters frustratedly. "Chuck, take my bike, put Chug in the sidecar, and drive to the nearest hospital."

In the heat of the moment, I'd almost forgotten about the sidecar we'd decided to bring for Leah to ride in. Chuck immediately does as he's told. Saving his best friend is his priority right now.

"Good luck," he says, saluting us before he tears away.

"The rest of us are gonna try to split them up and either outrun them or take them out. Got it?"

"Axel, you know that's madness. Lucifer will just send them all after you. You're too valuable, we've gotta protect you."

"What else do you suggest, Knox?"

"I say we stand our ground, and you challenge Lucifer to a fight"

"He'd never go for that, he'd be crazy to try to challenge Axel in a one-on-one fight, as vain and stupid as he is, even Lucifer knows he wouldn't stand a chance," Jace points out.

"True, but he might be proud enough to try if you goad him enough. If not, I reckon you could convince him to race you."

“I hope you’re right...”

“What about Leah? Should one of us go to her?” I ask. As much as I don’t want to leave my brothers behind, I can’t stand the thought that she and the babies might be in danger.

He shakes his head sadly. “We can’t risk leading them to her. We just have to trust that she’s okay and get this over with as quickly as we can.”

Whatever Lucifer was expecting, I presume it wasn’t this. We stand in a line, hands up. Lucifer and his men stop a little distance away and dismount, guns drawn.

“Surrendering already?” Lucifer croons.

“Not quite, but I’ve got a wager I’d like to put to you, which will save any fighting or bloodshed on either side,” Axel calls back.

“The way I see it, we outnumber you, so why would we bother when our victory is a sure thing?” Despite his words, I can tell Lucifer is intrigued. A gambler never turns down a wager, Axel’s got him hooked already.

“I wouldn’t be so confident about that. We might be outnumbered, but we’re also four highly trained combat veterans with far more experience handling weapons than your men. Even if you win, you’re gonna lose men. Are you willing to take that risk when there’s an easier way?”

“What do you propose?”

“You and me, a little one-on-one competition.”

Lucifer snorts. “You want me to fight you?”

It's clear from his tone he won't go for it, not even if we goad him and question his masculinity in front of his men. He's not so foolish as to think he could win.

"No. I want you to race me."

Lucifer laughs with glee. As simple as that, we've got him. Lucifer is known for his speed and loves to race. It's a challenge that's in his favor and he knows it. This way, if he wins, he takes all the glory.

"What are the stakes?"

"Club for club. You win, the Steel Vipers are yours, if I win, the Hellhounds are mine."

"You're bullshitting me. You can't make that call," he says.

"I'm Prez now, I can do what the fuck I like," Axel says as he starts to walk toward his bike, knowing he's got Lucifer well and truly hooked.

"You'd give your club to me?" his voice is incredulous.

"Only if I lose, and I ain't planning on doing that."

It's an offer Lucifer can't refuse. "Deal."

The terms of the race are discussed and agreed upon. The rain is still hammering down, and the risk of crashing is going to be high. Lucifer is known for being a cheat, he'll do his best to run Axel off the road. He won't be satisfied with just winning, if he can, he'll kill Axel.

"Are you sure about this, Prez?" I say quietly as he climbs on his bike.

“Yes. This is the only way. Even if we take them all out, chances are we spend the rest of our lives in jail for it. Leah and the babies need us, they need you. This way gets them off our back.”

“But what if—”

He cuts me off, “I’m gonna win. There’s no ‘what ifs’.”

“But Leah and the babies need you to, you’re no use to anyone dead,” I say.

“I’ll be fine, brother,” he promises, we both know he can’t be sure of that though.

Lucifer revs his engine, and the race is about to start.

“Knox. I need you to do this. Once the race begins and everyone is distracted, I want you to get on your bike and drive as fast as you can to Leah. Do you understand me?”

“But...”

I want to say that I’ll miss the race, I won’t know if we win or lose or if Axel even survives, but the words die on my lips. He’s right, I need to make sure Leah and the babies are safe, they have to be my main priority, now and always.

“Do you understand?” he repeats hurriedly.

I nod. “Yes.”

The race starts and Lucifer is off to an early lead.

With great effort, I force myself to look away and focus on everyone else.

The second I spot my opportunity I don't hesitate, I jump on my bike and tear out of there as quickly as I dare.

By the time the Hellhounds realize what's happening I'm already far ahead and to catch up to me would risk crashing.

They fire off a few shots, one sails past my head, too close for comfort and I accelerate, picking up the speed and making my bike skid on the slick ground.

I don't slow down until they're out of sight and I see they've given up on following me.

If Lucifer survives, I'm sure he'll be having words with his men about that.

I try not to think about what we'll do if Axel loses. The thought is inconceivable to me. We'd lose our best friend and the club in one fell swoop. He has to win. Even if the odds are stacked against him.

Leah

I can't stand here watching any longer. Ashley is doing this to buy me time to escape.

As quietly as I can, I tiptoe to the nearest room, hoping to find a way out.

I peek out the window, looking at the trellis outside.

It's old and rotted, there's no way I can climb down.

The fall is too high, I can't try to jump either.

I go back out into the landing, trying not to listen to the sickening sounds of Tony beating Ashley.

I can't believe that she's not given in yet.

All Tony would need to do is stop and come upstairs to find me. He knows full well I'm up here.

He also knows that I'm not the sort of person who can listen to this without trying to help. He's trying to lure me out of my hiding space. He's toying with us both. He's enjoying this.

I can't believe I'm not going to help her. What sort of a coward am I? But what could I do to help? And if I do, I'm doing exactly what he expects of me, what he wants me to do. No. I need to be smart about this.

A gun. There has to be a gun here.

Abandoning my plans of escape, I change tactics and look for a weapon.

A floorboard squeaks.

It falls silent downstairs.

“There you are, Leah. I was beginning to think you were going to do nothing while your friend died for you. Not very noble of you,” he calls out, his voice taunting and yet strangely proud.

He’s happy I was willing to put myself first, he wants me to be as selfish and emotionless as he is.

“Why don’t you come on down here and join us? ”

I hover indecisively for a second before deciding to continue my search. Without a weapon, I can’t save Ashley or myself. I also know Tony, right now the only thing keeping Ashley alive is that she’s something he can use against me. He’ll hurt her, but he won’t kill her.

“Don’t...” Ashley croaks. “My... room...”

I don’t wait to hear the rest of her sentence, I know what she’s telling me. There has to be a gun in her room somewhere.

I race across the hall, not caring how much noise I make now.

The deafening sound of a gunshot makes me come to a screeching halt.

A sob catches in my throat as I realize it can only mean one thing.

He's killed her. He actually killed her.

I could have saved her, and I didn't. I can't let myself dwell on my guilt and shame though.

He's coming for me.

I have to save myself and my babies.

"Ready or not... here I come!" he cries out in delight, as if this is a game. As if he didn't just murder an innocent woman in cold blood.

I race to Ashley's bedroom, slamming the door and locking it behind me. I stumble over to the wardrobe, hastily searching for it and finding it empty. I head to the dresser, yanking open the drawer to find a gun case. Thank god. I almost sob with relief.

I can hear Tony walking slowly along the corridor, his footsteps heavy and sure. He's not in a rush. He's not afraid. He even begins to whistle. The sadistic bastard is enjoying this.

I'll show him.

With trembling hands, I try to load the gun as quickly as I can.

Knock knock knock.

"Locking doors is cheating, Leah," he calls in a sing-song voice.

“Come on in and get me then, motherfucker.”

He laughs, amused by my defiance. He should be scared.

With one, swift kick the door buckles and swings open. Tony bursts through the door. I have the pleasure of watching the smile wipe from his face as he notices the gun I have pointed at his head. Before he has a chance to react, I pull the trigger.

The gun clicks.

Nothing happens.

Tony’s look of horror turns to triumph and while I’m still figuring out what happened he runs full pelt toward me, knocking the gun from my hand and sending it skittering across the room.

I should be grateful at least that he didn’t use his gun on me.

If Tony plans to kill me, he won’t want it to be quick.

I struggle against him, but I’m no match for Tony. He’s bigger, stronger, and a trained fighter. He knocks me to the ground, sitting astride me, his hands close around my throat.

“You thought you could get away from me, didn’t you?”

” he snarls. “I knew all about your little plan. You see, not everyone thinks your precious bikers are so great. Some of their men actually have sense. They know that they’re too weak to rule, and under Axel’s leadership, the Steel Vipers will remain weak Boy Scouts with no power.

So they've been reporting back to me, letting me know all about their little plan.

Of course, we could have stopped it before it even started, but where would the fun be in that? ”

His hands squeeze my throat, cutting off just enough air to keep me silent without stopping me from breathing completely.

He wants me to listen to his tirade. Which is a good thing, it buys me time.

My gun is out of reach, but his isn't. If I can distract him, perhaps I can pull it from its holster quick enough to use it.

“No, far better to allow them to move ahead with their plan and catch them unawares. It was the perfect ambush. They didn't stand a chance. No one's coming to rescue you, Leah. Those losers weren't your white knights, your saviors. I was. And you rejected me.”

He can tell I'm trying to speak, and he releases my throat slightly, no doubt expecting me to beg and plead for my life. To appease him and tell him what he wants to hear, the same way I've always done.

“You're pathetic, all this because a woman rejected you. You're weak, getting others to take on your enemy while you handle the girls,” I spit, blazing fire as I glare defiantly into his eyes.

He roars with anger, striking me so hard across the jaw that I taste blood. I've hit a nerve.

“You don't understand, Leah, no one's coming to save you. And if I can't have you, no one can.”

He starts to squeeze tighter, cutting off my airflow completely. I try to stay calm, to focus on getting his gun. I hit him but my punches are weak and ineffective. I start to see stars. It won't be long now.

In the distance, I can hear the rumble of motorcycles and relief floods my body. They're coming. They're okay. But they're too far away. They'll be too late. Tony is right. No one is coming to save me, to save my babies. But he's forgetting one thing.

I can save us.

Just as I think it's too late, my hand clasps around the gun. Tony is too busy telling me how much he loves me to notice what is happening. He thinks he's the tragic hero, that killing me is justified. He has no idea what love is.

With my last ounce of strength, I raise the gun and point it at his temple. I pull back the safety with a click. Tony's eyes go wide with realization, and he eases his grip on my throat.

"Leah—"

I pull the trigger.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:38 pm

Knox

The second I pull up to the safehouse I know something is wrong. Very wrong. The front door is wide open. I jump off my bike, discarding my helmet on the ground as I run toward the house. The sound of a gunshot momentarily stops me in my tracks, and I swear my heart stops beating.

“Leah!” I scream in panic as I race inside, gun drawn.

At the bottom of the stairs I see Ashley’s lifeless body, I don’t bother to check for a pulse, whoever killed her did a thorough job of it and half of her head is blown away. I race up the stairs, taking them two at a time.

Why is it so quiet?

“Leah!”

I find her in a bedroom. She’s huddled on the floor, her back against the wall, her beautiful face is splattered in blood from the dead man who lies before her.

Holstering my gun I tentatively walk over to her, moving as slowly and carefully as I can so as to not startle her.

She’s in shock, the gun still gripped in her hand, her gaze focused only on the dead man before her. She hasn’t even realized I’m here.

“Leah, sweetie, it’s me, Knox... it’s okay now, you’re safe, I’m here...”

I move over to crouch down beside her, gently taking hold of the gun.

She releases it without a fight. She blinks, seeming to come into focus as she looks up at me.

She looks so fragile I want to pull her into my arms and never let go but she's just been through a traumatic experience, and I don't want to overwhelm her.

"Knox?" she says softly, her voice confused.

"Yes baby, I'm here."

She throws herself with force into my arms, squeezing me tightly to ascertain if I'm real or not.

"He was going to kill me... he killed Ashley, I had to..." she starts to babble.

"Shh, it's okay, I know... it's okay," I murmur, stroking her hair as she finally breaks down, her tears making little difference on my already soaked skin.

I curse myself for not getting here sooner, for not being here to keep her safe. For trusting Ashley, who must have revealed our secret location.

"I'm so sorry I wasn't here. You should never have to have gone through this. We should never have trusted Ashley."

She shakes her head furiously. "No, Ashley didn't betray us. She died trying to protect me. I should have saved her," she sobs.

"How did he find you?" I ask, confused.

“I don’t know, but it wasn’t Ashley. He was torturing her,” this comes out in a strangled, pained sob. “He somehow knew she was going to help me escape, I think he followed us here.”

Wolf must have revealed the plan but the only people who knew the location were us and Ashley, it stands to reason the only way he could have found this place was by following them.

Coming to her senses more, Leah finally notices the others are missing. “Where are Axel, Rider, and Jace?” she asks, her brow furrowed with concern as she clings to my shirt like a life raft. She looks at me with such fear and trust in her eyes I can’t bring myself to tell her the truth.

“They’ll be here soon. Come on, let’s get out of this room.”

She allows me to help her up but as she looks at the dead man who terrorized her for so long, her legs buckle, and I scoop her up into my arms. It feels good to hold her like this.

I carry her downstairs, doing my best to shield her from the sight of Ashley.

Even so, she lets out a pained cry when she sees her.

I try to comfort her as best as I can. Reluctantly, I call the police.

There’s no way we can cover this up or hide it.

But I’d give anything for Leah to not have to go through what’s to come.

I don’t want her to relive this nightmare.

Part of me considers that we should run, get as far away as we can, but I know the cops would track us down eventually and it would look far worse on Leah if she did.

If she tells the truth, I know they will see that it's a clear case of self-defense.

Time seems to drag by painfully slowly while we wait. My mind keeps going to Axel. The race must be over by now. Why aren't the guys here yet? The fact that they aren't can only mean one thing, something bad happened.

Do I even have a club anymore, or have Steel Vipers been patched over to the Hellhounds?

My phone rings, it's Jace. With a heavy heart, I answer it, dreading the news I'm about to hear.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:38 pm

Leah

The rain has finally stopped, and a new day is breaking when the police finally finish interviewing me.

The night feels like a blur, and I can barely remember their questions, I'm grateful Knox called the club's lawyer.

Reliving the night's events has completely drained me.

Thankfully, the police seem to believe me, and their lawyer doesn't think they'll press charges.

That does little to assuage my guilt. I let Ashley die.

I may not have trusted her, but she didn't deserve that.

If only I'd found the gun sooner she might still be alive.

I know I'll never forget tonight, as much as I may want to.

Knox is waiting for me when I come out and he pulls me into his strong arms, his embrace a welcome comfort. Part of me had dared to hope that the others would be there too. Their absence is worrying.

"Let's get you home," Knox says, gently guiding me out of the door.

“Where are the others? Why didn’t they come?” I ask, my voice small and childlike.

Part of me worries they’ve somehow decided they don’t want me, that they don’t care enough to come, the other worries they physically can’t come because they’re hurt. I don’t know which will hurt more.

Knox looks torn and I can tell he’s wrestling with whether or not he should tell me the truth. “Please, whatever it is, tell me,” I urge.

Finally, he relents. “They’re at the hospital.”

“What happened? Are they okay?”

“Yes, they’re okay,” he says, but I can tell he’s withholding something from me.

“Please, tell me.”

“Not here. Let’s get home and then I promise I’ll tell you everything.”

I can only assume he doesn’t want the cops overhearing.

“I’m not going home. We’re going to the hospital to see them, right now. You can tell me what happened on the way.”

Knox knows me well enough by now to know how stubborn I can be. One look at my determined expression and he gives in with a sigh.

“Come on then,” he says heading over to Ashley’s truck.

He only had his bike with him, so it made sense to take hers.

It feels strange climbing inside. It was only a few hours ago that Ashley and I were driving to the safehouse and I thought the nightmare was over, it turned out it was only just starting.

As we drive to the hospital, Knox explains everything that happened up until the point that Axel told him to come find me.

He then relays his phone conversation with Jace.

Apparently, Lucifer was fighting dirty, trying to run Axel off the road.

Axel managed to hold his own and even overtake Lucifer at one point, but then the other man rammed into the back of his bike, causing him to crash.

Lucifer's move was a foolish one as it caused him to lose control of his own bike.

He came flying off, colliding headfirst with a tree, killing him instantly.

Seeing their leader was dead, but that there had technically been no victor, the remaining Hellhounds were confused.

Some decided to flee while others stayed and fought.

Knox doesn't go into details, but it sounds as if Rider and Jace were lucky to have beaten them.

Both got wounded in the process but will be fine.

He continues, "Axel wasn't so lucky. He hit his head when he crashed. The helmet saved his life, but there was swelling on his brain, and he's got several broken bones. He's currently in a medically induced coma."

Knox is still speaking, but I can't take any of it in. After surviving so much, will a motorcycle crash be the thing that ends him? I don't even realize I'm crying until I feel Knox lean over and wipe them away.

"Did you hear me, Leah? I said he's going to be okay, the doctors think he'll make a full recovery."

Relief floods me. "He's going to be okay? Really? They're all okay?"

"Yes, Leah, he will be, and they are," Knox replies with a smile. "Please try to keep calm, it's not good for the babies," he adds, worry marring his handsome face as he pulls into the hospital parking lot.

I love how much he cares for these babies before they've even been born. My heart swells with love for him and I pull him close, kissing him deeply. Pleasantly surprised, he kisses me back.

"You're incredible, do you know that?" I tell him.

He smiles at me and shakes his head. "No. You are. I'm not sure I'll ever forgive myself for not being there on time to rescue you, for not being there when you needed me the most. But I hope that if you take one positive thing from this whole horrifying ordeal, it's this, you are a strong, capable woman.

You don't need a man to save you, you can save yourself.

I promise, I will be there every step of the way as long as you'll have me, as a partner, a lover, or even just as a friend if that's what you want, but know that you are capable of doing anything, with or without help. "

A strange sense of pride floods me. He's right.

I did survive all that without anyone else.

I don't need a knight in shining armor to save me, I can save myself.

If I survived tonight and finally got Tony out of my life for good, there's nothing holding me back.

I can be the mom these babies need without any help.

I can choose. He's giving me an out. He's telling me that he won't mind if I want to be alone.

He's giving me a choice. Something Tony robbed me of. I love him for it.

"I love you." The words come before I've even registered what I said.

He looks at me in shock and for a second, I think I've misjudged it horribly, but then he breaks into the most gorgeous grin I've ever seen. "I love you, too." The words are like music to my ears, and I know I can face what's to come with him by my side.

We head into the hospital hand in hand where we find Rider and Jace, both bruised and bandaged but otherwise fine, waiting for us in the reception area. I rush over to them and throw myself into Jace's arms. He hugs me tightly.

"Good to see you, gorgeous. I heard about how badass you were tonight, remind me never to piss you off."

His words are so him, so Jace, that I laugh despite the fact there are tears in my eyes. "Don't you forget it," I say punching him playfully in his good arm.

I move over to Rider, a little more uncertain, he's not a fan of physical contact. I

needn't have worried, he immediately pulls me into a tight embrace, kissing my forehead. "I'm so glad you're okay, I'm sorry we couldn't be there."

"This one ripped his IV out and tried to leave. By that point you were already at the cop shop, so I managed to talk him out of it," Jace tells me.

"I know all of you would have been there if you could. You had no way of knowing that Tony had found us, that I was in danger at all. You did the right thing staying to protect Axel. If you hadn't been there..."

"My voice trails off, there's no need for me to say the words.

If Axel had raced Lucifer alone, when he crashed his men would likely have killed him.

I don't want to be some damsel in distress. If my life had been put first and one of them had died, I'd have never forgiven myself. Or them.

"Where is he?"

There's no need to say who I mean. The others lead the way to Axel's room.

I let out a small cry of anguish when I see him.

He looks so small, so vulnerable in the bed, hooked up to machines.

They have shaved his long, thick hair leaving his scalp exposed, most of his body is bandaged, his arm, shoulder, and a leg in plaster cast. I've no doubt that he's lucky to be alive.

I move over to his side, taking his big, limp hand in mine. I squeeze it but he doesn't

squeeze back. I stroke his cheek gently, unable to hold back my tears.

“You come back to us soon, Axel, okay? We need you, I need you, these babies need you. Don’t you dare quit on us, you hear me?” I lean close to kiss his cheek. “I love you,” I whisper into his ear, hoping that, wherever he might be, he can hear me.

One Week Later

The soft beep of monitors is the only constant sound in the quiet hospital room. It’s become a strange kind of comfort, that rhythm, steady and calm. I sit by Axel’s bed, my hand curled gently around his. His skin is warm, but unmoving.

A week ago, I thought we might lose everything. We didn’t. Not entirely. The babies are healthy. That’s a miracle all on its own. My last checkup showed they’re developing normally, their tiny hearts strong and beating. Despite everything, they’re thriving.

Axel... not yet.

His sedation was stopped two days ago. Now it’s just a waiting game. The doctors are cautiously optimistic, but that only helps so much. I know the statistics. I’ve read everything I can about comas, waking up, what it means, what it doesn’t. I just want him back.

The door creaks quietly as Knox enters, followed by Rider and Jace. All three look tired, like they’ve lived a hundred lives this past week. Jace’s arm is still bandaged, Rider has a fresh scar above his eyebrow. But they’re alive. And they’re here.

“Hey,” I say softly.

They offer tired smiles and file in, taking their usual spots. Jace drops into the chair beside me and steals one of the hospital jelly cups off the side tray. He's the only one who can make this place feel a little lighter.

"You holding up?" Knox asks, crouching beside me. He puts a hand on my thigh, squeezing gently.

I nod weakly. "Trying to."

"Surprised you can sleep on the hospital cot" Jace mutters through a mouthful of green jelly. "Those things are sadistic."

A weak smile tugs at the corner of my mouth. The guys all wanted to take turns staying with Axel, but I insisted. I lean my head briefly against Knox's shoulder.

"Doctor said it could happen anytime now," I whisper. "He's breathing on his own. No complications. But... it's Axel. He's strong. I just—I don't know what we'll do if he doesn't come back."

"He'll come back," Rider says, voice hoarse but steady.

"I want to believe that."

"You don't have to believe it," Jace says. "Just know it. He's too damn stubborn to check out now. And he promised you, remember? He never breaks a promise."

Knox stands, placing a gentle kiss to the top of my head. "If he can fight off Lucifer and a bike crash at full speed, he can fight his way back to us."

They try to sound confident, but I can hear the cracks. We're all holding on by threads. The club is holding strong, the cleanup continues, but this—Axel—is what

we orbit. Without him, nothing feels solid.

Rider walks to the window and stares out at the morning light. “You should rest, Leah. Let us take over for a bit.”

“I can’t,” I say, eyes still on Axel’s face. “I might miss it.”

“Miss what?” Knox asks gently.

“When he wakes up.”

We sit in silence for a while. The guys talk softly about club matters—who’s watching the compound, updates on rebuilding the clubhouse. I half-listen. My hand never leaves Axel’s.

Despite my promise to myself that I’d keep watch, I felt my eyelids getting heavier and I must have dozed off. However, a moment later, Axel’s fingers twitch underneath mine.

I freeze. I stare at his hand, afraid to breathe.

“Did you guys see that?” I whisper, heart pounding.

Knox steps forward, eyes narrowing. “Do it again, brother,” he mutters under his breath. “Come on, you’ve got more fight in you.”

There it is again—a definite twitch, this time his eyelids fluttering slightly.

I stand, my fingers trembling as I press the call button for the nurse. “He’s moving. I swear to god, he’s moving.”

Jace is already at the foot of the bed, eyes wide. “Jesus, Axel, if you’re about to wake up just to tell me I owe you fifty bucks, I swear...”

The nurse rushes in a minute later, checks his vitals, then leans close to his face, calling his name, “Mr. Martin?”

“Axel? Can you hear me?” I ask.

A low groan rumbles from his throat. His lips part, and his head shifts slightly towards my voice.

“Axel?” I breathe. “It’s me. Leah. I’m right here.”

His brows furrow. Another soft sound escapes him. His eyes struggle to open, but they don’t quite manage it.

“Take your time,” I whisper, stroking his forehead. “You’re okay. You’re safe.”

His chest rises more sharply now, the rhythm of his breathing changing as if he’s trying to speak.

“Can he hear us?” Rider asks the nurse quietly.

“He might. Keep talking. Keep him grounded.”

Knox moves closer, his voice low and steady. “Axel, we’re all here. You’re at the hospital. You made it, brother. We’ve got you.”

Jace leans in next. “Come on man, you can do it.”

That gets a faint breath of air from Axel—just enough to be called a laugh.

His eyelids flicker again. This time, one eye opens a sliver.

“Axel?” I say again, my heart in my throat.

His lips barely move, but the sound is unmistakable—a broken whisper, rough from disuse.

“Leah...”

Tears flood my eyes. “I’m here. I’m right here, Axel.”

His fingers close weakly around mine. His gaze is cloudy, but he finds me, just for a second.

“You... okay?” he rasps, barely audible.

I nod, tears spilling down my cheeks.

“Babies?”

“They’re perfect. Strong as hell, they must take after their father.”

He tries to smile, but it comes out more like a twitch of his lips.

“Love... you...”

I kiss his knuckles, holding them to my cheek. “I love you too. We all do.”

Knox puts a hand on his shoulder, gentle. “You did it, Prez. You made it back.”

Axel’s eyes close again, his breathing steadying—but this time, it’s not the stillness

of coma. It's the exhaustion of someone who's just clawed their way back to the world.

And he's here. With us.

And no one is ever going to part us again.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:38 pm

Axel

Six Months Later

The last thought that crossed my mind as I lost control of my bike that fateful night was of Leah's face and how I would never see it again.

When I woke up a week later, her angelic face was the first thing I saw.

For a brief moment, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

I suppose, in a way, I did since my life since then has been as close to perfect as I could imagine.

Sure, rehabilitation and PT have been a bitch, but with Leah and my best friends by my side, and knowing I'm lucky to be alive, have made it bearable.

Six months later, I'm almost back to normal, though I walk with a slight limp now and always will, thanks to the bike crushing my leg.

I enjoy teasing Jace about that to no end, since it was his motorcycle I was riding.

Chuck feels terrible for taking my bike as if that might have made a difference, but I don't regret it one bit.

If he hadn't gotten Chug to the hospital when he did, our friend would have died.

With Tony and Lucifer both dead, and the Hellhounds disbanded, we made it perfectly clear that a new leader with the same ideals would be quickly shut down.

Our men did a number on their clubhouse too, so that helped to stop any potential new president from picking up where Lucifer left off.

Some of the members even asked to join the Steel Vipers, they were heavily vetted and it turned out that many had disapproved of Lucifer's plans for the club but were too afraid to leave as other deserters had been killed.

We had some housekeeping to do at the Steel Vipers too.

With it coming to light that Wolf was a traitor, we had to weed out any others.

It's going to take time, but I feel confident that the club is going to move in a newer, better direction.

Then, of course, we had to rebuild our clubhouse.

Tonight is the grand opening and Leah will be performing, bump and all.

I'm in constant awe of how strong she's been throughout all of this.

She's an old lady that any Prez would be proud to have.

Thankfully, Leah didn't face any charges for killing Tony, nor did we for Lucifer's death.

It helped that we'd managed to take out the city's most notorious crime lord and the most troublesome motorcycle gang leader in one fell swoop.

One stipulation of that was that the Steel Vipers had to be whiter than white and legal from now on.

Considering Zeus had been in the process of trying to do just that, I was only too happy to agree.

I have a family to consider, and the legacy I leave behind for my kids is going to be a positive one.

I roll over in bed to look at Leah, who's still fast asleep.

She looks even more beautiful now that she's heavily pregnant.

Her bump is huge, she looks like she's ready to pop, but she's still a few months away.

All of us are obsessed with her bump. I think it's become a bit of a kink for us.

I like nothing more than to spend hours giving her massages and rubbing oil into it to help her prevent stretch marks.

It's my turn to share a bed with her, we tend to take it in turns since trying to fit five of us in a bed is a struggle.

However, we've almost finished the house conversion which will better fit our expanding family.

We're knocking through and combining our house with Zeus and Donna's old place to make a giant family-sized home.

One that will have a big old room with a massive bed for nights when we do all want

to share— and to play in—as well as our own bedrooms for when we need some alone time.

Plus it will have a large nursery for the babies.

Down the line, we may need to give up some space for when the quadruplets want their own rooms, but for now, that's not a concern.

We decided to keep the genders a surprise, but chances are there will be at least one of each I reckon.

As long as they're healthy and happy, I don't mind.

I just can't wait to be a dad. They might not be ours by blood, but we'll love them as if they were.

I kiss Leah on the nape of her neck, and she groans sleepily, wiggling her butt back into me.

My cock twinges in response. She still manages to turn me on just as much as before.

I know the others feel the same way too.

Six months on and things are pretty serious between us all, we've all dropped the 'L-bomb' with her, and she's reciprocated.

Life is fucking great.

I'm loath to wake her, but the builders will arrive soon, and she's told me off before for letting her sleep late.

Despite this, she still manages to tell me off for waking her every time.

Not that I blame her for being a bit grouchy.

Carrying one child is hard enough, let alone four.

Luckily, I know a surefire way to wake her up happy.

I continue to kiss her neck, my hand snaking around her to gently massage her breasts which have swollen to astronomical proportions.

Jace is a particular lover of her boobs now stating that 'there's no such thing as too big' when she complains about them.

I tease her nipples, and she gasps breathily, I know she's awake now, but she'll continue the charade of pretending to be asleep, so I continue 'waking her up'.

She bites her lip, giving herself away and I chuckle softly under my breath.

She pushes her ass against my cock, teasing me.

I pull her closer, putting my left arm under her so I can continue to play with her nipples while my right-hand teases her clit.

Her bump is so big now that I have to go from behind.

I stroke a finger along the length of her slit, feeling how wet she is already.

Her sex drive hasn't dissipated with the pregnancy, if anything it's only gotten higher.

We've been only too happy to find new, creative ways to pleasure her without harming the babies.

The sex is different now than it was, more tender, but even better because we all know exactly what turns each other on.

I'd say the gentleness comes from the pregnancy, but in all honesty, I think it's also because we're no longer just fucking, we're making love.

Something I never thought I'd say, and you wouldn't catch me saying out loud.

Leah moans, grinding on my hand and I delve a finger into her folds.

She's slick with arousal which turns me on even more, my cock hardens and pushes against her ass.

I'd like to make her cum with my fingers, but she's hungry for more this morning.

Reaching back she moves my fingers out of the way and gripping the base of my cock, she guides my tip to her entrance.

I oblige her, pushing in slowly so I can feel her tight pussy stretching for me, a perfect fit.

I kiss her neck again, biting her ear softly. "I fucking love you," I whisper in her ear.

"I fucking love you too. Now fuck me," she giggles back, turning her head to kiss me.

I do just that, fucking her slowly and lazily, the perfect start to the day. It doesn't take long until we're both close.

“Cum with me,” she pants, and I do. After all, I can’t say no to her.

Leah

Six Months Later

It's the babies christening today. They came early by almost two months, three boys and a girl, and were in the NICU for a short while.

But they're strong and were out before we knew it.

Even so, we waited a little while for the christening to make sure they were as healthy as can be before exposing them to so many people.

They're almost eight months old now and becoming little handfuls.

We named them for their biological family, gone but never forgotten.

The boys, Levi for his dad, Billy for his grandfather—Zeus' real name was William—and little Donnie after his grandma.

Our little girl is, of course, April, after her mom.

Her second name is Ashley, after the woman who helped save my life and theirs.

My nightmares have almost gone now. I'm too exhausted, when I get the chance to sleep, I'm out like a light. In time, I hope I'll forget Tony's face. I know that with the love of my amazing men and children, I'll heal from what he did to me.

It was no surprise to me that Knox absolutely adores the children and dotes on them, as do Jace and Axel, both of whom were a little more of a surprise to see how gentle and adoring they can be.

The real surprise was Rider. Not that I didn't think he'd love them, I knew he would, but I thought he might struggle given his PTSD.

But the babies have been miracles for him, healing him in ways nothing else could.

Especially little April, she is well and truly a daddy's girl, the others hardly get a look in because she's always in Rider's arms. It melts my heart to see him healing.

He doesn't even turn on the light at night in their room when he checks on them, lest he wake them up, despite how much the dark terrifies him.

I can imagine that by the time they're running around playing hide and go seek, he'll feel brave and comfortable enough to hide in a dark closet without panicking.

Giving birth to four babies was no walk in the park, so I've been damn lucky to have the guys to help take care of them. I won't say it's been easy, but with five of us to care for them, we get by without too much difficulty. I have the utmost respect for single moms who do it all alone.

I've not sung publicly since before the babies were born, but I sing to them every day. They seem to like it. Today I'm going to serenade them with as many loving songs as I can think of at the after-party.

As I climb on the stage at the brand-new and improved clubhouse, I take a moment to look out at the faces of our friends and family.

Seeing my handsome, kind, and fearless men holding our babies makes my heart swell and I give the best performance of my life.

After two encores, I'm tired but blissfully happy.

I leave the stage to rapturous applause and head over to the men I love, who I know will always be in the crowd cheering me on.

I no longer wish to be famous, but I will be happy to make a living performing.

I want to teach my children that we don't give up on our dreams, but sometimes they evolve.

Mine is now to be the best mom and partner I can be.

"You were amazing, darlin'," Axel says, kissing me first. I kiss the top of Levi's sleeping head, breathing in the amazing baby smell of him.

"At least you think so, this little one always sleeps through my performances," I chuckle.

"Take it as a compliment, your voice is so soothing," Knox interjects coming to kiss me too, and handing Donnie over to me.

Donnie looks up at me and grabs my hair in his pudgy fist. I blow a raspberry on his cheek which elicits screams of delight from him. Billy reaches out his arms for me, eager not to be left out and I take him too. Before long I won't be able to hold two of them like this, they're getting so big.

"You were incredible, shame we've got to listen to Rider now," Jace quips. But we all know he's just teasing. The guys are possibly even happier than I am about Rider's newfound confidence on stage, he even performs alone now.

I hand Donnie and Billy back to the guys and take April off Rider. I kiss him on the lips, and she pushes us apart indignantly demanding a kiss on the cheek from daddy

too. We chuckle and he obliges her.

“She’s a bossy little madam, we’re going to have to watch her, or else she’s going to walk all over her brothers,” I point out.

“As she should, it will serve them well to learn that women are strong and independent early on,” Rider replies.

“Too true. Break a leg up there.”

“I’ll do my best, you’re a tough act to follow.”

“Love you.”

“I love you too.”

The others simply smile at this interaction.

There’s no jealousy. We all make sure to let each other know how much we love each other.

The guys might not say it to one another, but they love each other as brothers.

Well, perhaps brothers isn’t right, it might be a bit gross considering the sexual aspect of our relationship, but they’re more than just friends.

Sometimes I want to pinch myself about how lucky I am. When I left home for LA I never imagined my life turning out like this. If you’d told me I’d be in a committed relationship with four men and mother to quadruplets I’d have told you you’re insane, yet here I am, and I couldn’t be happier.

My grandfather is visiting us currently.

We only told him that I was in a relationship with Axel and that we had quadruplets, we didn't want to shock him, and it's too complicated to explain over the phone.

But he's an astute man, it didn't take him more than a few hours to figure out that there's more to my relationship with the others.

But so far, he's not said anything. As he walks over from the bar, carrying a tray of beers for us all he has a satisfied look on his face, and I realize he must have seen me kiss them all.

My heart starts to pound as I wonder how my grandfather will react.

"I always knew that there wasn't a man on earth good enough for my baby girl, between the four of them, I think they've managed it," he says with a smile that dances in his eyes.

The relief I feel is palpable. I'm amazed at how much he's taken it all in his stride. He's become fascinated by the club too, it's been a struggle to keep him from trying to ride a motorcycle. He's even started talking about moving here to be closer to the babies.

I grin back at him and pull him in for a hug, much to April's delight who clings onto her great-grandfather, so I hand her over as I pull away. I kiss him on the cheek.

"Did I ever tell you that you're the best great-grandfather and grandfather a girl could hope for?"

"You did, but I always like to hear it," he says, the corner of his eyes crinkling.

Right now, I'm so happy I feel as if my heart could burst.

I know that things can't stay this good forever and that there will be hard times ahead,

but I also know that with my family by my side, we can weather any storm and come out stronger for it.

The babies are down, finally. Even April, our resident night owl, surrendered to her lullaby. I close the nursery door gently, exhaling as I press my back to it. The hum of the baby monitor follows me down the hallway, but it's a welcome sound now—proof of peace, however temporary.

In our massive, shared bedroom, the lights are low. Candlelight flickers from the dresser, casting warm shadows over the big bed we all share on nights like this. Axel sits propped up on pillows, bare-chested, his eyes on the door like he's been waiting just for me.

He always watches me like that. Still. After everything.

Knox lounges beside him, half-dressed in loose pajama pants, his hair tousled. Rider is standing near the window, quiet and unreadable, his arms crossed over his chest. Jace is sprawled in the armchair, legs wide, eyes sparkling with mischief and heat.

I take a step inside, letting the robe slip from one shoulder, then the other. It pools silently at my feet. The air shifts. They're still, watching me—but not with hunger. With wonder. Like I'm something they built their world around.

For a second, they just stare.

And then they move.

Knox is the first to reach me. His hands find my waist, large and warm, fingers spreading across the swell of my hips as if he's anchoring himself. He dips his head, kissing the hollow between my breasts. "You're too beautiful," he murmurs. "Too

much. I can barely breathe when I look at you.”

Axel rises next. He kisses me like he needs to memorize me—slow, possessive, and full of hunger. His hand cups my jaw, his thumb brushing across my lips. “You still drive me crazy,” he whispers. “More than ever.”

Rider moves behind me, his fingers sliding along my spine, making me shiver. He brushes my hair aside and presses a kiss to the back of my neck, his hands roaming down to cup my ass, firm and purposeful. “I think about you constantly,” he growls softly. “I want to feel all of you.”

Jace doesn’t wait. He’s behind me a second later, running his palms up my thighs, over the curve of my bare backside. “You’re glowing, baby,” he says against my ear. “And I’m gonna make you scream.”

They surround me.

Hands everywhere—on my breasts, my waist, my thighs. Lips on my shoulders, my throat, my belly. Each of them touching me in their own way—Knox reverent, Axel grounding, Rider intense, Jace playful and electric.

They guide me to the bed, laying me down like a treasure they’re unwrapping. Axel’s mouth finds my nipple, licking and sucking softly while his hand caresses my other breast, his thumb flicking against the peak. I moan, arching up into his touch, my hands in his hair.

Rider’s mouth is on my stomach, kissing the stretch marks, the soft flesh they all love without hesitation. “You gave life here,” he whispers. “Let us give something back.”

Jace nips at the inside of my thigh, then soothes the spot with his tongue, laughing softly when I squirm. “Sensitive,” he teases. “I like it.”

Knox slides up beside me, taking my hand, lacing our fingers together. “Let go, baby. We’ve got you.”

They explore me like they’re rediscovering me all over again. Fingers trace the dip of my waist, the sensitive crease between my thighs, the tender swell of my breasts. Their mouths worship me, take their time on every inch of skin. I gasp, moan, whisper their names like a litany.

I’m slick and pulsing, their touches building something unbearable and perfect. I feel someone’s lips on my pussy, their tongue making figure of eights on my clit.

“Fuck, that feels so good!” I moan.

There’s a dark chuckle and the sensation of fullness as fingers find me, soaked, swollen, and ready.

Their bodies surround me—firm chests, rough hands, hard thighs pressing against mine.

I feel lips on my inner thigh, a tongue at my nipple, fingers brushing between my folds, then slipping into my wetness and curling inside me in a way that drives me wild.

“I’m gonna cum,” I say, breathless.

Each one of them knows how to push me to the edge. Together, they make me fall.

“Let go,” Knox says as he bends over to take my nipple into his mouth I reach out and grab his cock, feeling him thick, hard, and slick with precum. This is just the start, on nights like this, where we have all the time in the world, I know by dawn I’ll be wrung out in the best possible way.

When I cum, it crashes over me like heat and light. My back arches, my toes curl, and my cry is caught in Jace's kiss.

I'm not sure how long it lasts.

After, I collapse into the center of them, trembling and glowing. They hold me close—Axel curled behind me, Knox wrapped around my front, Rider's hand tangled with mine, Jace whispering something filthy and sweet in my ear that makes me laugh even as I melt.

"I love you," I whisper into the warm hush.

"Love you too," Knox murmurs, kissing my temple.

"Every damn inch," Jace adds.

"Forever," says Axel.

Rider doesn't speak. He just kisses my hand and lays it gently over his heart.

My thighs ache. My pulse is still settling, but I've never felt more whole.

For a few blissful moments, I just breathe—held in the arms of the men I love, my body humming with everything they gave me.

But it isn't over.

Fingers start to roam again. Slow, teasing strokes across my stomach. A mouth brushing my collarbone. A low murmur at my ear that sends another spark through me.

Jace chuckles softly. "Round two?"

Axel shifts behind me, pressing closer. “Thought we agreed to make the most of our night.”

Knox’s palm slides down my hip, his hand cupping my ass and his fingers teasing my asshole.

Rider finally speaks, voice rough and deep. “We’re not done loving you.”

And just like that, they begin again—each touch more confident, more possessive, more tender.

I surrender with a smile, eyes fluttering closed as heat blooms low and slow inside me all over again.

Wrapped in their arms, lost in their hands and mouths, I drift between pleasure and peace—safe, surrounded, and worshipped—knowing I’ll never sleep alone again.

THE END

Hope you enjoyed the book!