



Ruined (Ruined MC #1)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Im fifty shades of screwed up. I love too hard and too much, and my love? Its destructive.

Joey found me at one of the lowest points of my life, right when I was ready to give it all up, and he saved me. He taught me how to breathe when I felt like my lungs no longer worked.

But the cause of my downfall, Tristan, is back, and hes tearing through my life like a tornado. I miss him, but I cant breathe when hes near. Im drowning all over again.

Tristan doesnt know who I am anymore. He still loves the innocent, naive girl I used to be.

But shes dead because Joey killed her when he gave me a purpose.

My life is imploding around me. My ground is shaky at best, and before long, an earthquake is splitting my world in half.

Im lost. Untethered. Broken.

Ruined.

When Im attacked and left for dead, theres only man I know I can call that wont make everything worse.

The only thing he requests when he comes to my aid is

Live for me, darlin.

No matter the hell I endure, Ill keep my word to him, even if it means hurting everyone around me in the process.

Previously published as Ruined. That book has been re-edited and republished as two separate books. The story remains the same, though important details have been fixed to fit the rest of the series, which will also be republished.

Please read the Note from the Author at the beginning of the book before deciding to read.

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Chapter One

Adelaide

“Come on, Adelaide, it’s time to go,” Joey told me, a scowl settling over his features as I continued dancing on top of the table, not paying him a bit of mind. Hell, I was purposely ignoring him.

I was in a right fucking mood, and I really just wanted to forget what this day was and what it meant to me. And Joey was doing his best to shit all over that.

Joey was a control freak, and though I loved the man with every fiber of my being, he was overbearing. Too much for a woman like me that needed freedom and independence. Needed to be able to make her own decisions without the Sons of Hell’s president breathing fire down my neck all of the time.

Joey and I didn’t mix. We never really had, no matter how much we wanted to. We were oil and water. And Joey was the oil, always smothering me.

“You’re fucking wasted, pretty girl.” Oh, that sweet name. That name would forever melt my insides. “Get your ass down here now,” he snapped up at me. I only continued to ignore him, and though I knew it was pissing him off, I couldn’t bring myself to care. I just wanted to be left alone, to forget the pain and heartache burning through my chest.

“Loosen up, Joey. Let the girl have fun,” I heard his twin, Jessie, snap at him. “You’re always up her ass. She’s not your girl. Not right now. You two ended that,”

she reminded him.

Her words felt like a slap across my face. They were a sore reminder that Joey and I just couldn't ever get it right when we were together.

"She needs a goddamn man to put her in line," Joey snapped back at her. "This shit has gone on long enough."

I clenched my jaw, my body momentarily stopping before I forced myself to start dancing again, forcing myself to block out the familiar pain of losing my best friend exactly one torturous year ago on my fucking birthday.

My birthday had become a series of tragedies, and it was now a day I longed to just forget about.

"Am I interrupting something?" A voice that I hadn't heard in years asked us.

I abruptly stopped dancing so quickly that I instantly lost my footing since I was so wasted. A shriek left my lips as I fell forward, my arms flailing for something to grasp onto. Everyone turned to stare at me, and I screamed as the floor came closer to my face. With a muttered curse, Joey quickly caught me in his muscular arms before I could face plant on the floor. He was always there to save me from my own shit—shit that I tended to always get myself into.

Always my savior and my hero. Really the reason that I was still breathing today.

Despite the rage that I could see burning in his dark eyes, he gently set me on my feet on the floor before he released me, the muscle in his jaw ticking furiously. "I told you to get off of that table, Adelaide," he snapped down at me, his frame easily towering over my shorter one.

Momentarily forgetting about our visitor, I grinned up at my for-the-moment-ex as I sloppily pressed my finger to Joey's lips, wanting to silence him. He released a soft sigh, his eyes softening for the tiniest moment before they hardened again. "Shh," I told him, drawing out the sound. He narrowed his eyes at me. "You're such a party pooper," I slurred.

Joey rolled his eyes at me, but I saw a smirk twitch at his lips for a moment. He'd never been one for joking and messing around, but somehow, I seemed to kind of bring out the brighter side of his personality. But that was probably due to the sort of strange dynamic we had together.

Oil and water. Always smothering me, trapping me, holding me down.

But fuck if we didn't deeply care about each other. I had never loved another man as much as I loved Joey Dirks, the president of Sons of Hell.

Joey was always so damn serious, but I was the woman who smoothed out his rough edges, who made him feel human again because, in our world, too many feelings could get one of us killed.

I was eighteen when Joey took me under his wing, giving me a reason to live and to fight. And it was my twentieth birthday when my best friend lost her fight to cancer and I started my downward spiral, getting deeper into the life of an outlaw.

But Joey had never left my side. He never left me to fight on my own. It didn't matter if we were on the outs and not getting along. The man standing in front of me never let me down.

"It's been a fucking year, Adelaide," Joey snapped down at me.

I narrowed my eyes at him, fire lighting up my dark eyes. Joey clenched his jaw, a

look of regret passing through his eyes before he smothered it, evenly meeting my enraged gaze, not intimidated by me in the slightest. Not like his other men would have been. “You really want to do this?” I snapped at him, my words still slurred but that one sentence from him had sobered me up a tiny bit.

It was my birthday today—my twenty-first birthday, at that—which meant it’d been exactly a year since I’d lost my rock to cancer. It had been an entire year since I’d walked into her apartment and found her dead—lifeless—on her couch.

Joey clenched his jaw. “We’ve all been waiting for you to come around, Adelaide, but enough is fucking enough.” I could have breathed fire at that moment as I glared up at him, my hands tightening into fists at my sides. “You’re twenty-one fucking years old today. It’s time to get your shit together.”

I sent a right hook against his face, not giving a fuck about the consequences. Joey could be violent if he wanted to. He’d never hit me, but he was an MC president, and shit like I’d just pulled couldn’t go unpunished.

His face swung to the left, and I instantly saw blood well up on his lip and trickle down his jaw. He turned his blazing, dark eyes to me, danger glittering in their angry depths. I swallowed thickly, knowing just how volatile Joey could be. Jessie quickly grabbed him, pulling him back from me before he could retaliate like I knew he wanted.

Large, calloused hands settled over my bare shoulders, sending a shiver racing down my spine as familiar cologne that I hadn’t smelled in three fucking years wrapped around me. I would know those hands anywhere, too. Could pick up the smell of that cologne in any setting. He hadn’t changed.

Tristan Groves.

My dead best friend's brother that I had once been madly in love with.

But that was before he shattered my heart on my eighteenth birthday.

After last year, I was beginning to think my birthdays were cursed.

“Why don't you go cool off, Joey?” Tristan suggested from behind me, his voice filled with so much coldness that some of the people around us stopped dancing and turned to see what was going on. They never paid Joey and I much mind. They knew we fought all of the time. But someone daring to stand up against Joey, another MC president at that?

It was very possible that blood was about to be spilled.

I flung Tristan's hands off my shoulders, stepping closer to Joey. He reached out and turned me, pulling my back flat against his chest, his left arm wrapping around my shoulders, holding me protectively to his body. We might have been oil and water, but he didn't rip my goddamn heart out of my chest. I could always count on Joey when it came down to it.

Tristan? He took one of the worst times of my life to fuck me up.

“How about you get the fuck out of my clubhouse, Grim ?” Joey snarled at him, using Tristan's street name. “And keep your fucking hands off of my woman.” His arm flexed around me. I slid my hands over his forearm, trying to keep him calm, to get him to hold me with him.

That was the one promise he made to me—that I would always be able to keep him with me, no matter what happened between us.

I squeaked in shock when Tristan quickly grabbed me and pushed me behind him

before he stepped toe to toe with Joey, both of their heights evenly matched, though Joey was just a bit more muscular—and a little older. “I was here to make a deal, Joey,” Tristan snarled at Joey. “But I can always change my fucking mind and instead spill blood all over your fucking carpets.”

What the hell was Tristan talking about? A deal?

Joey had cut ties to the Sons of Death as soon as he found out what Tristan did to me. I hadn’t even been under Joey’s care for a week when he found out, but Joey quickly cut all connections, and they’d been enemies since.

Before I could begin to voice my questions, to try to figure out what the hell Tristan was on about, I leaned over and vomited all over the floor.

“Fucking hell, Adelaide!” Joey snapped as Jessie quickly gripped my shoulder and held my hair back out of my face. “You’re cleaning this shit up!” he barked at me.

“Ignore him, sweetheart,” Jessie told me softly, rubbing my back soothingly as I retched again. “You alright?”

I nodded at her, not admitting weakness. I never would, especially not in front of Tristan. Standing back up to my full height and taking a step away from my own mess, I glared up at Tristan. “Why are you here, Tristan?” I demanded. “This club doesn’t make deals with the Sons of Death. They’re actually loyal to the people they care about.”

Pain momentarily flashed in Tristan’s eyes, but honestly, I didn’t care. “I’m here to make a deal with Joey.” He turned his gaze to Joey, ignoring me. “In exchange for us leaving your crew and your territory alone, I want Adelaide. You deny me this and I’ll fucking wipe your goddamn club off the face of the earth.”

Joey's face lit up with an almost uncontrollable fury, as did my own. This was my home. My family. My fucking crew just as much as it was Joey's. "Over my fucking dead body, Grim," Joey snarled. "Adelaide is mine. "

I swallowed thickly. Why the fuck did Tristan want me? He'd tossed me aside three years ago as if I had never meant shit to him.

Tristan's eyes darkened with rage. "Let me make this clear, Joey," Tristan said with chilling softness. My heart pounded hard in my chest, my eyes nervously flickering to Joey. This wasn't the Tristan I remembered. This was a monster . "I will be leaving with Adelaide tonight with or without your consent." I narrowed my eyes at Joey in a silent warning. He better fucking protect me. I would not be fucking leaving with Tristan.

An understanding passed between us as Joey flicked his eyes to me. Joey would do what he could to keep me with him. And that was all that I could ask for.

"We can do this civilly, or I can start dropping bodies until you give in," Tristan snapped, not missing our silent exchange. "Which is it?"

"Hold on!" I shouted, holding up a hand. "Don't I get a fucking say in this?" I snarled up at Tristan, my eyes blazing with rage.

Tristan shook his head at me. I sneered at him, and his lips twitched up into a smirk at my rage. I couldn't fucking believe his audacity. I didn't want him, and I sure as fuck didn't want to be with him.

He had fucking ruined me. Because of him, I was a mess of a fucking woman.

He turned his attention back to Joey. "Well, which is it?"

Suddenly, something hit me hard in my temple, and I let out a cry of pain, my vision quickly darkening as I began to crumple to the floor.

“Adelaide!” Joey roared.

The last thing I remembered was gun shots and Tristan’s muscular arms wrapping around my body before I could completely drop to the ground.

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Chapter Two

Adelaide

My head was throbbing, and the taste of stale vomit lingered on my tongue, not to mention it felt like I'd chewed on fucking cotton balls all night.

Fuck, I had partied way too hard.

I slowly ripped my eyes open and cursed softly as I quickly took in my surroundings.

This certainly wasn't the fucking clubhouse.

Normally, I woke up with Joey's arm thrown over my waist as he snored next to me, even if we were on the outs because he didn't like leaving me alone when I was wasted. But Joey wasn't anywhere to be found.

He never left me alone after a night of partying.

So, where the fuck was I?

The bedroom door opened as I began to push myself up into a sitting position, my head spinning at the movement, nausea rising fast in my throat. I swallowed it back down, a master at keeping myself from getting sick after so many nights of losing myself at the bottom of a liquor bottle.

Tristan strode into the room, a disgruntled scowl settled on his features. Rage rose hot

and fast in my veins. Why the fuck was I here ? Hell, why the fuck was he here?

Fucking hell, I hadn't seen him in three years, not since he had ripped my heart out and stomped all over it in his steel-toed, black boots on my eighteenth birthday at my birthday party that he had organized for me.

I hadn't even seen him at my best friend's funeral—his twin's funeral.

“Morning, Addy,” he roughly greeted, shooting a devilish smirk my way that still had my stomach twisting into knots. Fury laced through my veins at myself.

Christ, he couldn't really still be able to affect me like this, could he? It was unfair. Life was fucking unfair. And half the time, I felt like it was laughing at me right in my face.

I didn't want to feel anything for Tristan but anger and hatred. Why did he still have the power to affect me so deeply?

“Why am I here?” I demanded to know, wincing when the sound of my voice just made my head hurt so much worse than it already did.

Tristan silently strode over to me and grabbed a bottle of medicine off the nightstand and a bottle of water. Different emotions swirled in my gut—fear, hatred, wariness.

Confusion.

He had thought about how I would feel when I woke up, enough to set medicine and water near me so I would have quick access to it when I was finally awake.

I hated that it made me long for more of that care. Tristan had never been this attentive when we were together. He just took care of me, but I had been hopelessly

in love with him back then. So in love that I overlooked how bad of a boyfriend he was.

“Here,” Tristan gruffly spoke up, holding out two pills and the now opened bottle of water.

Silently, I took the medicine because my head was hurting too bad to refuse him, keeping my eyes steady with his. I didn’t care how he made me feel. I was here because of him. That much was clear. I wanted to know why the fuck I wasn’t with the Sons of Hell. With Joey. “Well?” I demanded.

He shrugged. “I found out that for the last three years, you’ve been with Joey’s crew,” he informed me, anger twisting his handsome features into a snarl, but he didn’t intimidate me. Instead, I only grew angrier at the fact that he thought he had any right to be pissed about what I’d been doing with my life when he was the one that brutally ripped my heart and soul apart and left me fucking stranded .

“I brought you back here where you belong.” I opened my mouth to snap at him, but he kept going, not giving me a chance. “Why the fuck were you with Joey’s club?” he snarled down at me.

“Because three years ago on my fucking birthday, Tristan, you fucking ripped my goddamn heart out,” I bitterly reminded him. His face paled slightly at my words, and his Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed. “I wanted you to hurt as much as you’ve hurt me,” I admitted angrily. “So, I fucking betrayed you by joining the one fucking crew you can’t stand ,” I lied. In all reality, Joey had offered me a night of fun, and I’d taken it with both hands, just wanting to forget about my heartbreak.

But later that night, when he had gotten ready to drop me off at home and saw where I lived, he just shook his head and drove back off, not even letting me attempt to get out of his vehicle.

“I’m not letting you stay in a fucking trap house. Not when you’re of legal age now, ” Joey had told me. “You’re coming home with me.”

“What the hell?!” I shouted at him as he drove off so fast, my back slammed against the seat. “Joey, turn back around! I’m not going home with you!”

He turned those dark eyes on me, settling the unease in my gut. I didn’t know how he did it, but those dark eyes had been soothing me all night. “Pretty girl, you’re eighteen now. Any man in that house could now take you, and you’d probably lose the rape case because men get away with that shit all of the time. I won’t let you be a victim.”

I helplessly tossed my hands up in the air before letting them drop down to my lap with a loud smack. “Well, I don’t have anywhere else to go, Joey,” I bitterly reminded him. That horrible fucking place was all I had.

He smirked at me, melting my insides. “You do now, pretty girl.” He rolled to a stop at the end of the street and reached over, cupping my cheek in his hand. My heart flipped in my chest. “You have me, pretty girl.” My bottom lip trembled, tears burning in my eyes. His words were so sweet, and I was doing my best not to cling onto them, but it was so hard. He was giving me so much without asking for anything in return. Had anyone ever done that for me? “You’ll always have me.”

He glanced behind us at the house we had left behind. “Besides, with how tormented your eyes have looked all night, I have no doubt in my mind that you’d lose yourself inside of every drug you can find in that house, and I won’t let you do that to yourself.” A tear slid down my face.

I had actually planned on doing just that. How had he known?

He leaned forward and brushed his lips to my cheek, catching the tear before it could

meet my own lips. “I’m going to teach you how to breathe again, Adelaide. Just give me time.”

“Did Helene know?” Tristan demanded, dragging me out of my head and out of that sweet memory I shared with Joey. The muscle in Tristan’s jaw was ticking with his outrage.

A smirk twisted my lips, my heart squeezing painfully in my chest. “She told me it was a fucking great idea,” I retorted, lying straight through my teeth, but he didn’t need to know that. Helene had thought Joey would be a good rebound guy for me, nothing more. She hadn’t expected nor wanted me to get in so deep with him and his club. “She hated you for doing that to me,” I told him, and that was the fucking truth. He had always loved his sister. I knew that much. They used to be two little peas in a pod. But something between them had broken when he turned his back on me.

And I planned to use that to hurt him as much as I could. I was a sadistic bitch, but he had destroyed me.

His face fell the tiniest bit. “I know,” he said quietly. “I fucking remember.”

I shook my head and slid off of the bed. “I need to get back,” I told him, not wanting to continue with our conversation. What happened between us was done. It was over, and I had no urge to rehash old feelings, to reopen those wounds deep inside of me. It would do nothing but make me destructive. Self-destructive, at that.

“You’re not going anywhere, Adelaide,” Tristan informed me, using my full name.

I narrowed my eyes at him. “Who the fuck are you to dictate my goddamn moves, Tristan?” I sneered. His features darkened, but I wasn’t afraid of him. I had faced worse—much worse. Chills slid down my spine at the mere thought of the hell I had recently endured. “I’m fucking grown. I’m no longer that naive little eighteen-year-

old girl that begged you to stay and love her.” He flinched. “I have shit I need to do, and I can’t fucking do that if I’m here.”

Tristan glared at me, and he shook his head. “You’re here now, Adelaide. You’re done with Joey’s crew, got that?”

I picked up the closest thing to me, which happened to be a lamp, and threw it at him. He ducked, letting it crash against the wall and shatter into pieces as it fell to the floor. “I’m not fucking done any goddamn where, Tristan Groves!” I shouted at him, my chest heaving with rage. Who the fuck did he think he was?

He was not keeping me from Joey. I would lose myself if I lost Joey.

Tristan made it clear three years ago how he felt about me. I turned to someone else, and that someone else actually cared about me and loved me in his own fucked up way.

Joey and I might clash heads, but he had never fucking abandoned me, not like Tristan had done.

Tristan stormed over to me, his eyes almost black as they swirled with rage. I swallowed hard, remembering the kind of rage Tristan kept under the tight composure that he always wore. I tilted my chin up in a dare despite my heart pounding hard in my chest. Tristan had never put his hands on me before, but I’d seen what he was capable of doing to other people, had seen the aftermath, and it had never been a pretty sight.

If he put his hands on me, he would quickly realize why I was Joey’s woman.

I was fucking dangerous—lethal. Joey had created a monster to make sure I continued breathing. He had given me a purpose .

Tristan gripped my chin, his fingers digging painfully into my skin. “Don’t you dare do something like that again, understand?” he growled.

I let a smirk twist my lips. “Or what?” I taunted.

I squeaked in shock when he gripped a fistful of my hair and yanked my head back, covering my lips with his. In one quick step, he had me pushed against the wall, his hand sliding around to hold the back of my neck as his other hand tightly gripped my hip. I gasped, opening my lips under his demanding ones as my body surrendered to his. My nerve endings curled tightly, and desire swept through my core, leaving me throbbing and wet as his tongue slid along mine.

Fucking hell, I had forgotten what it was like being with Tristan. To be claimed and taken by him.

And I couldn’t resist kissing him back. All of those old, buried feelings rose inside of me sharp and fast, and I gripped his cut in my fists, kissing him back just as hungrily.

The shrill ringing of my phone jerked me out of the moment, and with a gasp, I shoved him back from me, my eyes widening in horror.

What in the hell had I been thinking. Fuck, what had I been doing ?

Tristan cursed, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath. “What the fuck is that noise?” he heatedly demanded.

“My phone,” I grumbled, moving toward the sound only to find it on the floor beside the bed.

Jessie.

I answered the phone with a drawn-out sigh. “Yes?” I asked.

“Adelaide, you know I’ve tried protecting you from Joey for the last year since you went off the rails, but I can’t do anything this time,” she told me right off the bat, her voice sounding slightly panicked.

“What now?” I demanded to know, my gut twisting.

“You’re with Tristan,” she told me. I grunted. It sure as fuck wasn’t by choice. “Joey is pissed, Adelaide. You can’t come back. Promise me that you’ll protect yourself,” she begged, sounding truly panicked.

I snorted. “Jessie, Joey and I have fallouts all of the time—” I tried reassuring her, but she quickly interrupted me.

“No, Adelaide, this time it’s different.” I clenched my jaw, glaring at the sheets of the bed as I sat down, my heart thumping crazily in my chest. My throat burned with tears. He couldn’t be doing this. He promised me that I could always keep him with me.

“He’s destroyed your entire fucking room, and he’s got a meeting this afternoon with a hired hitman,” she informed me. I swallowed hard. My life just took a major downward spiral. Joey had officially turned his back on me. I guessed his word didn’t mean shit either. “You need to stay hidden.”

“Thanks, Jessie, but I can take care of myself,” I quietly told her.

I hung up, clenching my jaw to hold in my tears and the hurt burning through my chest. I quickly pulled up my texts and went to Joey’s number, a smirk twisting my lips as I prepared to piss him off even further. I couldn’t help it. I was hurting. Fucking aching .

And I was self-destructing.

Adelaide:

Can't wait to see what you've got planned, Joe- Joe. Love you!

My phone pinged with a text message a moment later. Tristan hovered over my shoulder as I opened it to read the message.

Joey:

What the fuck are you talking about?

“What the fuck is going on?” Tristan demanded to know. When I didn't answer him, he gripped my arm and yanked me off the bed, swinging me around to face him. My heart was splitting in my chest, the pain billowing out through the rest of my body. “Fucking answer me, dammit,” He snarled down into my face when I didn't immediately answer, his eyes narrowed.

I shrugged, moving back from him. My heart and mind started going nuts when he touched me. I hated it. I couldn't let him affect me like he used to. I wasn't that same young, foolish, naive girl anymore.

I wanted Joey, but he was giving up on me.

My phone pinged again, this time with a text message from an unknown number.

Unknown:

Wherefore art thou, Adelaide? Tick. Tick. Boom.

“Fuck!” I shouted, gripping Tristan’s wrist in my hand as I pulled him toward the bedroom door.

“Addy, what the fuck?!” Tristan shouted, trying to pull me to a stop.

“We’ve got to get out, Tristan. This place is about to fucking explode!” I barked at him over my shoulder, my heart pounding hard and fast in my chest as adrenaline rushed through my veins.

Something in my gut told me this wasn’t Joey’s doing. He wouldn’t have had time to have a talk with a hitman yet nor to set up any kind of plan.

Someone was after Tristan.

Or me. There was no real way of knowing. I’d pissed off a lot of people in the past three years.

We rushed out of the old, rundown house right before the ground shook with an explosion. The last thing I remembered was Tristan throwing me to the ground and covering his body with mine before everything went dark.

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Chapter Three

Adelaide

A soft groan spilled from my lips when I turned my head to look over at Tristan, wincing when pain stabbed through my neck from sleeping wrong. It was dark outside, and the only sound in the car was the soft purr of the car engine and the tires rolling over the asphalt of the highway. Tristan had one hand on the steering wheel, and the other was on the gear shift between us.

A pang pierced my heart for a moment as I remembered him always giving my knee a gentle squeeze before he used to switch gears. He had always preferred manual cars over automatics. He liked being in control of when his car would shift.

“Good to see you awake,” he spoke up, his voice low and gruff. He glanced over at me before he focused his eyes back on the road.

I grunted and rolled my neck around, groaning when my neck popped, but that ache finally eased off. “Where are you taking me?”

Tristan tapped the steering wheel with two of his fingers, looking in his rear-view mirror before he switched lanes to go around a slower car. “To my cousin’s since my house got blown up,” he informed me.

I rolled my eyes at him. “Should have kept your nose in your own business,” I retorted.

Tristan clenched his jaw. “You don’t belong with the Sons of Hell, Addy,” Tristan snapped at me. “You belong here with me.”

I snorted. “One, stop fucking calling me Addy. You lost that privilege three years ago.” Tristan’s hand tightened around the steering wheel, his teeth clenched so tightly that the muscle in his jaw began to tick. “Two, I belong with them a hell of a lot more than I belong with you,” I snarled.

Tristan shot a dark look in my direction. I only narrowed my eyes at him in return. He didn’t intimidate me anymore nor did he scare me. “You never used to be like this, Adelaide,” Tristan finally said, his voice a little calmer. I snorted. He didn’t know who the fuck I was today. He’d been gone for three goddamn years. I wasn’t sweet anymore. I was a fucking monster. “What the fuck is going on with you?”

I rolled my eyes. “Did you seriously expect me to still be the same sweet, innocent girl you were with three years ago?” I asked incredulously.

Tristan shrugged, almost as if he actually had been. I rolled my eyes. “The Sons of Hell aren’t known for allowing their women to get caught in the dirty shit.”

I barked out a laugh. Tristan had no idea how shit operated with the Sons of Hell. I was not only Joey’s off-again-on-again girlfriend, but I was also his right-hand woman. “I was in the middle of all of the dirty shit, Tristan,” I corrected him. He clenched his jaw again at that information, his eyes flashing with anger. “I smuggled their drugs back and forth across the Mexico border, and I fought when I needed extra cash. I blew shit up, and I delivered hired hits. You don’t know a fucking thing about me.”

Tristan shook his head, fury lighting up his eyes as he changed lanes again. “I don’t know which to be more pissed about,” he growled. “You smuggling drugs or you fighting. Helene refused to tell me about the shit that you were caught up in.”

“It wasn’t any of your fucking business,” I retorted. And it wasn’t. When it came down to it, Helene protected my secrets, even if she didn’t agree with them. And I knew she never spoke to her brother about what I was doing nor what was going on with me. She had at least agreed with me that Tristan didn’t deserve to know a damn thing about me after what he had done and after how he’d abandoned me.

“It was my fucking business!” Tristan finally roared, slamming his hand on the steering wheel. I clenched my jaw, getting ready for a fight. “Goddammit, Adelaide, I broke your heart all those years ago for your own fucking good, but two weeks ago, I saw you attached to Joey’s hip, and he was introducing you as his fucking girl to Vin.”

I flinched at Vin’s name.

If I thought Tristan had ruined me, then Vin had fucking destroyed me. That man had killed my soul.

Joey was trying to set up an alliance with Vin, and he knew Vin had a soft spot for me. I grimaced as I remembered that night and how I had barely escaped with my life.

Yeah, Vin had a soft spot for me alright.

“What’s that look for?” Tristan demanded as I grimaced.

Fuck, he was way too perceptive for his own good.

“Nothing.” I snarled, looking out the window. I was done talking to him. “Are we almost there?” I asked as Tristan took an exit.

“Almost,” he snapped, still aggravated and pissed off at me for being so secretive. He

had no damn right to be pissed though. Had he seriously thought that he could pop back up into my life and I would fall into his arms again as if he had never hurt me, as if he had never ripped my fucking heart apart and tossed the pieces at my feet? “We’ll be at Noah’s in about ten minutes,” Tristan informed me.

I sighed and leaned my head against the window, looking out at the darkness surrounding us. There were no lights off of this exit, leaving everything drowned in pitch-black.

“Why couldn’t anyone from your crew take us in?” I asked him.

Tristan shot me a deadpan look. “My crew is the first place that whoever is after us is going to look. I need to keep you safe until I can deal with this problem, Addy.”

Every time he called me by my old nickname, my heart skipped a beat in my chest, and I fucking hated it. I didn’t want to react to him at all. I wasn’t that weak girl anymore. I was stronger now.

“I can take care of myself, Tristan. I’ve been doing it for three years now.” He tightened his grip around the steering wheel again, his knuckles turning white. “And stop calling me Addy,” I bit out. “My fucking name is Adelaide. Start fucking using it.”

Suddenly, Tristan yanked the car over to the shoulder of the road, threw it into neutral, and pulled the emergency brake up. He firmly gripped my chin in his hand and brought his face close to mine. My breath hitched in my throat, my heart thrumming hard in my chest.

“Three years ago, I let go of the most important person in the entire world to me to keep her safe from my enemies.” My breath hitched in my throat, and I suddenly felt a little nauseous in the face of new information. “Two weeks ago, I found that same

woman in the middle of a deal with one of the most feared men of Mexico.” I swallowed hard, knowing he was talking about me.

“It took everything in me to not put a bullet through Vin’s head that night, Addy. But that night, I vowed to have you back with me, in my arms, by my side, where you fucking belong and where I know that I can keep you safe. You can fight me on this all you want, Addy, but my mind is set, and I will get what the fuck I want.”

He ran his thumb over my bottom lip, and I couldn’t help the little sigh that escaped my lips at his touch as I closed my eyes, hating that he still affected me so strongly, yet unable to help leaning into him, wanting more of that strength and security that he was offering me. “And I will not stop calling you Addy because you are mine , baby girl, whether you like it or not.”

With that, he threw his car back into first, put down the emergency brake, and pulled back into traffic. I drew in a shaky breath.

And there was the possessive, controlling Tristan at his finest.

A tired sigh escaped my lips as I stretched after stepping out of Tristan’s old ‘67 Mustang. Noah, Tristan’s cousin who I remembered as being more like a brother than a cousin to Tristan, stepped out of his small, brick house. I had always thought that Noah was extremely attractive, even though Tristan had always held my heart, as much as I hated it at that moment. Noah was also a lot more laid back, and he enjoyed getting on every single one of my nerves.

Noah was wearing only a pair of faded worn blue jeans that were hanging low on his hips. He didn’t have a shirt on, leaving all of his muscles and abs on display. I flashed him a wicked smirk, and he grinned back at me, his eyes lighting up.

“Adelaide, it’s been a while,” Noah commented as he strode down his porch steps

toward me. Tristan rounded the hood of his car to stand next to me, a disgruntled look on his face.

I rolled my eyes. “It hasn’t been long enough,” I snarked.

“Ignore her,” Tristan told his cousin. Noah turned his amused eyes to his best friend. “Adelaide has been in a very pissy mood since she woke up a little while ago.”

I glared at Tristan. “Bite me,” I snarled, making Noah bark out a laugh.

Tristan’s lips tilted up into that devilish smirk that always made my belly twist with need as he leaned in close to me. My breath hitched in my throat at his proximity. “Don’t tempt me,” he breathed. I swallowed thickly, my heart pumping blood so fast through my veins that I could feel the rapid beats in my throat. “Because I know the perfect place to bite you in.” Lifting a hand, he ran his calloused index finger along the curve of my neck where it met my shoulder.

I shuddered at his touch as my eyes locked on his. His eyes darkened at the need shining in my own that I couldn’t hide from him, no matter how hard I tried to.

But I would fight that need with every fiber of my being.

“Anyway, if you two are done eye-fucking each other, I’ve got something to tell you two that I don’t think Adelaide is going to like too much,” Noah commented as he rocked back and forth on his heels, an amused grin on his features as he shoved his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

“What?” I snapped at him, dragging my heated gaze from the man I still somehow wanted more than anything.

And wanting Tristan was dangerous.

“I only have one extra bedroom, and my brother, Josh, is crashing on my couch, so you guys are going to have to share a room,” Noah informed us, his grin widening at the rage that flashed in my eyes.

My gaze narrowed on him, my hands twitching at my sides with the urge to fucking hit something. Noah held his hands up in a surrendering gesture as he took a step back from me. I looked up at Tristan, but his smirk only widened as he winked at me.

I fucking hated them both.

“Don’t look at me like that, Addy, because you know I’m going to take advantage of this arrangement as much as I can,” Tristan told me nonchalantly, but I took it as a warning.

I stepped up to him and jabbed my finger against his chest, making sure my nail hit him hard. He flinched and reached up to rub his chest. I was seething. “I’d rather fuck Vin again than let you touch me,” I snarled up at him, lying through my teeth. I’d never fucked Vin willingly, but Tristan didn’t know that. Hell, even Joey had no idea that Vin had touched me.

But I wanted to hit the son of a bitch where it fucking hurt.

Tristan wrapped his larger hand around mine, which was still against his chest, and tugged me closer to him. Leaning down, he finally spoke, his voice a deadly whisper that chilled the blood in my veins. “The only man touching you in any fucking way will be me, do I make myself clear?”

Unable to come up with a snarky remark when he was looking down at me so intently, I just wordlessly nodded my head.

Oh, boy, what had I just been dragged into?

Irritation bubbled in my gut as I stared at the single, full-size bed in the center of the bedroom.

Why couldn't Noah at least have had a queen size bed?

With Tristan's bulky frame, there was no way we were going to sleep on this bed tonight without touching each other. I knew that Tristan wasn't going to mind in the slightest, considering for some reason he was trying to stay as close as possible to me—wanted me back as his—but I couldn't have that. I had to protect myself and my heart from him at all costs, no matter how hard it was going to be.

At that moment, I missed Joey more than I ever had before. I knew what to expect with Joey. We fought, we fucked, and we were good for a few days. It was like a routine.

I fucking craved that toxic cycle.

"Well, this is nice," Tristan drawled as he sauntered into the bedroom, a smirk tilting his lips. I scowled at him. "Ready to cuddle, Addy? It'll be just like old times." He wiggled his eyebrows at me.

My scowl deepened, only causing his smirk to widen.

This was about to be a long night.

"I'm not sleeping on that bed with you," I snapped, pointing at it. I'd rather fucking sleep outside.

He clenched his jaw, his amusement quickly disappearing. "Oh, yes, you are," he told me, his voice firm.

I clenched my jaw. I was just about seething, and he didn't want to see how lethal I was when I finally lost my shit. "No, I'm not," I snarled.

His eyes lit up with fury, and he stormed over to me in all of his dominating, masculine glory. I stood my ground because fuck him . "Oh, yes, you are." He gripped my upper arms and yanked me against him. My heart slammed hard against my breastbone at his proximity. I swallowed nervously. I hated not knowing what to expect with Tristan. "Your life is in danger, and I am not letting you out of my arms while we sleep and are at our most vulnerable." I opened my mouth to protest, but he put his finger over my lips, silencing me as his eyes bored into mine.

"You are the most important person to me, Addy, and I will not risk anything."

As much as I hated it, my heart melted, my destroyed soul crying out for him to heal us and to put us back together again.

Chapter Four

Adelaide

My eighteenth birthday was when I first met Joey. It was the same night that Tristan decided to destroy my heart. Decided to leave me in pieces. I was at my birthday party that Tristan and Helene had organized at their place, and I was a fucking mess after Tristan had dumped me. I was drinking away my sorrows in a corner, crying into my hands when Joey kneeled in front of me.

He'd seen a broken girl filled with pain, and he'd wanted to help her. He wasn't even supposed to be there because he was Tristan's enemy. I had no idea what he'd up his sleeve that night, but instead of doing whatever he'd originally been planning, he took me in.

"Hey, gorgeous, aren't you the birthday girl?" he asked me.

I looked up at him through my tears, sniffing unladylike. Nodding slowly, I answered him. "Yeah," I whispered, taking another swig from the bottle of whiskey that I had snatched from the kitchen. His lips twitched, his eyes lighting up in surprise as the liquid burned down my throat, but I never flinched.

"Why are you crying on one of the biggest days of your life?" he asked me, taking a seat beside me on the floor. I flinched, casting my eyes to the floor as I remembered my heart being ripped apart not even an hour ago. "You're too beautiful to be sitting here crying on your birthday, pretty girl."

I blushed at his words even though my heart was filled with so much pain, I wasn't sure if I was capable of feeling anything else. "My boyfriend of three years just broke up with me," I confessed, more tears sliding down my cheeks. He frowned. "I don't know what I did wrong," I pathetically sobbed, everything suddenly spilling from my lips. "We were so happy earlier, and then, all of a sudden, he's telling me he doesn't want to be with me anymore and that he's been miserable for the last year."

"Well, he's a fucking asshole," the guy next to me admitted. I snorted. "Is he still here?" At my nod, he sighed. "Is that why you're hiding in this corner when you should be enjoying your birthday party?"

I nodded again. He pursed his lips, then stood up, a smirk twisting his lips. My breath hitched in my throat. God, he was hot as fuck. He had ink everywhere, and his dark eyes were filled with trouble that called to my soul. Dirty blonde hair flopped onto his forehead, and I just wanted to run my fingers through the soft-looking strands.

I was clearly a little drunk.

"How about this, pretty girl?" I arched an eyebrow at him, my tears drying up. "My name is Joey, and I think it's time to let loose and forget about this asshole of an ex for a little while. What do you say? Want to get out of here?"

I nodded at him, desperate for some kind of relief from the pain in my chest. He held his hand out to me, and I placed my palm in his, letting him pull me up to my feet. He wrapped an arm around my waist, a mischievous twinkle lighting up his eyes that almost had me swooning. "It's time to have some fun on the wild side, pretty girl. What's your name?" he asked me.

"Adelaide," I informed him.

"Gorgeous name for a gorgeous girl," he commented, winking at me as he led me

toward the door all while I still clutched the whiskey bottle in my hand.

That night led to many more nights filled with “fun” on the wild side.

But honestly, Joey might have saved my life because back then, I wasn’t sure if I could survive without Tristan to lean on.

I sat on the bathroom counter, trying to put off dealing with Tristan for as long as I could. I knew he was waiting on me to come out and come to bed before he went to sleep. But he was going to be waiting a hell of a long time. I’d sleep in the damn bathroom before I slept in the same bed with him again.

I stared down at Jessie’s name on my phone. She was calling me again, and I was sorely tempted to answer it. She and I had always been close, especially after Joey and I had started clashing heads a lot a few months after we first got together. She’d always had my back after one of our huge fights, and I knew at the end of the day, she was one of the people that I knew I could always rely on.

Then again, I’d thought that about Joey, too, and just that quickly, he’d turned his back on me just because I was with Tristan.

Sighing, I pressed the answer button on my phone, putting it up to my ear. “Hello, gorgeous,” I commented, a smirk twisting my lips, actually kind of happy that I would be hearing her familiar voice.

“I figured you’d answer her call and not mine,” Joey drawled on the other end of the line. I cursed softly, the smirk dropping from my lips. He sighed softly, sounding extremely tired and worn out. A frown tugged at my lips as worry wound around my heart for the man. “You actually think you can run from me, pretty girl?” he asked, using his old nickname for me.

“Not really running, Joey,” I grumbled, being honest. I mean, I was in a way, but I was running from whoever was after Tristan—or me. I was still trying to figure that one out. If I relied on that text message though, my money was on me.

He snorted. “Right,” he sarcastically retorted. I swallowed thickly. “I’ll pretend that you didn’t just try to fucking lie to me.” I grimaced. If Joey hated anything, he fucking hated a liar. “Tell you what, pretty girl,” he said, calling me by that old, familiar nickname again. I swallowed thickly. God, I missed him. “You come back to me by tomorrow night, and I’ll fix all of this bad shit between us. We’re good as hell together, pretty girl, and you’re too deep in this shit to try to run away now.”

I frowned down at the floor, all of those old feelings rising in me. Joey had drawn me out of the funk that I had fallen into after Tristan and I had broken up. He was my rebound in a way, and after a few months, he became a lot more than that to me. Although we were toxic as fuck together, I couldn’t deny that I still deeply cared about Joey. I always would. He was my rock.

“Joey, you know that I would never rat on you. I went through hell and back to protect you and your secrets.” And he knew what kind of hell I’d gone through. How many times had I finally come back home to him, beaten to within an inch of my life, just to protect him? It was certainly more times than I could count on one hand.

He sighed. “You leaving right now was a really bad choice, Adelaide. You need to come back home, pretty girl.”

“Why, Joey?” I angrily demanded. He knew how much I hated being given the run-around.

“Pretty girl, I’ve got a lot of explaining to do, alright? Just... fuck, I always seem to fuck up with you,” he confessed, making my heart twist in my chest. “Pretty girl, I know what Jessie said to you. I never put a hitman on you. I tried to set up a meeting

to get one off of your back, but it didn't fucking work." Shit . "There's a man that's supposed to be bringing you back to me, but he's not going to hurt you. He's supposed to protect you until he can get you back here to me."

"But Tristan's house—" I started.

"Vin is after you," Joey interrupted me.

My hand tightened around the phone, and I swallowed down vomit. Now wasn't the time to be throwing up. "V-Vin?" I stuttered, my face paling. Even his name left a nasty, bitter taste on my tongue.

I could picture Joey running his hand down his face in my mind. "Yes, pretty girl. I had no idea what the fuck Vin was doing to you. I had no idea he fucking raped you." I flinched and squeezed my eyes shut, resisting the urge to whimper as his malicious face popped into my mind. "I know it doesn't make up for shit, Adelaide, but I'm so fucking sorry that I didn't protect you better," he apologized. I resisted the urge to cry. God, I hated it when Joey felt guilty about shit that happened to me, especially shit that wasn't his fault. "He told me he was using you for some fights. That was it."

I shook my head even though he couldn't see me. "I was the only one to escape him, Joey," I whispered.

"I know, pretty girl. I need you to come back home, alright? Fucking hell, at this point, I wouldn't give a fucking shit if you brought Tristan with you. You need protection until this Vin situation can be dealt with. The more protection you have, the fucking better. I won't lose you, Adelaide, especially not to fucking death."

The bathroom door suddenly opened, and Tristan stood there, his expression murderous. I glared back at him, defiance gleaming in my gaze. "Why the fuck are you talking to Joey, Addy?" Tristan snarled at me.

“Let me talk to him, pretty girl,” Joey told me gently. “Don’t fight him, Adelaide. Just let me talk to him.”

With a sigh, I slowly held my hand out to Tristan, offering him the phone. He glared down at it, not reaching out to take it. He instead looked back up at me. “Tristan, please,” I whispered.

I just wanted to go back home where I knew I was okay, back to the man that I knew what to expect with. The man that I knew would never, truly let me down. Not when it truly counted.

Tristan’s expression softened when he actually paid attention to how terrible I looked. Wordlessly, he took the phone from my hand. Stepping between my legs, he wrapped his free arm around my waist, tugging me up close to his hard, muscular frame as he put my phone to his ear.

I hated myself for it, knew I shouldn’t want it, but I leaned into him anyway, allowing Tristan to silently comfort me. I closed my eyes, allowing myself this one small moment of peace between us.

“What?” Tristan grumbled into the phone.

I could hear Joey explaining everything to Tristan as best as he could. Tristan’s body tensed against mine, and his eyes flickered down to me more than once, fury burning in their depths as he held me tighter against him when Joey told him about Vin.

“We’ll be on our way back in the morning,” Tristan informed him. “I’ll have my crew meet us at your place. The more protection on her, the better.”

“I agree,” Joey told him.

“Just let me ask this,” Tristan started, his fingers absentmindedly running up and down my spine. I sighed softly, my eyes beginning to slide closed. He remembered one of the ways to calm me down, and my heart hurt. Tristan used to do this all the time when we were younger, and honestly, I missed his soft, soothing touch. “Why are you all of a sudden being protective over Addy?” he demanded to know.

“I’ve always been protective of her in my own way, Tristan,” Joey told him. And he had. “Adelaide and I have a silent agreement of sorts. She hates being doted over, and she wants to be free to make her own decisions. I protect her from the background, and I only step forward when something drastic is happening, like now. She’s not the same girl whose heart you broke three years ago, Tristan. She’s changed, and she’s grown into one hell of a woman.”

I couldn’t stop the smile that crossed my lips at Joey’s words.

“Whatever,” Tristan grumbled, obviously not pleased by that bit of information. “I’ll text you and let you know when we’re on the road,” Tristan informed him, hanging up the phone right after.

After a few silent moments, Tristan finally looked down at me. “What kind of history do you and Joey have?” Tristan asked me, his voice gruff.

I tilted my chin up as I leaned back from him, every one of my guards going back up against Tristan, and they went up hard . He was digging too deep into something that wasn’t his fucking business. “I don’t think that fucking concerns you.”

Tristan placed a hand on either side of me on the counter and leaned down so his face was only a couple of inches from mine. My breath hitched in my throat at his proximity. His eyes almost undid me as he let them meet mine. “It does concern me when I’m back to claim what’s mine,” Tristan softly told me. I swallowed thickly, my heart racing in my chest at his words, but whether from hope or fear, I wasn’t sure.

“And believe me when I say this, Addy. I will have you back, no matter who or what I have to hurt or destroy to get my way.”

With that, he stood back up to his full height and walked out of the bathroom.

I dropped my face into my hands, my heart racing in my chest at his words.

When did my love life become so fucking complicated?

I stepped into the Sons of Hell’s clubhouse, the familiar smell of cigarettes and liquor instantly infiltrating my nostrils. Tristan was walking close behind me, his vice president, sergeant at arms, and treasurer following close behind him, while his other men stayed outside.

I found Jessie working the bar, so I walked over to her, leaning over the bar to grab my own bottle of vodka. “Hey, gorgeous,” I greeted. “Where’s Joey?”

She jerked her head in the direction of the back where the combat ring was set up. “There’s a fight going on out there right now. Joey’s out there handling bids.”

I shot her a smile, and she snatched the bottle of vodka back out of my hands, her eyes playfully narrowing at me. “You’ve got to stop drinking all of the vodka, gorgeous,” she lightly teased.

I rolled my eyes at her. She only laughed as I walked off toward the back of the clubhouse, feeling Tristan following close on my heels. I pushed open the back door, and sure enough, two men were beating each other bloody in the ring, and Joey was handling the money as he held a conversation with his vice president, Charles.

Joey looked up when I stepped out of the clubhouse onto the gravel, a smile tilting his lips the slightest bit, warming that spot in my heart that would always solely belong

to him.

I quickly walked over to him, and he instantly wrapped me up in his arms, pressing a kiss to my temple. I sighed softly, my body relaxing as I sank into his familiar, safe embrace. “Good to have you back home where you belong, pretty girl,” he murmured in my ear. He brushed his finger over a bruise on my cheek from the house explosion. “You alright?” Anger burned in his eyes for a moment before he smothered it.

I nodded at him. “I’m fine,” I assured him.

Tristan gripped my arm and pulled me back from Joey, his hands gripping my shoulders. I scowled as I reached up to brush his hands off. “Let me just make this clear,” Tristan said, his voice coming off calm but extremely cold. It sent chills down my spine just at the sound of it. “Adelaide is mine,” he snapped at Joey. “Keep your goddamn hands off of her.”

“I’m no one’s,” I snarled, ripping myself away from Tristan, throwing him a harsh glare as I did so.

He narrowed his eyes at me. “Remember what I told you?” he asked me. My belly swooped.

No matter who or what I have to destroy to get my way.

“You’re a fucking sadistic asshole,” I barked, my upper lip curling at him.

He smirked, but it lacked any humor, instead coming off cold. It made my stomach turn as I stepped back slightly into Joey. Joey silently settled his hands over my hips. “Always have been, Addy,” Tristan retorted. He narrowed his eyes where Joey was lightly gripping my hips, but he kept his mouth shut.

The urge to punch him was still strong though.

I turned to Joey. “I want to fight,” I told him. Spending the past couple of days with Tristan had me ready to explode. I needed to get bloody.

He inclined his head to me. “You sure?” I nodded. “You’ve been through a lot of shit lately, pretty girl,” he gently reminded me, knowing how I could get in the ring when I was overwhelmed.

I clenched my jaw, glaring at him. “Joey...” I warned softly. He was overstepping my boundaries.

He nodded with a shrug of his shoulders. “Alright then, pretty girl. I’m giving you five minutes to get in that clubhouse, change, and come back out. Rachel just came back, and she’s itching to fight you.”

I nodded once in understanding. Tristan gripped my arm when I went to move past him, and his eyes narrowed on mine when I looked up at him. “You’re not fucking fighting,” he snarled down at me.

I ripped my arm from his grip, glaring up at him as I did so. “You don’t fucking own me, Tristan. You want me? Then you take all of me just the fucking way I am, got that?”

I stormed into the clubhouse before he could get another word in. I was so sick of him trying to control every little damn thing I did. I’d found myself, found my fucking independence. I didn’t need a damn man dictating every single thing for me anymore.

And Tristan better figure that shit out quick.

After changing into a black sports bra and a pair of sweatpants, I slid on my black

high tops and threw my hair up into a messy bun, not caring if it was perfect or not. I planned to have blood coating my hands by the time this match was over. How I looked as I did it was the least of my fucking concerns.

I was a fucking monster, and Tristan was about to find that out really quick.

I walked back out of the clubhouse to see Tristan sitting on one of the tables beside Joey, his VP, Jesup, flanking his side.

Joey looked up at me as I walked over to him. “Ready?” he asked. I nodded. He ran his eyes over my face for a moment before he nodded as well. “Alright, remember to keep your face and your stomach covered. Rachel’s not going to go easy on you.”

I nodded in understanding. “Got it,” I told him.

Tristan gripped my wrist before I could spin away to go to the ring, his eyes intent on mine. Worry for my well-being shone in their depths, and I swallowed thickly, my heart skipping a beat at the unfamiliar, tender look. “Be careful up there, alright?”

I nodded, shooting him a small smile. I could take care of myself. Tristan didn’t know who I was today, but if he stuck around long enough, he would quickly find out.

And though Tristan got on my fucking nerves, I could deal with him being an asshole. It was familiar territory for me because it was easy as fuck for me to be bitchy back.

But when he got all caring? I didn’t know how to deal with him. It made my heart skip beats, and it made my stomach flutter.

Reluctantly, Tristan let me go. I walked up to the makeshift ring, waiting for Joey to announce me and Rachel into the ring.

I was going to fuck this bitch up.

Chapter Five

Tristan

Fucking hell, she was so much sexier than she'd been at eighteen.

In the three years that I had been gone, she had filled out into a beautiful young woman, and she'd eventually shaped into a fucking goddess. The woman standing at the edge of that ring was fucking magnificent. No one could ever compare to her.

I could tell she worked out a lot by the defined muscles of her abdomen, and I could see the hint of muscle in her arms. She was light as a feather. I knew that from carrying her. But I had no damn idea that she was this fucking fit.

"She'll do alright," Joey assured me.

I just pretended to not hear him. I hated that he knew her better than I did, hated that when she was near him, she leaned into him without realizing it. She instantly sought him out in a room.

She looked at him like she used to look at me.

And yeah, I had ruined that shit between us, but I was back now. I was back to fix this shit with her.

I just needed her to stop fighting me every step of the damn way.

With a grunt, Joey got up and walked up into the ring. “Alright, first up we have Rachel Keen. She’s a guest here from another club,” Joey announced, looking at the far corner of the ring.

A few cheers went up, and I watched as a girl with blonde hair stepped into the ring. She was wearing a bright pink sports bra with a pair of tight, pink workout shorts that showed her ass cheeks. I heard some whistles come up around the crowd, and I scowled.

She had absolutely nothing on Addy.

“And next, we all have your favorite—Adelaide!” Joey roared, reaching down to help her up into the ring.

The moment Adelaide stepped up onto the mat, a roar went up in the crowd surrounding the ring, the noise almost deafening. And there wasn’t even that many people watching the fucking fight.

“She’s not the same girl, Grim,” Jesup said, calling me by my street name.

I nodded in agreement. “Trust me, I know,” I grumbled. “The old Adelaide would have never even thought about violence like this.” After the way she’d grown up, violence used to make her nauseous and panicky. Now, she was seeking it out?

It made me sick to my stomach. Just who was Adelaide today?

“You ladies know the rules,” Joey told them. “No hair pulling, no biting. Fight fair. The winner leaves here with a grand in their pocket.”

They both nodded in understanding. Joey stepped out of the ring. “Fight!” he roared.

Adelaide quirked an eyebrow at Rachel, a smirk twisting her lips. I felt my blood chill at the sight of that smirk. This version of Addy was cold. She was a true fighter.

“Are you sure you don’t want to back out while you’ve got a chance?” Addy taunted her. Rachel scowled. “I see you wrapped your pretty little knuckles up.” She laughed, but it was more of a cackle.

I looked at Rachel’s hand, and sure enough, her knuckles were wrapped in bandages to keep them from getting scarred or busted up. Adelaide’s hands were bare, and I suddenly realized why she had so many scars covering her knuckles and her hands.

She fought bare-handed.

Rachel curled her lip up at Adelaide. “Watch me beat your ass like Vin did,” she snarled. Joey tensed, ready to go to Addy’s defense, at the same time I stood to my feet, but Adelaide didn’t need either of us.

Because she fucking snapped .

Before Rachel had time to react, Adelaide slammed her shoulder into Rachel’s abdomen, sending them crashing to the matted floor. Rearing her fists back, Adelaide sent repeated blows against Rachel’s face. Rachel was so blinded by panic that she couldn’t figure out how to fight back.

Adelaide was a fucking monster in that ring.

Blood was splattering the white mat around them, and Adelaide wasn’t showing any signs of stopping. Even after Rachel was knocked out unconscious beneath her, Adelaide kept swinging.

Joey and I made it into the ring at the same time, and he stayed back while I gripped

Adelaide's shoulders, pulling her off of Rachel. She jammed her elbow into my ribs, and I coughed out a breath, locking her arms against her sides as I held her to me, her back pressed to my front while my side fucking throbbed.

"Adelaide, chill," I snapped into her ear. Her chest was heaving, her expression a mask of pure rage. It was almost as if she wasn't even in the ring with us anymore but was instead somewhere else in her mind, fighting a different person than Rachel. "Addy, you need to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths," I coaxed, forcing my voice to be gentler.

She shook her head. "Get the fuck off of me," she snarled as she tried kicking back, though I thankfully dodged her foot just in time.

Gripping her chin, I turned her head, pressing my lips to hers. I instantly felt the tension leave her body as her lips worked with mine, a soft moan falling from her lips. My cock hardened in my jeans at the sound, and though I desperately wanted to deepen that kiss, I slowly pulled back after a moment, opening my eyes to look down at her beautiful face.

She was calm again, or at least back there at the clubhouse with us, and her cheeks were flushed, her lips a bit swollen from me kissing her so hard.

"You good?" I asked her quietly, brushing some strands of hair out of her face that had fallen from her bun.

She swallowed hard and nodded before she looked down at Rachel. Her face paled slightly when she saw what she'd done. Rachel looked like she needed a fucking hospital—if she was even still alive.

"Get me out of here, Tristan," she begged, her voice a mere whisper. "Please," she added on at the end.

I nodded and led her to the side of the ring. Joey looked at me before he ran his eyes over Adelaide, concern in his eyes. “Take her to her room in the clubhouse. She’ll want a good shower,” he told me, almost as if this wasn’t the first time something like this had happened.

As if Adelaide turning into something that dark and twisted was normal .

I nodded in understanding. I hated that he seemed to know so much about her, but at the same time, I was a bit grateful for it because I was honestly a bit terrified that I wouldn’t be able to handle Addy in this state.

The Addy I remembered was sweet and innocent. She blushed when I so much as looked her way, and she hated violence with a passion after growing up in a trap house.

This Addy had just beaten a girl into a bloody pulp in pure rage.

No matter who she was today, I knew she was still my Addy. I just had to learn to be patient and wait for her to come around to me.

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Chapter Six

Adelaide

I nodded my head to the beat of the song coming through my speakers, lightly tapping my fingers on the steering wheel of my car as I drove aimlessly down a random back road. I was trying to calm myself down. To catch my breath and recenter myself. After my fight earlier, I had scrubbed myself down in the shower and escaped through the window in my room to go for a drive. The window had been the only option if I wanted to flee because I knew Tristan nor Joey would let me go alone.

I had to get the fuck away from there. And I needed to be alone.

I knew how destructive I was. How much of a monster I could be. But I had almost killed Rachel in that ring.

And that? That wasn't me, not if I wasn't trying to survive. But I had heard Vin's name, and I snapped. I lost control of myself.

I glanced up into my rearview mirror but did a double take when I saw someone was coming up fast on my ass. I cursed at the black Charger. Its windows were illegally tinted, and there was a slight mark on the front end that alerted me that the person following me was the one from my fucking nightmares. Only one man drove a car with a V scratched into the paint.

He'd fucking found me.

I instantly tightened my hand around the steering wheel and floored my black Camaro, looking for the next side road. I knew my way around this area, and I knew that I could easily find my way back to the clubhouse.

It would bring shit on the Sons of Hell, but I had no other choice. Vin would fucking slit my throat if he got his hands on me, and I knew Joey would protect me if I could just get to him.

I refused to let that asshole get his grimy fucking hands on me again. I would fucking kill myself before I allowed that shit to happen again.

I almost missed the next road since it was a bit hidden inside a curve, and I cursed, hitting the brake as I whipped my wheel, my back end sliding as I made the sharp turn onto the road at the very last second. I saw Vin fly past me, but as he was passing me, his brake lights lit up, and I knew he still wouldn't be far behind me.

I floored it again, looking for the next side road that would lead me to the clubhouse. I knew this road. Joey liked to use it when he was bringing in guns and drugs to the clubhouse. The next road that led to the clubhouse was hidden well, only used by the club since it ended at the back of the Sons of Hell's property.

A couple of minutes later, I swung my car onto the next road that led to the back gate of Joey's crew. My heart pounded hard, adrenaline pumping through my veins when I saw the gates up ahead. They were locked tight, and thankfully, there wasn't anyone standing guard.

"Here goes nothing," I whispered.

My phone switched to a song with more base as I laid on my horn, warning whoever might be on the other side of the gate that I was about to crash through the fucking thing and to get the fuck out of my way.

I juttled forward in my seat as I slammed through the gate, the seatbelt locking around me, stealing the air from my lungs as I slammed my forehead onto the steering wheel. My airbags burst out, filling the air around me with white powder. I coughed as I pushed it out of my face. I had so much adrenaline running through my body that I didn't even feel the pain that I knew should be thrumming through my skull.

My door was ripped open, and I blinked up at Tristan, slightly dazed as the white powder floated out of the car. "Are you out of your damn mind?" he barked at me as he reached over me to unsnap my seatbelt.

I slowly turned to get out of the car, and Tristan gripped my upper arms to help me out. I stumbled slightly, my vision blurring as I stood on my feet.

"You're bleeding," he muttered, reaching up to wipe a little bit of blood from my forehead.

"Vin," I muttered. "He—" I was panting. "Vin was following me."

"Here. Sit down, Addy," Tristan gently said, easing me onto the ground so that I could lean back against my car. "You're in shock."

"Guard that fucking gate!" I heard Joey bark at someone as he stormed over to us. He leaned into my car and turned it off, shutting off my music. Then, he kneeled in front of me, his dark eyes running over my face, taking in the blood trickling from my forehead and down my cheek. "What happened, pretty girl?" he asked, forcing his tone to soften.

"Vin was following her," Tristan informed him as I leaned my head back against my car, finally registering the pain in my head from where I had hit my steering wheel.

"What in the fuck were you doing off of the clubhouse grounds to begin with,

Adelaide?” Joey demanded. I slowly rolled my head around to look at him. “You were supposed to be resting after that fight.”

“I had to get away,” I told him quietly, knowing he would understand. Joey sighed, a frown tugging at his lips.

“Getting away almost got you killed, Addy,” Tristan spoke up. I looked up at him. His arms were crossed over his broad chest, making the muscles in them bulge a bit. Joey rested a hand on my knee and gave it a gentle squeeze, a silent reminder that Tristan wouldn’t understand.

He didn’t know the woman I was now.

“You told me you were going to sleep after you got a shower,” Tristan accused. He wasn’t wrong though. I had said that.

It had also been a lie.

I shrugged carelessly. “You should learn that what comes out of my mouth usually can’t be trusted,” I snarked, unable to help but piss him off further.

“I should have fucking known you wouldn’t have rested after blacking out like that,” Joey grumbled. I slowly looked over at him. His eyes were tender and understanding as he met mine, but there was slight anger in their depths as well. “But Adelaide, you can’t just run off like that without at least letting someone know. What if Vin had been able to catch you? We might not have been able to save you in time.”

I sighed. “I got it,” I grumbled. “I fucking got it.”

Before Joey could respond, gun shots rang out around us. Tristan cursed as he dropped down to the ground beside me, he and Joey pulling guns out of their cuts at

the same time. Tristan wrapped an arm around my waist, tugging me close to him. “Can you use a gun?” he asked me.

I nodded at him. He thrust a pistol into my hand and pressed his lips to my forehead—the part that wasn’t bleeding. Despite the dangerous situation we were in, my heart fluttered in my chest. “If someone that’s not one of my men or Joey’s men comes near you, fucking shoot them,” he harshly ordered.

I watched as Tristan inched around the car, crouching at the hood. He started firing back, Joey right beside him. I kept my eyes trained on the area surrounding me. Soon, the gun shots died down, and I heard cars tear off of the lot, giving up for now. Tristan stood and came over to me. “You alright?”

I nodded, pushing myself up off of the ground. “Vin?” I guessed.

Tristan nodded in answer to my question. Joey strode over to me. “You need to get in that clubhouse,” he instructed, his eyes hard, still in protection mode. I clenched my jaw. “I’ll get one of the men to get your car over to the garage to get fixed.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “You know no one works on my car besides me, Joey.”

He stepped closer, our toes touching as he towered over me, his eyes narrowing. I tilted my chin up at him defiantly. “Get the fuck over it,” he snarled at me. I bristled. Joey was worried about me, and he was itching for a fight. I knew that. But that didn’t mean I wasn’t going to rise to the challenge. “Twice in the past ten fucking minutes, your life has been in jeopardy. Get your fucking ass in that goddamn clubhouse!” he barked down at me, pointing his finger in the direction of the clubhouse.

I spat in his face. He slowly closed his eyes and stepped back from me, using his shirt to wipe my spit off of his face. “You better watch who the fuck you’re talking to. In

case you've fucking forgotten, I still hold a goddamn gun in my hand."

He opened his eyes and arched an eyebrow at me, anger flaring in his beautiful eyes. "You threatening me, pretty girl?" he asked, his tone low and dangerous, the true, terrifying criminal within him coming to the surface.

I stepped up to him, glaring up into his handsome face. I wasn't afraid of Joey. He knew that. Just as I knew he'd never truly hurt me. "I'm making a promise," I seethed. "If you ever talk to me again like you just did, I will fucking shoot you, understand? I'm not one of your goddamn men."

He took a step back from me. "Get the fuck out of my sight."

Tristan gripped my arm and pulled me back from Joey when I reached up to jab my finger into his chest, ready to spew some more shit at him. "Come on," Tristan told me, trying to deescalate the situation. "You both need to calm down."

I ripped my arm from his grasp, almost stumbling when my skull pulsed from me moving too fast. "Don't tell me what the fuck I need to do."

He gripped my upper arms and snatched me against his hard, muscular frame, glaring down at me. I swallowed hard. I still wasn't used to this side of Tristan. "I'm not Joey, Addy. Watch yourself."

I let a careless smirk twist my lips. "You going to hit me, Tristan?" I asked, almost taunting him.

He leaned his head down, so his lips brushed against my ear. I shivered, my breath hitching in my throat as my eyes closed. Oh, God, what the fuck was he doing to me? "I'm not that kind of man, Addy, but I will throw you over my shoulder, drag you into your room, and fuck you stupid," he breathed into my ear.

My eyes snapped open as white-hot desire rippled straight down to my core. He leaned back up and reached up with one of his hands to brush the pad of his thumb over my bottom lip. My breath hitched in my throat. “Got it?”

Rendered speechless, I wordlessly nodded my head.

I silently watched as Tristan leaned his muscular body over the pool table with his cue stick in his hand, getting ready to break the triangle of balls on the table. I couldn't help but let my eyes linger on his ass for a moment because for a man, he really was gifted with a great, toned ass. It was the kind you wanted to sink your nails into or hell, even your teeth.

“You stare at that man any harder, gorgeous, and you'll burn holes into his ass,” Jessie commented as she leaned over the bar to hand me another beer.

Dragging my eyes away from Tristan, I turned my head to smirk at her. “At least this way I can check him out without him trying to fuck me every time I turn around.” She released a loud laugh. “It's been three years since I've seen him, much less been with him like that.” I shook my head. “I don't exactly know how to deal with him.” A soft frown pulled at her lips as her eyes filled with concern for me. “He's ten times cockier than he was when we were eighteen.”

Jessie sighed. “Maybe that's a good thing, gorgeous. You need some sexiness like him in your life again,” she told me, trying her best to lighten the mood again.

I pursed my lips. “I don't know. I think I've got enough of that in my life with your brother.”

Jessie snorted. “Look, I know Joey is my brother and all, but you don't react to him the way you react to Tristan. That man comes within five feet of you, and everyone around you can see just how much he affects you.”

I rolled my eyes. “He does not—” I started, but I cut myself off, anger roaring through my veins when I saw Lacie, one of the club women, saunter up to Tristan and press herself against him, a flirty smile on her lips.

“Oh, he doesn’t affect you, hm?” Jessie teased, a knowing smirk on her lips.

I ignored her as I guzzled half of my beer down and watched him smirk down at her and whisper something into her ear that had her blushing and giggling. I clenched my jaw. “Two can play at this fucking game,” I snarled, getting up from my stool.

Worry for me flashed in Jessie’s eyes. “Don’t do anything stupid, Adelaide.”

I only shot her a smirk before I turned around to go to the pool table, sliding up to Joey’s side. I could feel Tristan’s eyes on me, but I completely ignored him as I smiled up at Joey. “I’m sorry about earlier,” I murmured. I knew I was trying to make Tristan feel what I was feeling, but I did mean those words to Joey. I truly was sorry.

Joey gave me a soft smile as he wrapped an arm around my waist and kissed my jaw. “I know, pretty girl. We were both pissed at each other. I’m sorry, too,” he apologized.

That was one of the things I loved about Joey. He knew he had his faults, and he wasn’t afraid to admit that he had fucked up with me, just as I wasn’t afraid to apologize to him when I acted like a class-A bitch.

I splayed my hands over his muscular chest, looking up at him from under my lashes. “Makeup sex?” I asked him softly.

He smirked, his eyes flaring with his need for me. “I’ll never turn that down, pretty girl.” He thrust his pool stick at Charles, who hurried to grab it. “Charles is taking my place,” he announced to Tristan. “I’ve got something to tend to.”

Tristan's glare settled on my back as I laced my fingers through Joey's and tugged him toward his room, but I didn't give a fuck. I might have originally started out wanting to piss Tristan off, but now, I wanted Joey.

I wanted that normalcy I'd always had with him, and I knew Joey would give that to me, would take care of me like I needed.

Joey would always be the one man that I knew I could rely on in my time of need.

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Chapter Seven

Tristan

I gently pushed the blonde woman away from me, clenching my jaw as I watched Adelaide disappear down the hall into one of the rooms with Joey. I wanted to rush after them and fucking rip him away from her. And maybe bash his fucking face into my knee.

The blonde pouted up at me. “Tristan,” she whined.

I was so sick of club women. The only fucking woman I wanted was Adelaide, and she didn’t fucking want me.

Every rejection from her cut me deep, even if I never let her see it.

“No,” I snapped at the blonde, unable to control my temper. She flinched back from me, her eyes widening with fear. “I’m not fucking interested. Go fucking bother someone else.”

She glared up at me as she recovered from her shock. “Getting tangled up with Adelaide will only get you killed,” she spat up at me.

This girl was treading on dangerous fucking waters. She had no fucking clue what kind of woman Adelaide was.

Do you even know who she is ? my mind snapped back at me.

I took a dangerous step toward the blonde, my eyes narrowing. Her face paled, and she quickly stepped back from me. Her pulse jumped erratically at the base of her throat in fear. “Unless you’ve got something nice to say about Adelaide, I’d advise you to keep your fucking mouth shut,” I quietly warned her, my voice deadly and frightening. A clear warning that talking shit about Adelaide was off fucking limits.

I turned on my heel and stormed over to the bar, not interested in playing pool anymore. Jessie arched an eyebrow at me as I plopped onto one of the bar stools, a scowl settled over my features. “Something strong?” she guessed.

Wordlessly, I nodded. She grabbed a glass and filled it with ice, pouring hundred-proof vodka into the glass afterward. I caught the glass as she slid it toward me, the ice making a clanking sound in the glass. “If it makes you feel any better, she only went to fuck my brother to make you jealous,” Jessie informed me as she raised her dark eyes to meet mine.

I arched an eyebrow at her. “Who said I give a shit about Adelaide?” I retorted.

Jessie smirked and leaned forward on the bar, propping her chin up on her hand. “It’s written all over your face, sweetie.” She leaned back up and shrugged. “Adelaide saw you with Lacie, and she got pissed.”

I pinched the bridge of my nose with a rough sigh. Most of the time, I didn’t know how to even begin to deal with Addy. She was so different from the girl I fell in love with so many years ago. I missed the old her so fucking much, missed the girl who was sweet and kept me grounded.

Adelaide now? She was wild and untamed. Completely fucking dangerous.

“I love that woman more than I should,” I grumpily admitted, swallowing some of the vodka in the glass, not even making a face as the alcohol burned down my throat.

Jessie shrugged. "I could see the love you have for her when you laid your eyes on her the night of her birthday party," Jessie told me. I grunted. "But I'm going to warn you now that Adelaide has been through some shit, and she doesn't love easily anymore. Not after what you did to her, and especially not after your sister died." I couldn't hold in my flinch. The loss of my twin sister was still fresh.

"When Helene lost her fight to cancer, it seemed like Adelaide lost the last part of her that made her human. Sometimes, I swear she doesn't feel anything." Jessie's eyes lifted from the bar and met mine. "Well, until you came along, that is."

"Helene was always her rock," I remembered, that familiar sadness ringing through me as I thought of my younger twin sister. She'd been the light of everyone's life, and she had been Adelaide's only friend. Growing up in a trap house like Adelaide had, friends were few and far between, and having someone that she could trust was even rarer.

"Look, I love my brother to death," Jessie began, "but I'm going to be honest with you here. I love Adelaide. She's like the sister I've never had, and I want what's best for her. She and my brother are toxic as fuck together, but he also knows how to keep her grounded and keep her alive. If it weren't for Joey always bringing out that fire in Adelaide, I'm not even sure she would be alive today." I swallowed thickly. "But Adelaide also needs someone to bring her out of that fucking hole she's in, and I know that you can do that if you can just manage to get past that wall that she's built up against you."

"How did she even get like this?" I asked, almost afraid of the answer. "She used to be so sweet and innocent."

Jessie sighed, and judging by her face, I knew I wasn't going to like whatever she said next. "Not going to lie to you, Tristan, it all started with you." I flinched. "When you broke up with Adelaide on her birthday, Joey met her, and he gave her the

freedom that she needed, but he also got her caught up in some fucked up shit to bring her out of her funk. Adelaide was dead inside. You killed a part of her.” Pain lanced through my chest. “The first time I met Adelaide, she and Joey had been together for three months, and she was snorting a line of coke up her nose.”

I roughly ran a hand down my face, hating myself now more than I ever had before. I had left Adelaide so that I could protect her. I had destroyed her heart to keep her safe.

But I only drove her into the arms of just another form of the devil that I was already trying to protect her from to begin with. I never wanted this life to touch her.

Fucking hell.

“Apparently, Adelaide had been doing runs for Joey for a while.” I shook my head in disgust. Women weren’t meant to be a part of this shit. “I met Helene that same day. Your sister had come into the clubhouse to find Adelaide, and she instantly started yelling at Adelaide for doing hard drugs. Helene helped her get clean, but your sister wasn’t enough to help her heal.”

“Adelaide told me that Helene got her caught up with Joey. Said she even encouraged Adelaide.”

Jessie shook her head with a bitter laugh. “She thought Joey would be a great rebound guy for Adelaide but nothing more. She was pissed as hell when she found out that Adelaide was caught up in this life, but by the time Helene found out, Adelaide was already in too deep to get out, even if she wanted to. But she didn’t. Adelaide needs this now.”

“Fuck,” I whispered. What the fuck had I done to the sweet, innocent girl that used to be Adelaide?

“The two years between her eighteenth birthday and Helene’s death, Adelaide seemed normal for the most part after she got clean. She did the runs for Joey, and she fought when she needed extra money.” Jessie released a sad sigh. “But Adelaide lost the last part of herself that kept her sane when Helene lost her fight to cancer on the morning of Adelaide’s birthday.”

I fucking remembered that day like it was yesterday.

I had been sitting in my clubhouse, staring at Addy’s picture on the background of my phone, wishing I had everything figured out so that I could go back and claim her as mine again. I had been daydreaming about the day that Adelaide would be mine again.

Then, I had received a call from the hospital.

Helene was pronounced dead when paramedics got to her apartment.

“She won’t celebrate her birthday anymore, Tristan,” Jessie sadly informed me.

I swallowed past the sudden lump in my throat. “I can guess why,” I muttered. Not only had Helene passed away on her birthday, but I had destroyed her.

I wouldn’t want to celebrate my birthday either after that kind of luck.

“She was so happy when she got up that morning and drove over to Helene’s apartment. I was with her,” Jessie told me. I swallowed thickly as I stared down at the bar. I knew this was shit I needed to hear, needed to know if I wanted any chance of understanding Adelaide any better, but it sure as fuck didn’t make it any easier to hear. “We were all going to go shopping, eat out, and party our hearts out at a club that night, but when we got there, Helene wasn’t responding to the knocks on her door.”

I swallowed hard. “Don’t tell me,” I whispered, my chest aching.

“Adelaide unlocked the door and found her on the couch, but Helene was already gone,” Jessie continued. My chest tore wide open. “I called 9-1-1, and Joey had to come to get Adelaide because she was losing her fucking mind. She was screaming and crying, not making any sense. I didn’t know how to help her.” Jessie drew in a deep breath. “Joey saved her that day. She was ready to end her life to be with Helene.”

She’d found my sister, and on the same day without ever knowing it, I’d almost lost Adelaide, too.

I dropped my face into my hands, blowing out a harsh breath.

“Are you okay?” Jessie asked me, as if I deserved any kind of kindness after the hell I had put Adelaide through.

I nodded. “I hadn’t realized it was her that found Helene,” I admitted. I should have known, though. “The doctor only told me that a friend of hers found her and called 9-1-1. I can’t even begin to imagine what the fuck that did to her.”

“The girl you saw beat the fuck out of Rachel earlier, that’s the Adelaide we all know now. She’s a fighter, and she’s vicious as fuck. Deadly, even. Even Joey treads carefully around her sometimes, but Tristan... be careful around him. Joey will destroy the fucking world over her. They may scream and yell at each other, and sometimes, Adelaide might even throw shit at him, but Joey loves her in his own twisted, fucked-up way. He made her into a monster to help her, and she is a monster, Tristan. She’s destructive.”

“That scary?” I asked her.

Jessie shook her head, looking over toward the hallway as Addy emerged, her face twisted into a scowl as she hollered something over her shoulder.

“Nope. Just that unpredictable,” Jessie muttered.

“Don’t fucking be a bitch when you were the one fucking using me to get to him!” Joey roared after her as he came out of the hallway as well, his eyes narrowed on her back.

“Go fuck yourself!” Adelaide yelled back at him.

“I don’t need to fuck myself, sweetheart, when there’s plenty of other women in this clubhouse willing to fuck me in your goddamn place!” he roared down at her as he gripped her arm and spun her around to face him. She glared up at him, jealous rage shining in her eyes at his words. My heart sunk to my feet. Even fighting, she still wanted him. How the fuck was I meant to compete with what they shared? “I am second best to no one , Adelaide. You best fucking remember that,” he growled.

“Well, fuck,” Jessie grumbled, watching the scene unfold in front of us. I clenched my fists, wanting to bash Joey’s face in for the way he was treating Adelaide.

Adelaide’s hand came up and flew across Joey’s face with a resounding slap that sent his face swinging to the side. “Fuck!” I heard Jessie yell.

I lurched to my feet at the same time Jessie jumped over the bar, rushing toward the two of them. Joey roughly shoved Addy away from him, sending her crashing into a table and down to the floor.

I saw fucking red .

I stormed over to Joey and slammed my fist into his face, sending him crashing back

into one of the pool tables. Joey spit out blood, glaring up at me. “What the fuck?” he snarled up at me.

“Keep your fucking hands off of her,” I snapped down at him.

He chuckled, spitting out more blood as he pushed himself off the floor and rose back up to his feet. He looked deadly, like the monster everyone described him to be. “You go ahead and deal with that fucking whore,” he snarled, jabbing a finger at Adelaide. “I’m done with her.”

That time when I punched him, he slumped to the floor, knocked out cold, though I was pretty sure it had more to do with the liquor in his bloodstream rather than my fist hitting his face. Joey never went down easily.

I turned to Addy, only to see Jessie already helping her up from the floor. “You sure he didn’t hurt you too badly?” Jessie gently asked Addy.

Adelaide nodded. “Yeah. I’m good,” she grumbled, her eyes flickering to Joey for a moment before she shut her eyes, drawing in a deep breath.

I walked over to her and let my eyes run over her, checking to make sure that she was truly okay. “If he ever touches you again, I’ll fucking put a bullet through his skull,” I snarled, drawing her into my arms once she was steady.

She sighed, relaxing into me. I tightened my arms around her, not one to let a moment like this pass me by. I knew there would be very few of them. “I hit him first,” she defended him.

I sighed. She fucking loved him, and that shit gutted me. “Addy, baby, if you hit me, the most I would do is put you over my knee and spank you into submission.” I heard a low moan release from the back of her throat, and I smirked. I could still affect her,

just as I had when we were younger. “You don’t deserve to be treated like that, Addy.”

She shrugged. “You get used to it.”

I clenched my jaw, wanting to break Joey’s neck at that moment, but I restrained myself, knowing that if anything would drive Adelaide away from me, that would be it. “You should have never had to get used to it, Addy.”

She stayed silent, and I tightened my arms around her again, pressing my lips to the top of her head. We stayed like that for a moment, letting her draw strength from me.

After a minute, I leaned down, so my mouth was at her ear. A shiver ran down her spine as my hot breath blew over her lobe. I smirked. “I bet I could have you scream my name a hell of a lot louder than he did, Addy.”

Her fingers twisted into my shirt as her breath hitched in her throat. I silently pressed a kiss to her rapidly beating pulse.

Patience. I had to have patience.

I knew I would have her where she belonged soon enough.

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Chapter Eight

Adelaide

I bounced on the balls of my feet as I swung my fist forward, connecting it with the punching bag in front of me. I quickly swung my other fist forward, bringing my leg up right after.

I was aggravated beyond belief.

After everything that happened yesterday with Vin, I was on lockdown. To say that I was already going stir crazy in less than twenty-four hours was a bit of an understatement.

Joey had even left me behind this morning when he went on his run. We woke up everyone in the clubhouse during our shouting match because usually, he took me with him. Now, he was going to be gone for three days, and the last words I'd said to him were that I fucking hated him.

I was sorely regretting my words now. I knew he wasn't ever guaranteed to come back from a run, and if something were to happen to him, I would hate myself. Because no matter how much we fought, Joey was one of my rocks. He kept me grounded. Fuck, he kept me alive .

After I'd shouted at him that I hated him, he had simply left me with strict instructions to not leave the clubhouse. And to ensure that I followed the rules that Joey set, Tristan had set up one of his men at each entrance and exit of the clubhouse,

which included the fucking windows so that I couldn't escape like last time.

I'd sent Joey a text to apologize since I knew he wouldn't answer his phone while he was on a run, but he hadn't responded to me yet.

"Beating the hell of that punching bag isn't going to make you feel any better, love," Jesup stated as he stepped into the workout room, a beer held loosely in his grip as he watched me take out my aggression on the swinging bag in front of me.

I clenched my jaw, hating that he was disturbing me when all I wanted was to just be alone. "It's better than punching some people in the fucking face," I retorted, swinging at the bag again.

"You tried talking to anyone instead of just letting all of that aggression simmer inside of you?" Jesup asked as he took a seat on the bench across from me while I continued hitting the bag.

I shook my head. "All I want to do is beat Joey's face in until he's not so fucking handsome anymore for locking me in here, but I want him to fucking talk to me as well. We left shit on a bad note." I swung again as Jesup grunted. "And I also want to beat the hell out of your perfect fucking president and boot him and the rest of you mother fuckers back to where you came from."

Jesup took a swig from his beer, unbothered by my words. "You mean that?"

I clenched my jaw, grabbing the punching bag as it swung back toward me. I turned my head to glare at him. "I was handling myself just fine before Tristan dropped back into my life and snatched me up," I told him. "Tristan did all of his damage three years ago. He me know how he fucking felt the night of my eighteenth birthday. He should have fucking stayed gone."

“Tristan has always loved you, Adelaide,” Jesup told me. I snorted. That was fucking laughable. “He never stopped.”

I narrowed my eyes at the VP, clenching my jaw so hard that my teeth audibly ground together. Three years later and that wound was still raw as hell. Tristan had sent me on a downward spiral. The only fucking reason that I was still standing there was because of Joey.

“Could have fucking fooled me when he told me that he was tired of the relationship, that he couldn’t fucking deal with my neediness anymore,” I snarled at him. Jesup sighed as he shook his head. I threw my hands up into the air in exasperation, glaring at Jesup. “Jesup, he fucking kissed some random whore right afterward. I fucking begged him not to do that shit to me, and he fucking did it anyway.”

“He did what he needed to do to keep you safe, Adelaide.”

I released a humorless laugh, throwing my arms out to the sides. “Obviously, I could fucking do that myself if he had just stopped fucking babying me.” Jesup rolled his eyes. “I’ve been taking care of myself since the moment he dumped me and I met Joey. So, don’t you dare try that fucking shit on me.”

“When he broke up with you, Adelaide, you were still young and na?ve,” Jesup told me bluntly. I narrowed my eyes at him in a warning. Jesup knew the kind of shit that I grew up in. I wasn’t fucking na?ve. I grew up in a goddamn trap house. “You still needed emotional support. You have to admit that. Tristan needed to protect you, and he did what he needed to do for that to happen,” Jesup tried to reason with me.

“From what?!” I finally yelled at him, losing my cool. “What the fuck did he need to protect me from so badly that he had to fucking break me like that?!”

“Vin.” Tristan’s voice rang through the workout room, making my heart trip in my

chest. I swung my angry gaze to his. “I was trying to protect you from Vin.”

My eyes widened in shock as I looked up at him, but then, I glared, clenching and unclenching my fists at my sides. “Obviously, you didn’t do a good enough fucking job,” I snarled at him. “Because guess who the fuck is still after me? Fucking Vin .”

Anger flashed in Tristan’s eyes as he narrowed his dark, gleaming eyes at me. “Oh, I did,” he corrected me. “Your precious Joey got you in this fucking situation all by himself. I owed Vin a shit ton of money, and he was threatening those close to me to get what was owed to him.” Tristan stepped further into the room, and Jesup slipped out, leaving me alone with the man who’d broken me. “Remember that day that I didn’t show up to school?” he asked. I swallowed thickly. I remembered it well. I had been panicking all day because Tristan always showed up to school, even if he was so sick that he could barely stand, just to make sure that he was there to protect me from assholes. “When you finally saw me that night when I came home, my face was bruised and bloody.”

I nodded my head, my heart clenching in my chest as I remembered him collapsing in the foyer of his house as soon as he shut the door behind him, giving in to the pain when he was finally safe. “Vin had finally gotten his hands on me that day, and he threatened to hurt you.”

That had happened a week before my eighteenth birthday.

“I did what I had to do to protect you from him, Addy,” Tristan told me quietly, his dark eyes swirling with protectiveness. He stepped closer to me. “I never stopped loving you, Addy baby. Everything I said to you was to protect you from my shit.”

I shook my head at him, my heart beating so fast in my chest that it physically hurt. Everything he was telling me... fuck, it was so overwhelming. “How—what?” I started, unable to actually complete a sentence. I was shocked as hell.

He really had done all of that to protect me.

And I had been such a fucking bitch to him when he finally came back.

But dammit, I'd been hurt. I had buried all of that pain that he had caused me for years .

Tears filled my eyes, and I squeezed my eyes shut, turning away from him as I drew in a deep, shaky breath, desperately trying to calm myself down. I didn't want him to see me cry, to see me break down like this.

"Why didn't you just tell me that to begin with?" I asked him, hating that my voice came out weak and shaky.

Tristan's large, calloused hands settled over my shoulders. Warmth slid through my veins, thawing the ice around the part of my heart that had always been his. He slowly turned me around to face him. A tear trickled from my eye as I looked up at him, unable to keep it from sliding down my cheek.

He had never stopped loving me. Why did that hurt?

His face fell as he watched the tear trickle down. With gentle hands, he quickly reached up and wiped it away but kept his hand on my cheek afterward. "Because if I had told you what was going on, Addy, you would have never let me let you go," he told me honestly, and I knew he was right. I hated that he was right. "I had to break your heart in the worst way possible to keep you safe."

Another tear slid down my cheek, and my bottom lip trembled as I stared up at the man that had once held my entire heart. With a soft sigh, Tristan pulled me into his arms and pressed his lips to my hair. I quickly wound my own arms around him, pressing my body close to his, the steady thud of his heart keeping me calm and

grounded.

“Did Helene know?” I asked him quietly.

Tristan shook his head. “No one but Jesup knew,” he told me. I breathed a little easier now that I knew that my best friend hadn’t kept such a huge secret from me. “I couldn’t risk you finding out and trying to play the hero. I needed you to hate me. It fucking hurt like hell to let you go, to let you down, but it had to happen.”

I pulled myself tighter against him, tightening my arms around his torso. I took in all of the warmth, strength, and comfort he was giving me, soaking it up. He slid his hand down my back, his other arm flexing around me in response.

I looked up at him, and his dark eyes met mine. “So, what are you going to do now?” I asked him. “Are you going to break my heart all over again, destroy me for good this time?” Since Vin was still around, I assumed that was Tristan’s plan again. Sure, I had fought him every step of the way on this shit, but if he walked away again, I wouldn’t recover.

Tristan shook his head. “I’m older, and I’m stronger,” Tristan assured me. “I’ve got the right men to back me, and my club is strong.” His warm hand cupped my cheek, his eyes tender as he kept them locked with mine. “And we all protect our club women, especially our queen, Addy.” My cheeks warmed at his words, and my stomach swooped. “Vin won’t get close to you ever again, not if I have anything to do with it. He’s crossed me wrong for the last fucking time. I’m a hell of a lot meaner than I was when we were kids, and fucking with you has deadly consequences.”

My heart warmed at his words, my soul lighting up the slightest bit with hope—hope that he really wanted this with me, that he wouldn’t fucking destroy me again.

And this time, when Tristan bent his head and pressed his lips to mine, I didn’t want

to pull away. I didn't want to fight him on it.

I succumbed to him. I let him have me.

With one hand on my lower back, Tristan pressed me closer to him, and his other hand slid up into my hair, holding my lips to his. I gripped his shirt in my fists, obediently opening my lips beneath his when he licked along my bottom lip. A shiver ran down my spine as his tongue slid against mine, and I moaned softly. I slid my hands under his cut, feeling the rippling power of his muscular frame.

The door crashing open ripped us apart, both of us breathing a bit heavy as we looked to see who had intruded on our moment.

"Sorry, Grim," Jesup apologized, not looking sorry at all. Tristan grunted. "I know you guys were having a real heart to heart in here, but we've got a fucking problem." I pulled back from Tristan, my attention now fully on Jesup. My stomach twisted, a gut feeling that something was wrong spreading through my body like ice. "Joey has been shot, and he's being rushed to the emergency room," Jesup informed us.

My heart dropped to my feet, pure panic rushing through my veins.

I couldn't fucking lose him. Not Joey. Anyone but fucking Joey.

I moved past Tristan and ran out of the room, heading for the clubhouse exit before anyone could stop me, my heart in my fucking throat. Jessie met up with me at the door, tears rushing down her face. I was still panicking, too shocked and terrified of losing Joey to cry yet.

"I've got my car keys," she croaked as she desperately tried to hold herself together, but I knew she was freaking out as much as I was. "Ink and York are riding with us for protection."

I was shaking. All I could do was rush after her to her car, praying that I wasn't losing Joey.

I heard Tristan barking orders behind us at all of his men, but I was already rushing out of the door toward Jessie's car, not paying him any mind. Once my ass hit the passenger seat, she took off for the hospital, barely giving me time to close the door.

My heart was painfully pounding in my chest, stealing my breath, making it extremely hard to breathe.

God, I know I'm a shitty person, but please don't make me lose him. I won't survive it.

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Chapter Nine

Adelaide

When we got to the hospital, I rushed into the emergency room, immediately making my way to the receptionist on duty so she could tell me where Joey was.

“I’m sorry, Miss, but he’s currently in surgery.” I swallowed down vomit. Surgery . That was bad. That was really fucking bad. “You can have a seat in our waiting room and wait for the doctor to let me know that he’s out of surgery and into a recovery room.”

Numbly, I nodded, moving to the waiting room. Jessie took a seat in one of the hard, plastic chairs, but I couldn’t sit. I just paced back and forth across the floor. If I sat still, I would lose my fucking mind.

Ink took a seat beside Jessie and wrapped his arm around her, pulling her into him as he tried to console her. She cried into his shoulder.

I wished I could cry. Right then, I was numb, teetering on the edge between sanity and losing my damn mind. I didn’t know what to do without Joey.

I fucking hate you .

Those had been my last words to him, and right then, I fucking hated myself for letting him get hurt with those being my last fucking words to ring in his head.

I looked up when the double doors opened, and Tristan stepped in with Jesup hot on his heels, their familiar president and vice president patches adorning their cuts, letting everyone around know exactly who they were and that they weren't to be fucked with.

Tristan frowned when our eyes connected. Without a word, he opened his arms to me, giving me the option to take his comfort. With a choked sob, I rushed into his arms and collapsed against his chest as his strong arms wrapped around my slender frame, holding me together the best as he could.

"I can't lose him, too, Tristan," I sobbed. Losing him would literally be the beginning of my villain origin story. I would become so uncontrollable, I would have to be put down.

"Joey is strong, Addy baby," Tristan soothed as he brushed his calloused hand over my hair. "It's going to take a lot more than this to take him out." He pressed his lips to my temple, letting them linger for a moment.

For some reason, I couldn't believe his words. Any other time, I would agree, but something in my gut was telling me that this time wouldn't be like the others.

I cried into Tristan's chest as he stood with his back facing the wall, his arms tight around me as he let me cry it out. Jesup stood next to us, his eyes staying focused on his surroundings. "Joey Dirks?" a male voice called as he entered the waiting room.

Jessie jumped to her feet and rushed over to the doctor, who was still in his surgery scrubs. "I'm his sister," she rushed out. "Is he okay?"

The doctor gave her a sad look...

And I fucking knew .

I'd lost Joey, too. My chest began to cave in before he even got the words out of his mouth.

"I'm sorry, Miss, but we did everything we could," he softly told her.

My scream would have been one for the Oscars as I collapsed to the floor, my arms wrapping tightly around myself. Sobs wracked my body, my screams bouncing off of the walls. "No!" I screamed, my fists pounding the floor. "Joey !" I screeched.

Tristan dropped to the ground next to me, dragging me into his arms, holding me tight to him as he rocked me, doing his best to calm me back down. I tightly wrapped my arms around his torso, loud cries ripping from my lips as I begged Joey to come back to me. He'd promised me. He fucking promised he wouldn't leave me !

Tristan gripped my face in his hands, shaking me gently as he forced me to look up at him. His expression shattered as he ran his eyes over my face. "No, baby, not now. I need you to breathe, Addy," he told me firmly. "Focus on me." I couldn't breathe. Everything hurt. He was gone . "Come back to me, baby. Joey wouldn't want you to be like this."

I whimpered, my chest aching.

Tristan gave me a gentle smile. "Come on, baby girl. In. Out. Breathe." I followed his instructions as he ran his thumbs over my cheekbones. "That's it. Slowly, Addy. Just breathe, baby."

"I-Is he really gone?" I croaked, my voice coming out weak and strangled.

Tristan slowly nodded and drew me into his arms as silent tears trickled down my cheeks.

Who else was I going to lose before all of this shit was over?

The clubhouse was silent as I walked through the doors with Tristan right behind me. Some people were silently crying while others were staring blankly into space.

This club had just lost the greatest president to ever grace this earth. They'd lost their founder.

And I had just lost one of the greatest men I'd ever known.

"You know this is your fault, right?" Charles asked from his position at the bar. I looked over at him silently, a blank expression on my face and in my eyes. "Joey would still be alive if Vin hadn't fucking gone after him for protecting you."

Tears welled in my eyes at his words, shattering that numbness that I so desperately needed to hold on to. "I'm sorry," I choked out to both the club and Joey. Joey who would never hear my apology now. He'd never hear any of them.

It was all my fucking fault.

Tristan's hands settled over my shoulders, and he pressed himself against my back, guarding me and protecting me the best that he could. "Watch your fucking tone with her," Tristan snarled at Joey's VP, who now the president of the Sons of Hell.

"He's right," Jessie snapped at Charles. "This isn't her fucking fault."

"How the fuck is it not?" Charles snarled at her. I flinched at his words. "She's been nothing but fucking trouble since Joey took her from her birthday party when she was eighteen." Charles looked at me, rage clouding his features. I swallowed thickly. "As the new president, I'm ordering you to leave," he snapped, pointing his finger at me. I sucked in a sharp breath at his words. This was my home. What the fuck did he mean

leave ? “Get your shit and get the fuck out of my clubhouse. You’re no longer a part of this fucking club.”

“Now hold the fuck up!” Ink roared from his position beside Jessie. “You know Joey never wanted her to leave this fucking club, Charles! She’s one of us! She was his , for fuck’s sake.”

“Not anymore she’s not!” Charles roared at him. I rolled my lips into my mouth, resisting the urge to whimper. “Now shut your fucking mouth when speaking to me!” He looked back at me. “Get out, Adelaide.”

I tilted my chin up defiantly, refusing to show weakness to the asshole in front of me. Wiping my expression clean off my face, I nodded once at him. “Alright, Charles, I’m leaving, but note this,” I snarled, shrugging Tristan’s hands off of my shoulders as I strode forward until I could feel Charles’s hot breath on my skin. “This club will turn against you, Charles. No fucking new president ever goes against what the old president wanted. It’s called respect for the fucking dead.”

Charles tightly gripped my arm, yanking me closer to him as a disgusted snarl twisted his features. I brought my knee up, crushing his pathetic dick. He quickly released me and dropped to the floor, holding his balls in his hands, his expression white with pain. I spat on him, clenching my fists at my sides. “Mark my fucking words, Charles. You ever fucking come near me again, and it won’t be my knee on your balls. I’ll shoot your fucking dick off, you got me?”

I stepped over him and stormed to my room, not waiting for his bullshit reply. After yanking a duffel bag out of the top of my closet, I tossed it onto the bed and began throwing my necessary clothes into it along with any important documentation that I had. I could practically feel Tristan’s eyes on me as I moved around the room, but he was silent, giving me a moment to gather myself.

“What makes you so sure that the club will turn on him?” Tristan finally asked me.

“No one here really likes Charles,” I informed him. Tristan stayed silent, allowing me to continue. “He always wanted to go against Joey. Everyone here respected Joey as a president, and they respected his decisions. Charles running me off, the one fucking person Joey ever gave two damn shits about, the one person this club ever respected like a sister, is going to cause problems. Mark my words—the club is going to turn on Charles.”

“And what happens when the club turns on him?” Tristan asked me.

“It gets bloody,” I told him. “And the club is very possibly over.” Which just made my chest ache. I didn’t want to see Joey’s legacy die.

Tristan stayed silent. I zipped my bag up, and he grabbed it off of the bed. “Guess you’re finally coming home where you belong,” he softly said, but he didn’t sound all that happy about it. “I’m sorry it’s under these circumstances, Addy.”

I swallowed thickly but nodded, knowing the Sons of Death was the only place I could go to now. I didn’t have anywhere else.

I looked across the hall to Joey’s room as we stepped out of mine. Putting my finger up to signal Tristan to hold on a minute, I pushed open Joey’s door, swallowing past the sudden lump in my throat as I took in the picture of us on his nightstand. I was about to turn nineteen in a couple of weeks in that picture, and Joey had surprised me by making me an official member of his club and giving me my own room in the clubhouse.

We were standing right outside of the clubhouse, and he had his arms wrapped around me from behind. I was wearing his cut to show everyone that I was his woman, even though it basically swallowed me. Joey had on a blue and black flannel

shirt with a pair of dark jeans, and he was grinning down at me as I laughed at something he had said.

If I wasn't mistaken, Jessie had taken the picture of us.

Even then, we had always clashed heads, but we loved each other in our own sick, twisted ways.

Silent tears trickled down my cheeks as I picked up the picture, a small, sad smile playing on my lips.

Fuck, I already missed him so damn much.

"I will always love you, Joey," I whispered, my words almost inaudible to my own ears.

I grabbed his cut one of the members had laid out on his bed, and I grabbed his knife that he always kept under his pillow. It was the first knife he ever owned, and he had always said if he ever had a kid, he would always give the knife to his child.

He wasn't ever given the option. Joey would never have a family, never have children.

I walked back out of the room, and Tristan looked down at the items in my hand. Deciding to stay silent, he just followed me out of the clubhouse without a word. He was strapping my duffel bag to his bike when Jessie rushed outside and threw her arms around me. I hugged her back instantly.

"I'll miss you, gorgeous," she whispered into my shoulder.

I squeezed her gently, tears stinging my eyes, but I wouldn't let them fall—not here.

“I’ll miss you, too, gorgeous,” I whispered in return.

She pulled back from me, her dark eyes glimmering with unshed tears. “Promise me that you’ll stay safe?”

I nodded. “You better do the same,” I told her. She gave me a wobbly smile. “If things ever get to be too rough around here, call me. I promise I will come to get you, whether Tristan agrees or not.”

She nodded and kissed my cheek. “Please keep in touch,” she quietly begged me.

I kissed her cheek as well. “Always, gorgeous.”

With one last sad smile, she headed back to the clubhouse, where Ink was standing in the doorway, waiting on her. I had no idea what was going on with those two, but it wasn’t my business.

I sighed and slid onto the bike behind Tristan as he turned the engine over, the bike rumbling to life beneath me as I sat down. He gripped one of my hands and brought it up to his lips, pressing a light kiss to my knuckles. I drew in a slow, deep breath before I tightly wound my arms around his midsection and pressed the front of my body to his back.

And then, we were off to the Sons of Death’s territory, leaving the home I’d shared with Joey for the past three years behind.

Chapter Ten

Adelaide

I gagged when I woke up, vomit rising in my throat. I quickly lurched from the bed and rushed into the bathroom connected to Tristan's room, barely making it in front of the toilet before I began to empty my stomach.

I vaguely heard Tristan call after me, concern coloring his voice. I couldn't respond. I quickly dropped to my knees in front of the toilet, throwing up stomach acid again since I didn't eat anything yesterday. Tristan was kneeling next to me instantly, his hand holding my hair back out of my face as his other hand caressed my back, whispering soothing words to me as I continued retching.

Afterward, I sagged against the wall in exhaustion and closed my eyes, ignoring Tristan's worried gaze as he studied my face. I didn't want the worry. I probably just had some kind of stomach bug. It wasn't even something to be worried about.

"When was your last period, Addy?" Tristan gently asked me.

I opened my eyes to look at the handsome man in front of me, arching my eyebrow at him as I did so. "What kind of question is that?" I asked in confusion. What the fuck did my period have to do with anything?

"Just answer it," he told me, frustrated.

I sighed as I thought about his question. I took a moment to do the math in my head,

and my eyes flashed back open. Tears instantly welled in my eyes when I realized I was actually late.

I was very possibly pregnant.

With Joey's baby.

And there was no question that it was his because Vin used a condom the entire time with me.

I had to look down to make sure a knife hadn't been lodged in my heart when pain lanced through my chest.

Tristan sighed, sadness ringing in his eyes. "I thought so," he whispered.

Tears silently slid down my cheeks in quick succession as I looked down at my flat belly—my flat belly that was probably growing Joey's little kid.

I sobbed, my lips trembling and my shoulders shaking.

Tristan sat beside me against the wall and pulled me onto his lap, wrapping his arms around me. I burrowed against his chest, resisting the urge to wail. How cruel could the creator be?

"How can you not hate me right now?" I asked Tristan, my voice muffled against his muscular, bare chest.

Tristan sighed, tightening his arms around me. "I could never hate you, Addy," he confessed. I sniffled. Could he still love me so much that he was okay with me carrying another man's baby—another president's baby? A rival's baby? "Does it upset me that you're carrying another man's baby? Yes, of course, it does, but I can't

be angry at you . You and Joey were having sex way before I stepped back into the picture.” Still, despite his words, bitterness lingered in his voice. I knew he hated the fact that I felt so much for Joey, that I loved him so fucking much.

At the mention of Joey, my tears came harder. “I’m pregnant with his kid, and he’ll never know,” I sobbed. “I’ll never get the opportunity to see him hold his baby. He would have been a fucking fantastic dad,” I cried. Joey was a hardass, and we were toxic as fuck, but he adored kids. He was so fucking good with them.

Tristan tightened his arms around me. “He would have been ecstatic about it, Addy,” Tristan tried consoling me. “Joey would have gone above and beyond to make sure you and your baby were well and taken care of.”

I wrapped my arms tightly around Tristan’s torso as I cried harder. “What am I going to do?” I asked.

“I think you mean we ,” Tristan gently corrected me. I looked up at him in confusion, my tears clouding my vision. He reached up and gently wiped some of my tears off of my cheeks before he wrapped his arm back around me. “We’re in this together, Addy baby.”

I sniffled. “You’re too damn kind for your own good,” I grumbled as I buried my face back against his chest.

Tristan let out a husky, sexy laugh that had my belly twisting with desire for him, but I tamped it back down. “I just love you, Addy.” I swallowed thickly as my heart skipped a beat. “That has never changed. If loving you means that I have to father a kid that’s not mine, then that’s what I’m going to do. I’ll love this baby as if it were my own,” he promised me.

I tightened my arms around him. Fuck... what in the hell did I ever do to deserve a

man like Tristan?

Chapter Eleven

Tristan

Being extremely careful not to wake Addy up, I eased out of bed, not even breathing until my entire body was off the mattress. Now that I knew that she was pregnant, I was going to make sure she got all of the rest that she needed and that she took extremely good care of herself. All of this toxic shit that she had been doing had to come to an end. She wasn't just thinking of herself anymore.

But I knew that was going to be a fucking fight.

I walked into my connected bathroom and got a quick shower so I could go deal with club shit. I knew I needed to get a run organized and get ready to distribute funds at church today. I'd been slacking on my duties while trying to get Adelaide home.

After getting dressed in a pair of black cargo pants, my black steel-toed boots, a black t-shirt, and my cut, I walked out into the bar room, where Jesup was already behind the bar, talking to a couple of club women about cleaning up the mess from the welcoming back party last night.

Jesup arched an eyebrow at me when he noticed me. "You're up early," he noted.

I shrugged. "So are you," I retorted.

Normally after a welcome home party, all of the club members, including myself, slept extremely late. Like well into the afternoon kind of late. But there had been too

much shit on my mind to sleep, Addy being pregnant at the top of that list.

Jesup grinned at me. “I was expecting you to be balls deep inside of Adelaide for a while,” he lightly teased. I scowled at him. He shrugged at me. “What? It’s been years since you’ve been with her.”

I shook my head, thinking about Joey’s death, and then the fact that she had just found out that she was pregnant with his kid on top of it all. No fucking way was I about to sleep with her, much less try anything like that. I was a bastard, but I wasn’t that damn cruel. She wasn’t near ready for that kind of intimacy yet.

I nodded my head in the direction of the chapel, signaling for Jesup to follow me into the room. Once we were in the chapel, I shut the doors and locked them. Walking over to one of the windows, I crossed my arms over my broad chest and looked out at two of the prospects working on a car in the garage. “I think she’s pregnant,” I bluntly informed him, cutting straight to the chase.

“Woah, what ?” Jesup snapped in surprise. I turned to face him. His face was a mask of absolute shock and disbelief. “You’re fucking serious?” he asked after a moment. “She’s fucking pregnant ?”

I shrugged and heaved a deep sigh. “She woke up in the middle of the night last night to throw up. Probably a bit TMI for you, but I asked her when her last period was since she didn’t seem sick to me. No high temperature, not throwing up actual food since she didn’t eat anything yesterday. Her period is late.” Jesup’s eyes widened. “I’m going to take her to Dr. Howard when she wakes up so he can run a pregnancy test. She needs to know for sure.”

“Holy fuck , man,” Jesup breathed as he ran his hand through his hair. “How do you feel about that?” That was the question I was dreading. He shook his head. “On second thought, how the fuck does she feel about this?”

I was dreading that question even more.

I grunted and stuffed my hands into the pockets of my cargo pants. “I’ll step up and do what I need to do for her,” I told him, though I knew Jesup already figured that much. “I love Addy. I always have. If she’s pregnant with Joey’s kid, it’s not going to change how I feel about her.” I swallowed hard, blowing out a harsh breath as I glared at the table in the center of the room that had the club emblem engraved into it. “As for her... well, she fucking cried herself to sleep last night on the bathroom floor,” I told him quietly, pain lancing through my chest as I thought about how fucking heartbroken she had looked last night. “So, I don’t know how the fuck she’s feeling about this shit. She just lost Joey, only to find out she’s probably carrying his kid. It makes his death a double-edged sword straight through her heart.”

Jesup leaned against the wall, crossing his ankles and his arms as he steadily regarded me with that unnerving gaze of his. “What’s the plan if she is?” Jesup asked me.

I let my eyes meet his. “We protect her and that baby at all costs,” I told him. He nodded. “And we keep the Sons of Hell intact as much as we can because in about nineteen years, that club is going to fall into that child’s hands.”

Jesup nodded in understanding. “Charles looks like he might become a problem,” Jesup commented.

I nodded. “Addy has already warned me.” He raised an eyebrow at me. Adelaide had been in a lot deeper than me or him had originally thought, and she knew how that club worked. “When that club does fall apart, we’ll do what we have to do to make sure that the Sons of Hell stays a club.”

Jesup pursed his lips. “You think they’ll make Addy a president since she’s carrying Joey’s kid?” he asked me, knowing that was a possibility since she had been an actual club member.

I clenched my jaw. “Over my fucking dead body,” I snarled. Jesup smirked. “The life of a president is too fucking dangerous, and she’s a mother before anything else if she is pregnant. Her only worry and concern will be to make sure that child is safe, protected, loved, and taken care of. Nothing else. If the Sons of Hell eventually need a fucking leader, we’ll patch them over, but I will not have Addy as the president.”

Jesup nodded. “Understood.”

“I don’t know who the fuck you think you’re talking to,” I heard Addy snap at someone through the closed chapel doors, “but you better back the fuck down before I give you a goddamn reason to need plastic surgery.”

“Aaaand she’s awake,” Jesup drawled with a chuckle as he opened the door and we rushed out of the chapel to stop Adelaide from getting into a fight.

Addy was glaring at Emma, one of the newer women, and Emma was glaring right back at her. I let my eyes run over Addy, taking a moment to drink in her curvy figure. She was wearing a pair of jeans that clung to her round ass and thick thighs and a black t-shirt with her black combat-style boots. I swallowed hard.

Fuck, I was never going to get over how fucking sexy she was.

“I don’t think you understand how things work around here,” Emma snarled at her. Adelaide sighed in aggravation. River, one of my patched members, gently pushed Adelaide back, giving her a stern look to stay back. My blood pounded in my veins, but I tamped it down. It wasn’t like he was hitting on her. He was merely keeping her ass out of trouble. “The president doesn’t allow women to fucking call on him. He gets us when he’s ready to have one of us. So, no, you don’t need to know where the fucking president is,” Emma snarled at Adelaide.

Emma wasn’t wrong, but Adelaide was different.

Before I could stop Addy, she grabbed River's half-empty beer and threw it at Emma. Emma shrieked and ducked down right before the bottle could hit her in the face, letting it crash against the wall instead. Most men would be pissed that their beer had just been wasted, but River just looked amused.

“Woah—everyone chill the fuck out!” I barked, coming up behind a seething Addy. River stepped back, letting me take control of the situation. Jesup's sorry ass was too busy laughing at the entire situation to be of much help.

I settled my hands over Addy's shoulders, feeling some of the tension drain out of her shoulders as she subconsciously stepped back against me. “Grim, she's fucking crazy!” Emma shouted, calling me by my street name.

“Watch your tone with me,” I snarled at her, making her flinch and cast her eyes away from me. Adelaide snorted. I gently squeezed her shoulders, warning her to get her attitude under control. “Now, what's going on?”

“I'm about to break her fucking fake nose,” Addy snarled, tension bleeding into her shoulders again. “That's what's fucking going on.”

I massaged her shoulders gently. “That's not what I asked,” I stated calmly, knowing that arguing with Addy wouldn't get me anywhere. The woman was hotheaded as fuck. “I asked what was going on.”

“She demanded to know where you were, Grim,” Emma stated. “I told her what you tell all of us—not to ask for you.”

“You really don't have any fucking idea who I am, do you?” Addy asked Emma as she tilted her head to the side the tiniest bit. It was a predatory move, and fuck if it didn't make my cock hard.

“Obviously not,” Emma snarled at her. “But judging by the way Grim is with you, you mean something to him.”

“Smart girl,” Jesup commented. I sighed. He really didn’t help situations much. “I knew Grim kept you around for a reason.”

I rolled my eyes at Jesup. “Adelaide, meet Emma,” I introduced. “She’s one of the newer additions to the club. Emma, meet Adelaide, my old lady.”

“Your old nothing ,” Adelaide snarled, snatching herself out of my grip as she turned her angry eyes on me. I vaguely heard River snort in amusement, and I turned my gaze to his. He only raised his fresh beer to me before rolling his lips into his mouth, staying silent.

I looked back down at Adelaide. Fuck, she looked so gorgeous when she turned that fiery gaze on me. “I’m no one’s goddamn old lady, Tristan, and you better get that through your thick fucking skull.”

I narrowed my gaze at her. I hated when she fought this shit between us. We could be great together if she would just stop fighting me every damn step of the way. “You are mine , Adelaide,” I said, my tone coming off cold, but there was a hint of a warning there for her to stop while she was ahead.

She stepped up to me, jabbing her finger against my chest as she glared up at me. Fuck, she really wasn’t scared of anything. “I am no one’s , Tristan. I can be a girlfriend, but I am not yours , and I am certainly not your old lady.”

I gripped her finger in my hand and yanked her against me, wrapping an arm around her waist as I dipped my head down, covering her lips with mine. She instantly kissed me back, her hands gripping my cut tightly in her fists as she tugged me closer to her, a low moan sliding from between those perfect fucking lips.

God, she was fucking addicting.

I pulled back enough to stop kissing her, but my lips still brushed against hers as I spoke. “You are mine , Adelaide, and to claim anything different will only get you fucked into submission, understand me?”

Her breath hitched in her throat at my words as she nodded her head. I released her, stepping back as she drew in a deep, shaky breath. Jesup barked out a laugh. I glared at him, but Jesup had known me for so long that he didn’t even heed my silent warning to shut the fuck up. “I swear, even though she’s obviously not the same girl that she was when she was eighteen, the effect you have on her is still the same.”

Addy scowled at him and bared her teeth, not amused by him in the slightest. “Watch yourself.”

He held his hands up in a surrendering gesture, but the smirk didn’t drop from his lips. She sneered at him before she turned her beautiful eyes back to me. “Want to go to the doctor?” I asked Addy.

Her throat bobbed as she swallowed, and fear flashed through her eyes as the fight inside of her quickly disappeared, leaving behind a frightened, vulnerable woman. I stepped closer to her, resting my hands over her upper arms as I ran my hands up and down them, trying to soothe her. “You need to,” I told her quietly. She drew in a deep, shuddering breath. “I’ll be by your side the entire time. I swear,” I promised her.

She blew out a harsh breath, then nodded her head. I grabbed her hand in my own and laced my fingers through hers as I pulled my bike keys from my pocket. “Jesup, can you hold everything down here?” I asked him, though I knew he could without me having to ask.

He nodded, his eyes flickering to Addy for a split second before he returned them to me. “Got it, Grim.”

Chapter Twelve

Tristan

Addy nervously bounced her leg up and down as we waited for Dr. Howard to come into the little room that we had been placed in. I knew that nothing that I could say would calm down her nerves right then, so I just sat behind her on the little cot with her between my legs as I kept my arms wrapped tight around her, pressing light kisses to her neck and shoulder in a silent reminder that I was still with her, that she wasn't alone.

A light knock sounded on the door, and Dr. Howard stepped in with a warm smile on his face. Judging by the way Adelaide tensed in my arms though, it did nothing to soothe her. "Good to see you again, Tristan. How's your collarbone?" he asked me.

About a year ago, I'd had a motorcycle accident that had broken my collarbone. But after months of physical therapy, I was perfectly fine. I didn't even have a scar from the accident.

I shrugged. "Never been better," I told him. "Able to function perfectly again."

Addy shot me a questioning look, but I just shook my head at her. She sighed and turned her attention back to Dr. Howard. He smiled at her and held out his hand for her to shake. She slowly took his hand in hers. I pressed another light kiss to her shoulder, wishing I could help calm her in some kind of way, but I knew nothing was going to work right then.

“I’m Dr. Howard, Tristan’s only trusted doctor within a two-hundred-mile radius.” I rolled my eyes, though it was true. I didn’t trust anyone else. “You’re Adelaide Berkeley, correct?”

She nodded in answer, only bouncing her leg faster as she did so. I pressed a gentle kiss to her neck as I momentarily tightened my arms around her. Dr. Howard sat on his stool and looked up at her. “Well, you are pregnant, Adelaide,” he confirmed, not beating around the bush.

Her body went rigid in my arms. I pressed another kiss to the side of her neck as I tightened my arms around her again. “Breathe, Addy,” I coaxed. “I’m right here. It’s okay, baby.”

She drew in a shaky breath, her hands coming up to grip my forearms in a death grip, her nails digging into my skin. I didn’t even flinch. If it would make her feel better, I’d flay the skin from my bones for her. “Is Tristan the father?” Dr. Howard asked her.

Adelaide shook her head in answer. I could practically feel her struggling to hold in her tears as her nails dug further into my arm, almost drawing blood. I ignored the pain. “Do you know the family history of the father?” Dr. Howard asked her.

Adelaide nodded silently. I drew in a deep breath. She was on the verge of breaking. I could feel it.

“We need to write down any history of diseases on the father’s side. Can you do that for me?” he asked her gently, sensing her sadness.

“If you’re not ready, just say so,” I told her before she could answer him. “You need time to heal. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

She audibly swallowed before she whispered, “I can do this.”

My brave girl .

I pressed another kiss to her shoulder as Dr. Howard began asking her questions about Joey’s family history. Fuck, she was so goddamn brave. I didn’t know anyone who could do this so soon after losing someone so close to them. “Is he going to be in the picture?” Dr. Howard asked her after a few minutes of asking her questions about Joey’s family history.

That was all it took. She fell apart. Dr. Howard swung his alarmed gaze to me. I just shook my head at him wordlessly, and he nodded, stepping out of the room to give us some privacy. I wrapped my arms around Addy tightly, dragging her tight against me. “Hey, calm down,” I told her gently. “Stressing yourself out isn’t good for the baby.” I hated seeing her so fucking upset, though I knew it was inevitable.

“S-sorry.” She hiccupped. “It’s—it’s just...”

I pressed my lips to her forehead. “I know, baby girl.” She whimpered, her fingers clenching my cut in her fists. “It’s okay to cry, but I don’t want you to work yourself up too much. You have a little one to take care of,” I reminded her, grabbing her hand and placing it over her still flat belly, pressing my hand on top of hers as she looked up at me.

She sobbed, and the sound was so fucking broken that it tore at my soul.

She leaned up and kissed me softly. I knew she was using it as a distraction, but I took full advantage of the kiss. I groaned, instantly moving to deepen it. It was the first time she’d kissed me on her own, and it fucking drove me insane that she was finally moving forward with that tiny bit, even if every part of me was telling me that she was just looking for something in that moment to make her feel better.

“Promise me that you’re going to help me get through this?” she softly requested.

“I promise, Adelaide,” I swore, letting my eyes meet hers. “I’m not leaving your side.”

A few minutes later, Dr. Howard stepped into the room, acting as if nothing had ever happened, and for that, I was grateful. “Alright, Adelaide, we’re going to do an ultrasound to check on your little one, okay? Based on the date of your last period, you’re almost six weeks along, so you should be able to hear your little one’s heartbeat if you’d like.” She nodded at him. “Alright. You two follow me,” he instructed.

Addy stood, and I did as well, instantly lacing my fingers through hers as we followed Dr. Howard down a couple of halls to a dark room. A huge TV screen was on the wall, and beside the little cot in the room was a machine with a couple of wands attached to it with a small screen and a tiny printer. He told us that he would see us back in the room we had just come out of once we were finished here before he dipped.

A lady came out from behind a curtain, a smile lighting up her face. “Hi!” she exclaimed, overly chipper. “My name is Alyssa, and I’ll be doing your ultrasound today,” she explained to Addy. “I just need you to lay back on the cot and pull your shirt up and unbutton your jeans. Just slide them down for me a tiny bit, okay?”

Addy nodded and did as she was instructed. I stood beside the cot, holding one of her hands in mine as I slowly ran my fingers through her hair. Alyssa squeezed some gel on Addy’s belly and then pressed one of the wands against her skin. Instantly, a gritty image popped up on the screen. Everything around it was gray, and there was a black-looking... hole? I had no idea how to describe it.

Addy squeezed my hand tightly, and I could feel her rapidly beating pulse through

her hand. I gave her hand a gentle squeeze in return, a silent reminder that I was still there with her.

Suddenly, two tiny balls popped up on the screen. Alyssa stopped the screen, taking what seemed to be measurements. “This is your baby,” she said, pointing an arrow to it on the screen and typing the word ‘baby’, “and this is the yolk sac.”

Alyssa smiled over at Addy, who was rendered speechless. “Would you like to hear the heartbeat?”

Addy nodded. There was a couple of taps on the keyboard, and then suddenly, I heard it.

Whoosh-whoosh. Whoosh-whoosh. Whoosh-whoosh.

It wasn’t even my kid, but at that moment, I fell in love with Addy’s baby, and I was jealous as fuck of Joey, even if he was no longer with us.

Tears streamed down Addy’s cheeks. She looked up at me, a small, breathy laugh falling past her lips. The beautiful sound warmed the darkest, coldest parts of my soul. “She’s real,” Addy breathed.

“She?” I asked, unable to stop the smile that spread across my lips.

Addy nodded. “I have a damn good feeling that I’m going to have a girl, and she’s going to have Joey’s eyes and attitude.”

My mood soured at the thought of Joey, but I knew Adelaide needed this. And if it made her happy, then so be it. I would suck it up.

Alyssa smiled and handed Addy three pictures. “You can go through that curtain

there,” she said, pointing to a small curtain, “and clean the gel off of your belly.”

Addy handed me the pictures as she got off of the bed, disappearing behind the curtain. “You two are very lucky parents. The baby seems very strong and seems to be on track for how far along she is. Congratulations on being parents,” she said warmly as Addy appeared from behind the curtain.

I looked to Addy, smiling at her, so happy to see a small smile on her face after looking so sad ever since Joey passed. “Thank you. I’m just happy to be having a baby with a woman as incredible as her,” I told Alyssa, though my words were solely for the beautiful woman in front of me. Addy’s smile widened at me as she allowed me to grab her hand and link our fingers together. “Should we just head back to Dr. Howard’s room?”

Alyssa nodded. Once we were back in Dr. Howard’s room, Addy leaned up to kiss me again. Fuck, she was finally loosening up with me, and I was loving every second of it. I needed my Addy baby back. “Did you mean what you said in there?” Addy asked me softly.

Looking down at her, I nodded. “Of course, I did. Addy, this baby may not be mine, but the moment I heard that heartbeat, I fell in love with it.” Her beautiful eyes welled with tears. “I want to be here for you every step of the way. Through the mood swings, through the morning sickness, even the labor and delivery. I want to help you raise this baby, Addy.”

Tears slipped down her cheeks at my words. “You’re too damn amazing, Tristan,” she whispered, her voice hoarse.

Reaching up, I wiped the tears from her cheeks, giving her a warm, soft smile. “Only for you, Addy baby,” I told her, and it was true. For anyone else, I would have booted them to the curb.

For Addy? I would fucking do anything to keep her by my side.

Dr. Howard stepped into the room., breaking our heartfelt moment. “Alright. Well, your baby appears to be healthy and developing right on track, Adelaide.” He handed Addy a thick folder. “This is everything you can expect every week while you’re pregnant, with your body as well as how the baby is developing. I’ve also added in a list of over-the-counter medications that are safe to take while you’re pregnant, and there’s some information on some prenatal yoga classes, some parenting classes, etc., if you’re interested.” He looked at me. “If something is happening, and it’s worrying you, you know how to reach me after hours.”

I nodded. I had Dr. Howard’s private number, and if something were happening with Adelaide, he could bet on a phone call. I wouldn’t take any chances—not with her or her baby.

He looked back at Adelaide. “Here’s a prescription for some prenatal vitamins that you need to begin taking tomorrow morning,” he told her as he handed her a prescription paper. She put it in the folder. “You look as if you already exercise. What do you do?” Dr. Howard asked her.

“I normally fight,” Addy told him. I sighed. That was going to have to stop.

He shook his head at her. “I wouldn’t do that anymore if I were you.” Adelaide pursed her lips in distaste. “Some boxing with a punching bag probably won’t hurt, but no more actual fights. Light walking and jogging are good, but the moment you begin to feel tired, call it quits. You’re pregnant, and you don’t need to overdo yourself.”

She nodded in understanding, though she looked as if the idea of no longer fighting left a sour taste in her mouth. I knew it was how she burned off all her toxic energy, but she was going to have to find another outlet. “Three meals a day is extremely

important with some light snacks in-between. No more caffeine and drink plenty of water. I want you to come back in a month for a follow-up appointment.”

“Anything else?” she asked him, looking a bit overwhelmed with all of the information he had just crammed into her brain.

He shook his head and gave her a warm smile. “I’m pretty sure Tristan will make sure you take care of yourself. I look forward to seeing you in a month, Adelaide,” he told her before he left the room.

It was real. My Addy was becoming a mother.

Chapter Thirteen

Adelaide

I was sprawled out on the couch in the clubhouse bar room with my headphones plugged into my ears, my music turned all the way up as I listened to an old hip-hop song. Tristan was sitting at the bar with Jesup, and the entire club was waiting on Tristan's North Carolina charter to ride in for a run later in the evening.

The lyrics hit a sad note about someone passing away at a young age. I swallowed hard, realizing how hard the rapper's words hit home for me. For three years, I'd watched numerous people close to me die.

Numerous people had even died at my own hands.

Joey was only twenty-four, and I had already lost him. I'd lost one of the closest people to me.

How many more people would I lose before all of this shit was over?

The clubhouse doors opening caught my attention, and I watched as Troy Hilton, the president of North Carolina Sons of Death's charter, stepped in, his vice president, Kyle, following closely on his heels. A few of their other members followed in behind them.

Tristan stood up from his seat at the bar to greet his cousin, Jesup standing up as well. I pulled my headphones out of my ears, watching as Tristan walked up to Troy, both

of them shaking hands and pulling each other into a one-armed, manly hug.

“Good to see you, bro,” Tristan said as he stepped back from Troy. “I appreciate you riding out here on such short notice.”

“Not a problem,” Troy assured him as his eyes moved over the room, not taking notice of me yet.

But when he would finally notice me, I would be ready. Troy and I had always butted heads, especially since he was already in the life of an outlaw with Tristan, and I was just the girl that grew up in a trap house, not part of anything in particular.

I had always been considered dangerous and unreliable. Guess he’d turned out to be right.

Emma strode over to me. With a sigh, I turned my attention to her. She had been wearing on my damn nerves ever since I had gotten here. “Are you going to help us serve drinks or just sit here like you’re better than the rest of us?” she smarted off, crossing her arms over her chest.

I arched an eyebrow at her. “Emma, why don’t you go fuck off?” I snapped up at her. She knew who the fuck I was to Tristan, and yet every time that she thought he wasn’t paying attention, she had some snide remark to say, or she sent me a nasty look.

I was getting damn sick of it. I was trying so hard to keep my cool, but my patience was already thin, and she was stretching it even more.

She sneered down her nose at me. “All of us women have been trying to get Tristan’s attention for as long as we’ve been here, so fucking forgive me if we don’t appreciate the special fucking treatment you get from him,” she snarled. I snorted. “You don’t

belong here, Adelaide. You're nothing more than Joey's whore."

Wrong timing, bitch.

I stood up, clenching my fists at my sides. The doctor may have told me no more fighting, but I didn't give a fuck. I was about to knock this bitch right off of her fucking feet and onto her knees in front of me. "You want to fucking repeat that?" I demanded, my voice cold, my warning clear: she had better shut her mouth before I shut it for her.

She laughed. "Oh, you think no one knew?" she asked. "Why don't you fucking run back to your fucking master, Adelaide? I'm sure Joey fucking misses you. After all, he's got to be the only man who will ever really want you. He did make you into his fucking dog, after all."

That was all it took.

My fist swung out, and I punched her in the nose, sending her crashing back against one of the tables. She shrieked in pain as she hit the floor with a thump. I yanked her up by her throat, my eyes glaring down into hers, ignoring Tristan, who was shouting at me to let her go. Her eyes were filled with fear, and blood ran down her lips and chin from her nose. I smirked down at her, watching as all of the blood drained from her face.

Tristan couldn't protect her ass every fucking time, and unlike the rest of these bitches around here, I wasn't afraid of Tristan.

Because she had one thing right. Joey had trained me, and he had trained me well.

"I can't go back, bitch!" I barked down at her. She flinched. "You want to fucking know why? Because he's fucking dead!" I screamed down at her. I shook her, not

giving a shit that her face was turning blue as she clawed at my hands around her neck. “You inconsiderate fucking bitch !” I snarled.

I managed to land another punch to her face before Tristan grabbed my arms and yanked me up from her, forcing me to release her. I was seething, my chest heaving with my rage as Emma sobbed on the floor, blood trailing from her nose and down her chin.

Just for spite, I spat on her face.

Jesup began to help her up from the floor as Tristan roughly swung me around to face him. I glared up at him, my eyes gleaming with rage. “What the fuck happened?” he demanded to know.

“Why don’t you ask the fucking whore who told me to go back to my fucking master?” I snarled up at him, still absolutely furious. She had no fucking idea what Joey and I had together, and it pissed me the fuck off that she thought she had the fucking right to assume shit about me and the man who had honestly saved my goddamn life.

“What goddamn master?” he asked me, clenching his jaw as anger sparked in his dark eyes—anger on my behalf.

“She doesn’t belong here!” Emma screeched. Tristan tightened his hands on me, keeping me rooted in my place as I made a move to face her again. I was seething. “She’s Joey’s bitch?—”

“Shut your fucking mouth!” Tristan roared at her, making her flinch and cower back against Jesup, who shot her a dark look for talking shit about me. “I didn’t ask you a goddamn question! Speak only when you’re spoken to!” He looked at Jesup. “Get her the fuck out of my sight. I’ll fucking deal with her later.”

“Tristan—” Emma began again, but he growled, his eyes flashing dangerously as he turned his gaze on her again, effectively shutting her up.

Jesup steered her down the back hall. Tristan brushed my hair out of my face. “Are you alright?” he asked me gently, his mood doing a complete one-eighty on me.

I nodded, blowing out a soft breath as I flexed my fisted hands, forcing them to relax. “I’m fine,” I grumbled. “She just caught me by surprise.”

Tristan pressed his lips to my forehead, and I closed my eyes, drawing in the comfort that he was offering me. “Have you eaten anything for dinner yet?” When I shook my head no, he shot me a disapproving look. I scowled. “You’re not just looking after yourself anymore, Adelaide.”

I rolled my eyes, heaving a tired sigh. “I’ll eat when I’m ready to, Tristan,” I told him, placing my hands on my hips.

“She’s a hell of a lot feistier than I remember,” Troy commented as he strode over. “Not the same, sweet Adelaide we all remember, huh?” he asked, looking down at me.

I bristled, putting my guard up against Troy. “You should know the answer to that considering it was your VP that I shot in the shoulder,” I snapped at him.

Kyle scowled down at me, but I only smirked in return. Tristan sighed as he ran a hand down his face. “Thanks for that, by the way,” Kyle snapped at me. My smirk only widened. “It took me three months of physical therapy to be able to properly use my shoulder again.”

“Why did you shoot Kyle in the shoulder in the first place?” Tristan asked me, his eyebrows pulled low, a disturbed look passing over his face before it became

practically impassive again.

I shrugged before I crossed my arms over my chest. “I was at a drop, and Troy was there with Kyle and a couple of their men waiting to sabotage the entire exchange and lose the Sons of Hell one of our best clients,” I informed him. “It was a million-dollar deal. I wasn’t letting anyone fucking sabotage it.”

Tristan clenched his jaw and shook his head. “I keep forgetting that Joey had you in the middle of all of that shit.” I glared up at him, a silent warning for him to tread carefully. He clenched his jaw, dropping the subject before he turned to Troy. “She’s no longer with the Sons of Hell,” Tristan informed them. Pain sliced at my chest because not being part of that club wasn’t my choice.

Troy shrugged. “Guessed as much by the fact that she’s here with you,” Troy commented. “I heard Joey is currently MIA.”

I swallowed past the sudden lump in my throat, hating the swarm of emotions that warred inside of me at the thought of Joey being dead.

God, I fucking missed him. Hell, I fucking needed him.

Without a word, I turned on my heel and stormed off toward the bar. I could feel Tristan’s gaze on my back, but I ignored him, not even bothering to turn to face him. “Fucking hell, I wish I could have a drink right now,” I muttered as I made my way behind the bar top. I looked up at Jhenna as I reached up to rub my temples where they were beginning to throb. “Hey, darlin’, get me a cold water,” I told her.

She arched an eyebrow at me. “Just a water?” she asked, almost as if she couldn’t believe that I would want water on the night we were having a club party.

I narrowed my eyes at her. She instantly cowered back from me a little. “Did I

fucking stutter?” I snapped at her. Her face paled the tiniest bit. “I said to get me a fucking water.”

With a nod, she spun around to the fridge and pulled out a bottle of water, handing it to me. I strode away from the bar and headed for my room. However, before I could reach it, my phone began to vibrate in my back pocket. With a disgruntled sigh, I pulled it out.

Unknown:

Time is ticking, gorgeous.

“Fuck!” I yelled, dropping to the floor as the ground beneath my feet shook, and the glass from the windows exploded, raining down all around me like rain.

Whoever had exploded this place did it with perfect timing. They had to have been watching because they’d made sure I was away from everyone else first.

“Addy!” Tristan roared, his voice filled with panic.

I coughed, the air quickly filling with smoke. It didn’t take long for me to realize that the building was on fire from whatever had exploded outside. I quickly pulled my shirt up to cover my nose and mouth, desperately trying to see through the smoke.

Heat wrapped around me like a suffocating cloak, and I cursed. I couldn’t see past any of the flames and the smoke. I coughed again, my eyes burning from the smoke and the heat.

Was this really how I was going to go out? What a fucking cruel way to die.

“Adelaide!” Tristan roared. “Baby, if you’re alive, please fucking answer me!”

“Tristan?!” I called out, coughing again.

“Fuck, Addy, where are you?” he yelled, his panic increasing.

I screamed when a board fell from the roof, and I jumped out of the way just in time before it collapsed on top of me. “I’m trapped!” I told him just as I realized it myself, fear gripping my chest.

I placed my hand over my belly as I began coughing so hard that I was gagging, my shirt not doing much to help with the smoke in the air. “Tristan, it’s hard to breathe!” I managed to choke out.

“I’m coming, Addy. Just hang in there, baby,” Tristan told me.

I couldn’t fucking breathe.

I dropped to my hands and knees, clawing at my chest.

Joey, babe, I’m so fucking sorry that I couldn’t protect your kid.

Everything went dark.

Chapter Fourteen

Tristan

Addy was no longer responding to me. My heart was racing so fast that I was sure I was either going to have a heart attack or a stroke. I had to fucking get to her before it was too late. The part of the building that she was trapped in was already burning high and hot.

"I'll go through the back," I informed Jesup. "The fire shouldn't be too bad in there."

He nodded, still speaking to the 9-1-1 operator on the phone. I rushed around the back of the building, Troy hot on my heels. I was terrified that something had happened to Adelaide. I could barely fucking think past the panic swirling in my head, creating every worst-case scenario.

I looked at Troy when we reached the back of the building. "If I'm not out in two minutes, something happened," I told him.

Troy nodded. "Be careful, bro."

I nodded, rushing in. The heat and the smoke were almost unbearable, but I pushed through, desperate to get to Addy. She was the only one who hadn't been able to get out.

And then, I saw why.

There were burning boards all around her, blocking any escape route she could have taken. She was passed out on the floor, but I knew she wasn't going to last much longer if I didn't figure out how to get her the fuck out of there.

Whoever had set up that explosion had done it perfectly. It kept Adelaide from being saved.

And something in my gut told me that was the plan all along. Someone wanted to shut Addy up.

"Troy, I need help!" I roared.

I heard him behind me a moment later, and he cursed. "What's the plan?" he asked me as he looked around the burning building, trying to find a way to her.

"We've got to get one of these boards out of the way," I told him, the panic in my mind making it extremely hard to think straight. All I knew was that I fucking needed to get to her before it was too late.

He nodded in understanding.

Fucking hell, please let her be okay .

I couldn't lose her.

"Help is here!" Jesup shouted into the burning building.

I was conflicted. I knew the firefighters could get her out, but I couldn't bring myself to move, to leave her here by herself. She was unconscious and unable to help herself.

Troy grabbed my arm when he realized that I wasn't making any plans to move. "I

know you want to get her out, but you've got to let the firemen do what they can," he told me. "We're only going to be in their way. She'll be alright, man. They have gear that we don't, and they're trained for this," he tried assuring me.

But I wouldn't feel better until she was back in my arms and out of danger.

Troy managed to get me out of the building, and a couple of minutes later, one of the firemen strode out, carrying Addy in his arms. I instantly rushed forward. "Give her here," I commanded.

"Sir, she needs help?—"

"And she'll get fucking help!" I roared at him, finally losing my fucking cool. "Give my fucking woman here so I can take her over to the fucking paramedic!"

Without another word, he handed her over to me, and I strode over to the ambulance, pressing kisses to her sooty forehead as I did so. Her breaths were too shallow, her chest rattling with every inhale, and I knew if she'd been in there any longer, she'd have died.

I almost lost her. That knowledge settled in my gut like battery acid.

"Sir, we have to take her to the hospital to get her proper help," the paramedic informed me as he listened to her breathing. "I'm almost positive she has smoke poisoning, and she needs a steady stream of oxygen. You can ride with us, or you can follow in your own vehicle, but I need to get her moved."

Without hesitation, I jumped into the back of the ambulance, sitting beside her head as the paramedic worked on hooking her to an oxygen mask. I knew Jesup could take care of everything in my absence. It was one of the reasons he was my VP. There was no way in fuck I was leaving her side unless a doctor ordered me to.

“Is there anything we should inform the hospital of?” the paramedic asked me as he began to check her vitals.

“She’s pregnant,” I informed him, my voice rough.

I brushed my fingertips over her cheek.

Please, just let her be okay.

I couldn’t lose her, too.

Chapter Fifteen

Adelaide

I coughed, pain gripping my chest as I came awake. I ripped my eyes open, squinting them against the bright light in the hospital room. Tristan was passed out in the chair next to my hospital bed, his hand wrapped loosely around my own with his head resting on the bed. Jesup was passed out in another chair on the other side of my room, the hood of his black jacket thrown up over his head, soft snores sounding from his lips.

Both of the men were covered in soot, and they looked exhausted as hell. I pulled the oxygen tubes from my nose and winced at the beeping sound that instantly filled the room, jerking both men from their sleep.

Tristan snapped his head over to look at me, a relieved smile stretching his lips as his eyes landed on my open, tired eyes. God, he looked like he'd been through hell and back.

"You're awake," he breathed.

A nurse burst into my room before I could nod my head at him, and she blew out a relieved breath when she realized that I was awake. "Good to see you're awake, Miss Berkeley. I'll let your doctor know." She turned off the machine that was beeping before she strode back out of the room in search of my doctor.

"How are you feeling?" Tristan softly asked me as he gently ran his thumb over my

cheek.

“Tired,” I admitted a bit hoarsely, leaning my face into his hand as I closed my eyes again. “What happened?”

“You passed out. Smoke poisoning,” Tristan informed me. I grunted. That would explain why my chest and throat hurt so damn bad. “I tried to get to you, but I couldn’t.” He sounded guilty as fuck. I looked up at him. He swallowed thickly. “The firefighter got to you just in time.”

I sighed softly. “It was Vin,” I told him quietly. “It had to be. No one else makes sense.”

His hand tensed on my cheek, and I slowly opened my eyes to look up at him. His eyes were blazing with fury, and his jaw was clenched tightly. “How do you know?” he asked, his voice quiet but terse.

“I got a text right before the place exploded. It said, ‘time’s ticking, gorgeous’. Besides Jessie, Vin is the only one to call me gorgeous, and he only does it when he’s threatening and belittling me.”

“Fucking hell,” Tristan cursed right before someone knocked on the door, most likely my doctor. “Come in!” Tristan called, stepping back from me as a doctor stepped into the room.

The doctor gave me a warm smile as he moved over to my bed. “How are you feeling, Adelaide?” he asked me.

I shrugged. “Kind of burns when I breathe, and I’m still really tired.” I hated how hoarse my voice sounded.

He nodded. “That’s to be expected. I want to keep you here tonight to observe you since you are pregnant, and we’ll see how everything looks tomorrow.” I sighed. I hated hospitals. “I did an ultrasound while you were out with your husband’s consent.” I shot a dark look at Tristan, but he just evenly met my gaze. Sighing, I looked back at the doctor expectantly. “The baby seems fine as of right now, but if you begin to notice anything that seems even the tiniest bit abnormal, hit the button for the nurse.”

I nodded in understanding. He smiled. “Let us know if you need anything.” Then he was slipping from the room, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Tristan turned to Jesup. “Call River and Tank. I want them stationed outside of this hospital room door. No one gets in this room besides you and me, the doctor, and her nurse on duty.” Jesup nodded, pulling his phone out of his pocket. “Tell Dray and Wren that I want them on surveillance around this hospital, and one of them is to keep an eye on this hospital room window at all times. I’m not taking any more fucking chances. Not a goddamn soul comes near her without first being approved by one of the club men.”

“Got it,” Jesup told him, pulling his phone to his ear.

I looked up at Tristan. He looked exhausted and stressed, but under all of that, I saw how worried he was that he wouldn’t be able to properly protect me from Vin. I grabbed his hand in mine and tugged him closer to the bed. “Lay with me,” I quietly requested, giving him a small smile.

It was dangerous as fuck to want to be close with him like this, but I needed his comfort. Too much shit was happening back-to-back lately, and my rock was gone. Tristan was now all I had to keep me from spiraling.

With a soft sigh, he kicked his boots off and laid on the bed beside me, pulling me

into his arms without a single complaint. I sighed softly in contentment, nuzzling closer to him as I began to drift off into peaceful oblivion again.

My mind slid to Joey, and I frowned for a moment.

Somehow, Joey, I know you're looking over me.

He always had. Somehow, somehow, Joey always found some way to protect me.

I just wished he was physically with me.

I wanted him— just him. I covered my belly with my hand, tears threatening to fall from my eyes.

Joey, baby, why?

Chapter Sixteen

Adelaide

I absentmindedly tapped my fingers on the bar, listening to the construction crew that was finishing up the rebuilding of the part of the clubhouse that had burned down. Tristan was holding church, and the club girls were more than likely still passed out in their rooms after the party that was held last night in celebration of my coming home from the hospital.

Zyla came out of the back, fully dressed and showered, her hair done perfectly, her make-up on point, just like she always used to be. She was Jesup's ex, and she had taken off with another man who had more money a few years ago. I honestly wasn't shocked to see her back here. Besides, we all went through our own shit. I wasn't one to judge.

"Good morning," she chirped.

I tiredly ran a hand down my face. "I wish it was," I grumbled. "I'm exhausted. I've been up since two this morning with morning sickness." This baby was kicking my ass, and it was nothing more than a bean. I was getting taken out by a fucking bean .

She gave me a sad smile, pain flashing in her eyes for a moment before she smothered it. "Shit sucks, doesn't it?"

I cocked my head to the side, my curiosity piqued. "You ever been pregnant before?" I bluntly asked her.

She swallowed thickly, looking down at the bar as she picked up a random glass and began to wipe it down, removing fingerprints and watermarks. “Once upon a time,” she finally said, leaving it at that.

Before I could respond or pry a little more, a loud bang on the clubhouse doors drew my attention, and Zyla and I both looked at each other before I grabbed my gun from the small of my back. I slid off my barstool and moved toward the door. River, who had been left out here to protect me, motioned for me to stand down, his blue eyes warning me to heed his order. With gritted teeth, I stood back, watching as he shoved the door open, his gun drawn in front of him.

I gasped when I looked down at the body lying in front of the door. Joey was laying on the concrete, his face bloody and beaten. Joey, who was supposed to be fucking dead .

“Joey!” I screamed, not bothering to question how the fuck someone who was supposed to be dead was currently laying on the ground in front of me.

Joey was here. That was all that mattered to me.

I set my gun down on a random table and looked over to Zyla, who was staring with wide, shocked eyes at the man laying at my feet. River crouched next to Joey, pressing his fingers to his neck for a pulse. “Get Tristan!” I barked at Zyla as I grabbed Joey under his arms and dragged him into the clubhouse, not waiting on River to help me.

Joey was alive .

He was fucking alive and here. He was back with me.

The doors to the chapel flew open, and Tristan rushed out with Jesup hot on his heels.

“Zyla, get me a first aid kit,” I ordered as I sat on the floor, placing Joey’s head in my lap, unable to pull his heavy body any further. I noticed River slip out the clubhouse doors, most likely to go check the grounds and the surrounding area for anyone else.

“Joey, can you hear me?” I asked him, my hands shaking as I ran them over his body, tears clogging my throat and burning the backs of my eyes.

Nothing. Not a sound.

My heart constricted in my chest.

“Tank and Damion, go with River to check the grounds,” Tristan instructed the two men. Tristan placed a hand on my shoulder, dragging my tearful eyes up to his. “Let me and Jesup get him on the couch, Addy. It’ll be more comfortable for both of you.”

Reluctantly, I nodded. I didn’t want to let go of Joey, terrified he’d suddenly leave me again, but I knew Joey needed to be on something softer.

Tristan and Jesup lifted him from the floor, and I watched as they carried him across the room to the couch. I quickly sat down on the worn furniture, placing Joey’s head back in my lap as Zyla brought me a first aid kit. I began cleaning up his face, grimacing at the deep cuts.

Someone wanted to hurt him, not kill him. They wanted to send a message.

“Jessie...” Joey grumbled a moment later, his twin’s name nothing more than a slurred word.

“Joey, what’s wrong?” I gently asked as I ran my fingers through his soft, dirty-blond hair.

“Adelaide, get Jessie,” he slurred, his eyes slitting open to look up at me. I knew he was telling me because he trusted me to save her. Trusted me more than he trusted his own men.

What the fuck was happening?

I looked up at Tristan, hoping he heard Joey’s command. I couldn’t bring myself to leave Joey’s side, not after getting him back so soon. It was selfish of me, but I didn’t care.

I wasn’t leaving him.

Tristan nodded once at me. Pain flashed in his eyes for a moment before he smothered it. I swallowed thickly. I knew he hated seeing me with Joey like this, but I couldn’t—would never—turn my back on Joey.

“Hey, man, we’re on it. Do you know where she’s at?” Tristan asked him.

“With Charles,” Joey mumbled, beginning to pass back out.

I looked back up at Tristan. “Go,” I told him. “Tank and River will hold everything down here.”

Tristan grunted and leaned down, pressing his lips to mine. Pain lanced through my chest as I kissed him all while my fingers momentarily tightened on Joey. Now that Joey was back with me, it felt wrong to kiss Tristan, like I was betraying the man who had saved my life three years ago. “Call me if anything happens,” Tristan instructed.

With that, he and Jesup strode out of the door before I could respond.

I looked down at Joey. Cupping his face in my hands, I leaned down and brushed my lips with his, not giving a fuck who was in the room and witnessing it.

“Thank you for coming back to me,” I whispered.

Joey slowly brought his hand up and laced his fingers in my hair, deepening the kiss for a moment. My heart swelled in my chest, and tears spilled down my cheeks as I eagerly kissed him back, so fucking happy that he was back with me where he belonged.

“I’ll always come home to you, pretty girl,” he rasped.

Then his eyes shut again, darkness pulling him back under.

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Chapter Seventeen

Tristan

Jessie slid off the back of my bike, wincing in pain as she did so. Charles had fucked her up pretty badly, leaving her beaten and bloody. When we made it to the Sons of Hell's clubhouse, it had been vacant, but I'd found Jessie tied up in the basement, bloody, beaten, and naked.

Honestly, had Joey not come to Adelaide for help, Jessie might have died there. I didn't even want to think about what she'd endured at his hands.

And the woman had no idea that her brother was still very much alive. Hell, I wasn't even sure if she was aware that she was still alive. Jessie was basically a shell of herself. She hadn't uttered a fucking word since I unbound her and Jesup gave her clothes to put on.

But hell, none of us had known Joey was even alive. If any of us had known, it would have saved Adelaide all of the pain and heartache she had gone through.

It had killed a part of her to think that Joey was dead.

When she had dragged him into the clubhouse, her beautiful, dark eyes had lit up with a true fire—a fighting fire. Something I was beginning to realize only Joey could bring out in her.

I was beginning to wonder if he had become the other half of her soul.

And that shit cut me deep.

“How did you know where I was?” Jessie finally asked me as we strode towards my clubhouse, her voice rough and weak.

“Your brother,” I informed her. She swung her wide, shocked eyes to mine. I released a quiet sigh. “He’s alive, Jessie. He came to Adelaide for help.”

“How is he alive?” she choked out, disbelief coating her voice as tears glistened in her dark eyes.

I shrugged at her. “I don’t know,” I told her honestly. “He only woke up long enough to inform me and Adelaide of where you were.”

I strode into the clubhouse, my eyes instantly landing on Adelaide, who was still sitting on the couch. She was talking to Joey. He looked to be mostly awake, but he looked exhausted and in a shit ton of pain. He had taken a hell of a beating, too. That was for sure.

“Joey!” Jessie exclaimed.

Joey jerked his head up to look at his twin. “Holy shit, he fucked you up good,” he breathed as he pushed himself up off the couch with a pain-filled grimace, opening his arms up to his sister.

“I’ll be fine,” she choked out as she leaned down to wrap her arms around him.

I walked over to Adelaide. “How are you feeling, Addy?” I gently asked her, knowing her morning sickness was beginning to seriously kick her ass. Instead of it being only in the morning, it was becoming a fucking all-day thing.

She leaned her head back against the back of the couch, a tired, weary look in her dark eyes. “Exhausted,” she admitted, her tiredness seeping into her voice.

I kneeled in front of her, running my hands over her jean-clad thighs. Her eyes flickered toward Joey for a moment as he moved to sit up, but she didn’t push me away, for which I was relieved. I knew shit between us was about to get complicated once again. In my gut, I knew I’d always come second to Joey, and it cut.

“Have you eaten anything yet?” I asked her.

She nodded. “I just threw it up right back up, though.” I frowned at her. “My stomach has been upset since two this morning,” she reminded me as if I could forget spending half the night sitting in the bathroom with her.

“You need to rest,” Joey said to her. “You always had a problem with resting to get better.”

Adelaide snorted. “Going to take me about another eight months to get over this,” she told him, her dark eyes clashing with his as she dropped the bomb of her pregnancy like it was nothing.

Joey sucked in a harsh breath at her words, and then, he narrowed his eyes at me, anger flashing in his dark depths. “That goddamn fast you got her knocked up?!” he roared at me.

I clenched my jaw, reining in my temper. I wouldn’t fight with him, not over this and not with Adelaide sitting there to witness it. She had just gotten him back. I wouldn’t put her through the stress of us fighting. But it didn’t mean that I wouldn’t put him in his goddamn place and give him a reality check. “Not me,” I snarled at him as I stood up to my full height. “ You fucking did.”

Joey looked like I had punched him in the gut. His wide, shocked eyes snapped to Addy. Adelaide clenched her jaw and stood up from the couch, running her hands down her face in exhaustion.

“How far along are you, Adelaide?” he asked her quietly.

“Six weeks,” she said, her voice quiet.

He swallowed hard as he stared at her. “Fuck ,” he finally managed to utter.

Addy suddenly gagged, her hand flying up to her mouth as she rushed past me and down the hall to the bathroom. I rushed after her, getting there right as she dropped to her knees in front of the toilet, throwing up stomach acid since she hadn’t been able to keep anything down all day.

Once she was finished, I reached forward and flushed the toilet, lifting her into my arms despite the small noise of protest she made. “I think it’s time for you to get some rest.”

Deciding not to fight me on it, she nodded in agreement, resting her head against my shoulder. “Don’t let him leave,” she pleaded, already beginning to drift off. “I don’t want to lose him again.”

Her words sent pain lancing through my chest, but I quickly reminded myself that I was the one she was currently with, not him. But I couldn’t deny that she loved him, that she would always love him.

And it was going to take me some time to come to terms with that.

“I won’t, Addy baby,” I promised her as I laid her on my bed.

But she was already passed out, not hearing my words.

When I walked back into the bar, Joey was swallowing a mouth full of beer, and Jessie was helping Zyla clean up, though they seemed to be holding a pretty good conversation. I understood Jessie's need to do something, although she looked like death rolled over. She was trying to have normalcy. It was a normal reaction after surviving something so traumatic.

"Bit early to be drinking, isn't it?" I asked Joey as I took a seat next to him.

He just shot me a dark look. "I just found out I'm going to be a dad, not to mention the fact that the woman I'm madly in love with is carrying that kid and that she's in love with another man." He chuckled but it lacked humor. He shook his head as he took another swallow of the beer in his hand. "I always knew I would lose her to you someday," he admitted, sounding like he had just lost one of the greatest fucking things in his life.

Fuck, I was going to need a beer for this conversation as well.

I got up and walked around the bar to the fridge, grabbing two beers, one for me and another one for Joey since he had just finished his off, and it looked like he was definitely going to be needing a second.

"What's your plan for her?" I asked him.

Joey popped the top off of his fresh beer with the bottom of a lighter he pulled from his pocket. "I'm doing what's right by Adelaide and that baby. She may be with you, Grim, but I will be there for her as well." He let his dark eyes meet mine. "You're going to have a miserable relationship with her if you make her give me up," he warned.

I clenched my jaw, jealousy sparking in my veins. I smothered it though. There was a baby in the picture now. I had to learn to get along with Joey for the baby's sake... and Adelaide's. Because Joey was right. I couldn't ever force her to give him up. She would choose him over me.

"I'd be pissed if you weren't," I told him. "Takes two to tango and all that shit. This baby is your responsibility, too."

"Which means you and I are working together from now on, Grim." I grunted in agreement, though I didn't like it. "The past? Out the fucking window. Clean slate."

He was fucking serious about this shit because Joey didn't let go of grudges for anything, not unless he gave a fuck about something.

And if I knew there was one thing in this world he gave a shit about, it was Adelaide.

"And your club?" I asked him.

Joey smirked—a cold, calculating smirk that chilled my bones. Sometimes, it was hard to forget just how ruthless and destructive Joey could be. He was clearly softer around Adelaide, which had led to me letting my guard down around him.

"I'll put a bullet in the head of every mother fucker that dared to follow Charles, that dared to fucking cross me wrong," Joey swore. "And I'm taking my mother fucking club back." He swallowed another mouth full of beer. "No one watches over Adelaide unless it's me, you, or Jesup. I won't take any chances with her safety. She's our priority. Not a goddamn thing comes before her."

I nodded in agreement, glad that we could at least agree on something. Jesup came out of the back, but he halted in his steps when his eyes landed on Zyla. His jaw clenched so tightly, I could see the muscle there ticking from my position at the bar.

Cursing, I set my beer down, already knowing this was about to get ugly.

He had no idea that his ex-wife was back, nor that she was back seeking refuge from her crazy ass husband. Right when both he and Zyla turned eighteen, they went to the courthouse and got married. We hadn't even graduated high school yet. And only a few months after their marriage, she left him for another richer man.

"What in the hell are you doing here?" Jesup snarled at her.

"Ooh, drama," Joey said as he grinned at the scene in front of him. I glowered at him. He only shrugged. "What? I've been getting the shit beat out of me for the past few days. Cut me some slack," he grunted.

"J—" Zyla started, but I cut her off.

"Jesup, let's go talk," I told him as I slid off of the barstool.

Joey got off his stool, too. "I'm going to go check on Adelaide. Where is she?" he asked me.

"My room. Can't miss it. It has 'president' on the door." I pointed a finger at him. "Don't disturb her," I ordered.

He rolled his eyes. "I'm not a fucking idiot," he smarted off before he strode toward the hall. I glowered at his back. Joey always ran by his own book, and he never gave a fuck whose toes he stepped on in the process.

These next few years were going to be fucking exhausting and a real damn test of my patience.

"How the fuck are you even alive right now?" Jesup demanded as Joey walked past

him.

Joey shook his head at Jesup. “I did die, but they were able to revive me. I told them not to tell anyone I was alive because I’ve known for a while that Charles has been plotting against me.” He clenched his jaw, looking over at his sister. “And he’s been working with Vin this whole fucking time,” he quietly snarled, not letting his voice trail beyond us three.

“Fucking hell,” I swore. If Vin had been working with Charles, then that only meant that the entire time Joey had been trying to protect her, Vin had been one step ahead, and he might still be depending on where Charles was.

Joey nodded. “It’s why my sister looks like she does. Charles and Vin have been selling her out.”

With that, he walked down the hallway to go check on Adelaide.

I stared after Joey for a moment, trying to make sense of what might be going through his head, but I knew it was useless. Joey was unpredictable and dangerous.

I looked over at Jesup. “Come on,” I told him, pushing open the chapel doors. I knew this was going to be a tense conversation. Jesup had loved—hell, still did even if he wanted to deny it—Zyla with every fiber of his being. She had cut him deep when she took off with Rodney.

“Why is she back here?” Jesup demanded to know as soon as the doors were closed back behind us.

“She came to me last night. Showed up during the party. She’s lost everything, Jesup. She just needs a place to stay until she can get back on her feet,” I told him.

Jesup shook his head. “Not here, Grim,” Jesup snarled. “She fucking left . She demanded the divorce. She can figure her shit out on her own.”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “Jesup, it’s just for a little while, alright?” I told him. Zyla hadn’t told me what happened, but the look in her eyes as she begged me for help? She was looking for safety, too. Something had happened, and I wouldn’t turn her away if she needed help. “You don’t even have to converse with her.”

Jesup clenched his jaw. “I don’t even want to see her fucking face, Grim.” When it was clear I was standing my ground, he growled. “She’s got one fucking month. That’s it. If she isn’t on her feet in a month, I want her gone,” he snapped.

With that, he strode out of the room, not giving me a chance to respond.

Chapter Eighteen

Adelaide

I slowly opened my eyes, locking them on Joey's darker ones. He was kneeling beside the bed in front of me, his eyes running over my face. "Hey, pretty girl," he quietly greeted me as he reached up to run the tips of his fingers over my face.

"Hi," I whispered. I swallowed thickly, tears burning in my eyes. "I missed you," I croaked. "It hurt so fucking much to think that you were gone?—"

"Easy," he soothed as he cupped my cheek, brushing his thumb over my cheekbone. "You know I'll never leave you. That has always been my one promise to you. Always remember that promise, pretty girl."

I sniffled as a tear ran down my cheek. "You're my rock, Joey. I can't ever lose you. It'll fucking kill me."

He gave me a tender smile, one that warmed my heart and melted my soul. "I'll be your rock for as long as you need me to be," he promised. I smiled at him—a broken smile. He was the only man I'd ever let see just how shattered I was inside. "Always so fucking pretty," he breathed. Leaning forward, he smoothed his lips over mine. I softly sighed into the kiss, reaching up to clutch his shirt in my fist, holding him with me.

"We may fight, and we may clash heads, but you fucking hold me with you for as long as you need me, pretty girl." A tear ran down my cheek, and my chin wobbled.

“Tristan tries, baby, but he doesn’t see you . So, you hold me with you for as long as you need.”

I audibly swallowed as I nodded. “Lay with me?” I quietly asked him.

I slid over on the bed, allowing him to slide beneath the covers with me. He instantly wrapped his arms around me, holding me close to him. I snuggled further against him, desperately needing every part of him wrapped around me at that moment. “I know things are different, Adelaide.” My throat closed up with an impending breakdown. I wasn’t ready to hear this. “It’s not just me anymore. I know that. But something in my gut tells me that it’s not going to be just Tristan, either. It doesn’t end with him either, pretty girl.”

“It may,” I whispered, my voice breaking. All I knew at that moment was that I wanted Joey though. To hell with everyone else.

Joey shook his head. “The vibe between you two... it doesn’t sit right with me. You’ve changed. Quite frankly, you’ve changed too much for you two to ever fit together again.” He drew in a deep breath. “Adelaide, when that man comes along that warms your soul, that sets you on fucking fire, you need to let this go between us.”

I clutched his shirt in my fist, shaking my head. “Never,” I croaked.

Joey sighed as he brushed his lips to the top of my head. “You will. I know you will.” He tightened his arms around me. “Just go to sleep, pretty girl.”

I shut my eyes, not wanting Joey to know how much he was ripping my heart apart. I knew things were coming to an end between us.

But I would hold him with me for as long as I could.

Chapter Nineteen

Adelaide

Zyla blew out a harsh breath as she stepped up behind the bar where I was currently mixing a drink for one of the new girls. “I knew he was going to be upset about me being back, but I didn’t know it was going to be like this,” she grumbled as she grabbed a glass and filled it with Jack before she tossed it back, her face screwing up at the burn.

Zyla had never been much of a drinker, and it looked like that had never changed.

“You were the love of his life,” I reminded her, not commenting on the fact that she’d just thrown back about four fucking shots. She sighed, closing her eyes at the reminder, pain momentarily flashing across her face. “And you ripped his heart out when you divorced him for Rodney.”

Her throat bobbed as she swallowed. “I did it for a good reason, Adelaide.” She stared down at the counter. I glanced over at her, intrigued. “I’m still madly in love with him, but I wouldn’t change my decision to destroy him. I did what I had to do.”

I handed the new girl her drink and watched as she sauntered off toward one of the club men. I turned back to Zyla, turning my body in her direction. “Then why did you leave him, Zyla?”

She grabbed a beer out of the fridge for one of the men when they walked up, asking for one. “Promise you won’t say anything, not even to Tristan?” she asked.

I nodded. “Yeah, you’ve got my word, Zyla.”

She blew out a soft breath as she handed the beer to the guy who had asked for it. Once he walked off, she said, “Rodney got out of jail.” I nodded, at least knowing that much. Rodney had been her ex when she and Jesup got together. They broke up when she was sixteen when he went to jail for a felony drug charge, and she met Jesup a few months after that. “And he wanted me back. He threatened to kill Jesup if I didn’t go back to him, Adelaide.” She drew in a shaky breath. “I couldn’t take it if something happened to Jesup because of me.”

I handed another guy a beer. “Then, why are you back now?” I demanded to know. If she did all of that to protect Jesup, why would she come running back here? Wouldn’t that just put him in the same danger she had originally tried to protect him from?

She shook her head, a humorless laugh spilling from her lips, sounding almost hysteric. “Our place got searched by the FBI. Rodney got locked back up. I know he’s going to get out on bond, and he’ll probably get off with a slap on the wrist since he has so many damn connections these days, but I’m running before he has the chance to get out.” She drew in a deep breath. “So, I came back here for a few days, just until I can figure out where to go. I can’t let him trap me again.”

“You got money?” I asked in all seriousness. If she didn’t, I’d see what I could do to get her some cash. I was sure Joey would understand and help me.

She nodded. “I took all of Rodney’s cash. He kept a few million in his safe. The FBI didn’t find it.”

I studied her for a moment. “Where do you plan on going, Zyla?”

She shrugged, pouring a drink for one of the girls. “I don’t know right now. I’m still working that out.” She blew out a harsh breath. “Somewhere far though. I don’t want

him to ever find me again.” She shrugged. “Might have to learn to live off the grid, to be honest.” I frowned. I hated this for her.

“Zyla, why don’t you just explain everything to Jesup?” I knew he would protect her if he knew what had happened, knew why she did what she did. Hell, he’d fucking helped Tristan essentially do the same thing to me, so it’d be hypocritical of him not to.

She instantly shook her head. “No,” she snapped. “It’s out of the fucking question.”

I clenched my jaw at her stupidity. “Jesup is still in love with you, Zyla. I can tell you right now that man has never stopped loving you. He can take care of himself. And he can take care of you, too, if you would just give him the fucking chance. This could be your opportunity to not have to spend the rest of your life running from Rodney.”

She shook her head. “I killed his kid,” she told me quietly. My eyes widened in shock. “I couldn’t let Rodney know I was pregnant, and I’d never gotten the chance to tell Jesup. So, I had an abortion.” She shook her head, sinking her teeth into her bottom lip. “I can’t ever go back to him, Adelaide, not with that weighing down on my shoulders.” She blinked back tears. “How could Jesup ever forgive me for something like that?”

“Give me something that’s going to fuck me up,” Jesup snapped as he stepped up to the bar. “And I want Adelaide to make it,” he snarled when Zyla got ready to pour him a drink. She flinched, dropping her hands back to her sides. I scowled at Jesup. “I don’t fucking trust you to make me a damn drink, you traitorous fucking bitch.”

Zyla swallowed hard and stepped back from the bar, pushing through the door that led to the kitchen. I glared at Jesup. “I think you owe her a fucking apology.”

Jesup barked out a laugh, the sound cruel. “Me owe her a fucking apology? Girly,

you're out of your fucking mind. I don't owe her a goddamn thing. She left. She betrayed our marriage and demanded the fucking divorce. I didn't do shit . She doesn't deserve a goddamn apology. She deserves every bit of shit that I'm throwing her way."

I wanted to snap his neck. I could take one look at Zyla and know that she was running from something. Tristan could too, otherwise he wouldn't have allowed her to stay here. So, Jesup was either blind as fuck, or he was choosing to ignore her silent pleas for help and protection just to be a selfish dick.

"Then you're out of your goddamn mind if you think I'm making you a fucking drink," I snapped, grabbing Zyla's drink that she'd repoured and throwing it in his face.

"What the fuck?!" he roared, jumping up from the barstool, sending it clattering loudly to the floor. The room went deadly silent, all eyes turning to us.

"There's your fucking drink," I snapped at him.

"What the fuck is going on here?!" Tristan shouted as he walked up.

I glared at Jesup. "Get your fuckard of a VP out of my goddamn face," I snarled before I turned and pushed through the kitchen door where Zyla had disappeared to. I found her sitting in the corner near the fridge, her knees pulled up to her chest, sobbing into her hands.

"He hates me," she cried when she looked up at me.

"Come on," I gently urged, helping her up off the floor. "I think you need a good, stiff drink and to forget about what a cunt Jesup is."

I led her back out behind the bar, and I poured her a glass of Jack and Coke. “Liquor doesn’t fix anything, but it sure as hell makes you feel better for a little while,” I told her as I handed her the glass. How many times had I lost myself in a bottle to forget about all of the bad shit in my life for a while?

Her phone went off in her pocket, and she pulled it out, her face paling to a sickly white color. She jerked her eyes up to mine, fear like no other covering her features. “He’s out,” she whispered in horror, holding her phone up for me to see Rodney’s name on her screen.

I snatched her phone from her, answering it for her, a twisted, cruel smile playing on my lips. She opened her mouth to protest, but I held my hand up to her. I didn’t want Rodney hearing her. “Where are you, Zy?” Rodney asked as soon as I put the phone up to my ear. His voice was deadly calm—the kind of calm that came before a storm.

“Zy...” I hummed. “I’ve never been called that. I think it fits me,” I teased, my smirk widening when Rodney made an annoyed sound in the back of his throat.

“Adelaide fucking Berkeley,” Rodney snarled.

My smirk widened. “The one and only,” I sang. “How can I help you, Rodney boy?”

He growled. He had always hated that damn name, and I lived to piss off my enemies. “Where the fuck is Zyla?” he snarled.

“She’s currently naked in my bed,” I told him. Zyla’s eyes widened at me, fear flashing in their depths. I knew Rodney was practically steaming, and I was enjoying every second of playing with him. “I always did have a thing for her. Thanks for fucking up and giving me an in.”

“You fucking bitch!” he roared.

Pointers to me for knowing that Rodney was possessive as fuck when it came to Zyla.

I tsk ed. “That’s not very nice, Rodney boy,” I taunted as I leaned against the counter.

“You tell that traitorous bitch that she has two hours to get back to my house with all six million of my cash, or I will destroy everyone she holds dear.”

I let out a low whistle as I arched my eyebrows at Zyla, a proud smile playing on my lips afterward. The girl had robbed Rodney. Six million in fucking cash was a goddamn lot of money.

I snorted. “Sorry, Rodney boy. I can’t relay that message since she’s actually already on her way somewhere overseas, very far away from you. She left me her phone so that you couldn’t track her. Good luck getting all of that money back,” I taunted. “She’s long fucking gone.”

He released a snarl. “I always fucking hated you, Adelaide,” He sneered. I laughed. “You better hope dear old Tristan knows how to keep a leash on you because the moment I get my fucking hands on you, you are dead . I’m going to fuck you in every position, and I’m going to enjoy listening to you as you beg me to stop before I slit your throat.”

My blood chilled in my veins as the line went dead. I set Zyla’s phone on the counter. “That went well,” I commented dryly.

Zyla’s eyes flickered over my shoulder, and she paled even further. I turned around to see what she was looking at and cursed. Tristan’s eyes were blazing with fury. He pointed at both of us. “Chapel now ,” he ordered.

I blew out a harsh breath and followed him inside the chapel. Jesup and Joey were already in the room, both of them sitting at the table. Joey’s eyes were cold and flat. I

clenched my jaw, knowing this was about to be a fucking fight. “Sit the hell down,” Joey snarled at me.

I placed my hands on my hips, tilting my chin up at him defiantly, refusing to follow directions. “Who the fuck do you think you are?” I snapped at him.

Despite his injuries, he jumped up from his chair, slamming his hands down onto the table as if he wasn’t even hurt. Zyla, who had taken a seat, jumped and squeaked, but I just arched an eyebrow at him, staying on my feet. None of the men in this room scared me. “The father of the fucking kid you just put in danger,” he snarled at me. I narrowed my eyes at him in my deadliest glare. “So, sit the fuck down.”

“Now ,” Tristan breathed in my ear, his tone not allowing any room for argument.

With a harsh glare thrown at both of the men, I sat down in a random chair, crossing my arms over my chest. Joey sat back down in his seat, his eyes steady on mine, knowing how I could get. “Want to fucking explain to us why you just had a conversation with Rodney Hill?” Joey snapped at me. “How many times do I have to fucking tell you that man isn’t one to be fucked with, Adelaide?”

I sneered at him. “Numerous times, apparently,” I bit back, wanting to piss him off further.

Tristan slammed his hand on the table. I swung my angry gaze to him. “Enough!” he barked, jabbing a finger in my direction. I sneered at him, my upper lip curling up one side. He looked between me and Zyla. “One of you better start fucking explaining yourselves.”

“My question is,” Jesup started, his voice eerily calm, “is why the fuck he was calling your phone, Zyla.”

“He didn’t—” she started, but Jesup slammed her phone on the table so hard that it shattered the screen. Tristan must have grabbed it while we were walking toward the chapel.

Zyla flinched, swallowing hard.

“One more fucking lie, Zyla,” he warned.

I looked over at her. “Zyla, if you don’t want to tell them anything, you don’t have to,” I promised her. “You left the club. You don’t owe anyone at this table an explanation.”

Jesup jumped up from his chair, sending it flying against the wall behind him. Joey jumped as well, pressing a hand to Jesup’s chest, a warning for him to stand the fuck down. Joey and I might butt heads, but no one would get riled up around me like that without him stepping in.

“For once, shut your fucking mouth, Adelaide!” Tristan roared at me.

I jumped up from my chair as well, narrowing my eyes at Tristan. “You want to fucking know why the fuck I was talking to Rodney?” I snarled at him. He stood up from his chair, glaring down at me as he crossed his arms over his chest, but I wasn’t intimidated by him in the slightest. “I’m doing what Jesup failed to fucking do. I’m protecting Zyla.”

I stormed over to the door, but Tristan beat me to it, blocking my exit. My chest heaved with rage. “You are not walking out of this fucking room until one of you explains every fucking thing that’s been going on,” he snarled down at me. “Fucking try me, Addy,” he warned when I sneered up at him, taking another step closer.

“Or what, Tristan?” I angrily demanded. “Are you going to fuck me into

submission?” I taunted. “I doubt I’d even fucking enjoy it.”

His features twisted, revealing the monster Tristan had grown into. I bristled, but I didn’t stand down. “Don’t fucking test me, Adelaide.”

I roughly jabbed a finger into his chest. “No, you don’t fucking test me .” He smacked my hand away. “I’ve had it with you, and I’ve especially had it with this overbearing bullshit .”

“Adelaide, just sit the fuck down,” Joey spoke up, his voice a bit calmer, knowing I was almost past the point of reasoning.

I clenched my fists at my sides, the words falling from my lips before I could stop them. I knew it was only my anger talking, but I was past the point of giving a fuck. Had it been just Zyla talking on the phone to Rodney, they wouldn’t have given two shits. Joey had no reason to give a fuck, so I couldn’t fault him for that. But Jesup? Tristan? They should have cared about why Rodney was contacting Zyla. The only reason they were concerned was because I had talked to him, and that shit pissed me clean the fuck off.

“I wish you had stayed dead,” I snarled at Joey. He looked like I had slapped him, but then he clenched his teeth together, anger flaring in his eyes. I jerked my chin up, my heated gaze clashing with Tristan’s. “And you and me?” I gestured between us. “We’re fucking done , Tristan. Your priorities are fucked up, and I’m done with you and this entire fucking club. Now move the fuck out of my way.”

He stared down at me unflinchingly. “No.”

I snatched his gun from him when he wasn’t expecting it, pointing it at him. His eyes flashed with shock for a split second before he smothered it. “Move the fuck out of my way, Tristan,” I warned him. “Now or I swear, I will pull this fucking trigger and

move you myself.”

“Let her go,” Joey spoke up. Tristan didn’t remove his eyes from mine. “Trust me, man. She just needs to cool off. She’s way past the point of reasoning right now. She just needs a little bit to get herself together. Trust me.”

With a clenched jaw, Tristan moved out of my way, and I stormed out of the clubhouse. I slung his gun on the floor as I did so, making numerous girls scream in fear.

And honestly, I had every intention of coming back into the clubhouse in a little bit with a more level head, but fate—cruel, twisted fate—had other plans for me.

Chapter Twenty

River

Sighing when my phone began to vibrate, I slid it across the coffee table so I could pick it up. I frowned down at the screen when I saw Adelaide's name flash across the top. I only had her number and vice versa in cases of emergencies only. Tristan had made sure we had each other's numbers since he put me in charge of protecting her more often than not.

A bad feeling settled in the pit of my stomach because I knew she wouldn't contact me if it wasn't bad. I'd been doing my damnest to protect her without drawing too much attention to how much I was doing without my president's orders, but the woman had a knack for getting into some shitty situations. It honestly had to be some kind of fucking talent she had.

I had been attracted to Adelaide ever since she popped back up at the clubhouse after three damn years. The woman was full of fire, full of life, and she didn't take a bit of shit from anyone. She had an air around her that instantly drew everyone's attention to her when she stepped into a room.

She would make a hell of a good old lady one day. I was just biding my time until I could make my move. No matter how long it took. Because I could be a patient man for the right things.

And Adelaide? She was someone a man remained patient for, something Tristan didn't understand, though I could tell that Joey kind of understood her. He was trying,

but he couldn't seem to get it right yet.

A man learned a lot by standing on the outside looking in.

"Adelaide?" I asked, swiping to answer her call. "Darlin', what's wrong?"

"Help," she whispered, her voice too weak and shaky for my liking. This woman was always strong and loud. "River," she whimpered, "everything hurts."

I stood up from my couch, moving toward my apartment door without a beat of hesitation. I wasn't much of a partier. I never had been. So, when the club started getting rowdy earlier, I came home to drink a beer in the silence of my apartment.

"Darlin', where are you?" I asked her. "Can you tell me where you are?"

Her breathing was shallow. Too fucking shallow. Fear for her safety pulsed through my veins, but I locked it away, focusing on finding her. "I don't know," she whimpered, sounding truly afraid. I heard something hitting her phone. "My location is on," she told me, her voice fading in and out. "I sent you coordinates." Another breath rattled from her lungs. "River, find me," she begged.

The line went dead. Rage soared through my veins, and I vowed to get justice for her. I would slaughter whoever the fuck put their hands on her.

Darlin', I'm coming. Just hold on for me.

Chapter Twenty-One

Tristan

I looked down at the bar when my phone vibrated beside my elbow, showing a call from the hospital. A bad feeling spread through my gut, and I answered the call quickly, praying it had nothing to do with Adelaide, though my gut was telling me otherwise.

“Tristan Groves.”

“Um, Grim, Adelaide was just rushed into surgery,” River informed me, his voice cold. River was a damn good club member, but sometimes, I worried where River’s loyalties actually lied. But I knew if I needed him to do something, he would, no questions asked. He was a cold-blooded kind of man. I wasn’t even sure if he really had human emotions.

And as stupid as it was of me, it didn’t even occur to me to ask him why and how he knew Adelaide was being rushed into surgery. Or why he was calling me from the hospital phone instead of his. All I could focus on was that my woman was in the hospital.

“Fuck!” I roared, hanging up the phone, panic gripping my heart so tightly that for a moment, I couldn’t fucking breath. I pointed a shaky finger at Joey. “Had you just fucking let me handle her, she’d fucking be here safe and sound,” I snarled, pulling my bike keys out of my pocket.

“What the fuck happened?” Joey demanded to know as he got up off of the couch with a pain-filled grunt.

“Adelaide is in the hospital,” I told him as I rushed out the door, not giving a fuck if he decided to follow me or not.

Addy, baby, I’m so sorry that I keep fucking up with you.

I stared at the doctor, barely hearing him through the blood pounding in my ears. River was gone by the time I got to the hospital, but he’d been proactive enough to inform the front desk that Joey and I would be coming to the hospital, and we were in charge of her care.

Adelaide had been beaten to within an inch of her life. She had multiple stab wounds in her lower abdomen. There were signs of being strangled. She lost the baby. And she was raped, more than likely numerous times.

The doctor’s words: “She’s extremely lucky to still be alive.”

“Grim,” Dameon called, coming over to me with his laptop. “I found this.” Turning the screen to me, he showed me a video. “Got this from one of the traffic cameras.”

The video showed Adelaide being thrown out by a dumpster, her phone tossed out beside her. She hit the ground unconscious. There were no markings or plates on the van. It was just a plain white industrial van. Nothing special about it.

“Fuck,” I snarled, running my hands through my hair. We had no way of knowing who the fuck did this to her, but something in my gut told me it might be Vin.

Joey came out of the back from visiting Adelaide. When she had been released from surgery, he was the first person back there to see her, not even letting me back there

first. And honestly, after what we'd found out, I hadn't fought him on it. They both had lost a baby.

His jaw was clenched, and he looked murderous. Like the cold-blooded killer people said Joey really was. "She's asking for you," Joey told me, his voice empty.

I shook my head at him. "I can't go see her right now," I told him, guilt swirling in my gut. "Not knowing that I fucking let her walk out like that, that I'm part of the reason she's in this goddamn situation."

Joey shook his head at me, anger flashing in his eyes. "Tristan, if you don't go see her, I think it's going to send her toppling over the edge. She doesn't even give a shit that she's lost a baby. She's at the point of breaking completely, and I don't want to see her become that kind of monster. Don't be selfish. Fucking go see her."

"She won't," I told him, getting up from my chair and ignoring the last part of what he said. I couldn't face her. How the fuck could I?

Joey glared at me, shaking his head. "Then you don't know that woman at fucking all. She's destructive, Tristan, and right now, she's on the verge of shutting it all off."

I ignored him. Adelaide wasn't that kind of woman. I just needed a few hours to come to terms with what the fuck had happened, what I had failed to protect her from, and then, I would go see her.

I'd never felt more like an idiot in my life. I should have just fucking listened to Joey, swallowed my guilt, and went to go see her.

Because she fucking disappeared.

I stood with Jesup and Joey as we listened to the doctor, who sounded as baffled as I

fucking felt. “She left sometime in the middle of the night,” he informed us. “I don’t know how the hell she managed to walk out, but she’s gone. With her kind of injuries, she shouldn’t have even been able to move off of the bed. I have no idea how she slipped past the nurses on duty either. Security footage doesn’t show anything. It’s like she turned into a ghost.”

I swallowed thickly. Joey chuckled, but it lacked any humor. He shook his head. “I fucking told you, man.” He laughed again, his hands fisting at his sides. “I fucking told you!” he shouted, spinning to face me.

Then, his fist connected with my jaw, knocking me off my feet. He was dragged into cuffs, but he only grinned at me, looking slightly manic, like a man possessed.

“I created that monster to keep her from dying, Tristan.” I spit out blood on the floor. “You should have fucking just listened to me, and maybe she’d still be here,” he snarled at me before he was dragged away by the security officer.

I’d fucked up.

Adelaide was gone, and this time, no one knew where the fuck she’d gone.

Addy, baby, I’m so, so fucking sorry.

She had done exactly what Joey said she would do.

She had shut it all off, and she had left .

Chapter Twenty-Two

Tristan

ONE YEAR LATER

I walked into the bar where Vin had set up our next exchange. A year had gone by since Adelaide had left, and it was like she'd disappeared off the face of the earth. There was no fucking trace of her anywhere. Honestly, if we couldn't still find proof of her driver's license and social security number, I would have thought she was a mere figment of my imagination.

Vin had mellowed out shockingly, but I still had a feeling he knew where Adelaide was, and I also had a feeling he'd been the one to attack her and leave her for River to find. I'd tried to go after Rodney too just in case he'd had a hand in her attack, but someone had beat me to it, leaving him bloody and broken, his limbs bent at unnatural angles. When I confronted Joey about it, thinking he'd been the one to take Rodney out, he'd been as shocked as I'd been. Someone had shut Rodney up before either one of us could, but we just put that down to the dumbass having too many enemies.

So, a couple of months after Adelaide had disappeared, I set aside my pride and formed a truce with Vin in the hopes that I would find Addy before it was too late to save her.

"Fuck, this place is a disgusting ass strip club," Jesup muttered, following me back to the small booth in the very far corner where it was the darkest, where Vin always

decided for us to sit. He didn't like being able to be seen. He preferred to keep his business in the dark, just like the shady mother fucker he truly was.

A roach crawled across my shoe. I flung it off, disgust crawling down my spine. I was glad this place didn't serve food, but I seriously worried about the alcohol the patrons were consuming. Jesup wasn't joking. The club was disgusting and dirty. It was one of the filthiest establishments I'd ever stepped foot into.

Vin sauntered out of the back, his suit immaculate, a stark contrast to his strip club. "Welcome, boys," he greeted us as he took a seat. A waitress dressed in practically nothing sauntered up to our table, and Vin ordered three rounds of vodka shots, but I wouldn't be drinking mine, that was for sure. I might be an outlaw, but I had standards, and cleanliness was one of those standards.

It was silent around the table for a few moments. Vin liked to do this—let the silence linger. It made him feel powerful, like the big man in charge.

The song playing over the speakers switched, and the blonde girl that had been dancing on the stage walked off as another dark-haired girl appeared to take her place. She was wearing a red ensemble that barely covered her. She looked starved, way too fucking skinny. Hell, I could see her ribs from my table, and we were in the far back corner.

She turned her face our way, and I sucked in a harsh breath, the need for blood to be spilled pulsing through my veins. "Grim, is that—" Jesup started, but before he could finish his question, I snatched my gun out of my cut, pushing it against Vin's temple. He hadn't had any warning, so all he could do was sit still and just hope that I didn't blow his fucking brains across this booth.

That hope would be fucking futile.

“Why the fuck is Addy on your stage?” I snarled at him.

Vin’s lips tilted up into a smirk. “She’s mine now, Grim,” he informed me, using my street name.

“Not anymore, she’s not. She’s mine ,” I barked. I pulled the trigger, his blood splattering across my clothes and my cut. I roughly booted his dead, lifeless body out of the booth and stood up, glad that I had my silencer on my gun. No one had noticed the commotion, but everyone was soon going to see the blood splattering my clothes. And I knew it wouldn’t be long before someone came across the owner’s dead body, half his skull missing.

I couldn’t even bring myself to give a fuck about that though. I’d found Adelaide, and right then, that was all that mattered to me.

I stormed up to the stage. A man, more than likely some kind of security guard, blocked my way, crossing his arms over his chest. “No one is allowed up on the stage with the girls,” he told me gruffly.

I was past the point of giving a fuck about his goddamn rules or anyone else’s. I’d found Addy, and I was fucking taking her home.

I quickly put a bullet in his chest, and then I stepped over him, storming up onto the stage. Addy snapped her eyes over to me, stumbling in her heels as her dark eyes widened in shock. Her face paled at the blood covering me.

“It’s time to come home, Adelaide,” I told her.

“I—Tristan—” she stuttered, not able to form an entire sentence in her shock.

“Hey, you’ve got to wait for your fucking turn!” a disgusting man barked from the

foot of the stage. I clenched my jaw and closed my eyes, my patience fucking gone. “I paid two fucking grand for her tonight.”

From the foot of the stage, Jesup snapped the man’s neck, shaking his head. “I would hope she’s worth more than two grand,” my VP grumbled in distaste as he spat on the man’s lifeless body.

Addy stumbled, her eyes rolling to the back of her head as she passed out. I caught her before she hit the stage and lifted her into my arms. Fuck, she was light—too light. She’d lost so much fucking weight that it was a miracle she was still alive. She was severely malnourished.

“Good thing we brought the van,” Jesup commented.

I silently agreed. We’d originally planned to leave here with guns, but I had cargo in my arms that was way more important. I would send a couple of other men to get my weapons. I had to get Addy back to the clubhouse where it was safe and where I could keep an eye on her.

And where she couldn’t fucking leave me again.

I carried Adelaide through the back entrance of the club to where the van was parked in the back alley. Addy grunted quietly, her eyes slowly opening as she began shivering when the cold air slid over her exposed skin.

I slid into the passenger seat of the van with her still cradled in my arms, and Jesup jumped in the driver’s seat. “It’s c-cold,” Adelaide stuttered.

Twisting, Jesup leaned back and grabbed my jacket, silently tossing it to me before he cranked up the van and pulled onto the highway. I covered her up with it, cradling her closer to me, unable to bring myself to care about the fact that I was covering the side

of her body in Vin's blood.

"You're covered in blood," she grumbled after a moment, her eyes roving over my torso and face.

I shrugged. "Shit happens," I said bluntly.

"You do that a lot now?" she asked, looking up at me with her gorgeous, dark eyes.

I just grunted. I had turned into a ruthless bastard when she left, and I wasn't the same man she'd left behind. But I wasn't the only one who changed. Adelaide's soul had gotten ripped apart. It was laid bare in her eyes.

I just didn't know how fucking bad yet.

When we got to the clubhouse, I carried Adelaide straight to my room, not giving two shits about the numerous eyes that followed me as I did so. "Why are you bringing me back here?" Adelaide asked, sounding a bit pissy.

"This is your home, Addy," I gruffly reminded her. This clubhouse would always be her home.

She stayed silent, which was unnerving. The Addy I was used to would have at least tried biting my head off. But silent Adelaide? It made my gut twist with anxiety.

I set her on her feet, watching as she slipped off her heels, making her height drop almost six inches. "It's not my home anymore, Tristan," she finally spoke up, but there wasn't fire in her voice anymore. She sounded lost and broken, and it shredded me. "I'm not the same woman that left."

"Like hell that this isn't your home, Addy," I growled. "This will always be your

home.”

She looked up at me, slowly undoing the buckles and chains to her outfit. I damn near swallowed my tongue as I let my eyes trail over her. Her skimpy outfit dropped to the floor, leaving nothing to the imagination any longer. God, even though she'd lost so much weight, she was still the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in my life.

My cock strained against my zipper, begging to be buried deep inside of her.

“What do you want from me, Tristan?” she asked softly, stepping toward me. She ran her hands under my cut, gently pushing it off my shoulders. I bit my tongue to keep from saying anything until I figured out what the hell she was trying to do. She wasn't even giving a fuck about the blood.

“You want to fuck me, don't you? Want to sell me out?” she asked huskily. “I'm a fantastic way to earn the club some extra money.”

And there it was. I let my eyes meet hers, but hers were dead and lifeless. She was cold. Detached.

My blood roared in my veins. Whereas I had just been ready to let her have her fucking way with me, now I was seeing fucking red.

I stepped back from her, watching as she just let her hands fall back to her sides, not even giving a fuck that she was naked as she stood in front of me. “What the fuck has gotten into you, Addy?” I demanded.

She shrugged. “I told you that I wasn't the same woman that I used to be.” A cold smile tilted her lips. “Vin made damn sure of that.”

“I could shoot him a second fucking time,” I snarled, my hands tightening into fists at

my sides.

She shrugged carelessly. "It's not his fault that I'm like this." Like hell it wasn't. "I went to him willingly, Tristan. I asked him to make me forget who I was." She let those beautiful eyes meet mine. "I was tired of hurting."

I didn't believe that shit for a second. She'd been terrified of him. Why would she just give herself over to him?

I shook my head and walked over to my dresser, rage like no other roaring through my veins. I yanked open my drawers, grabbing one of my t-shirts and a pair of my sweatpants. "Get a fucking shower," I snarled, shoving the clothes against her chest.

Refusing to grab the clothes from me, she crossed her arms over her chest, that old spark lighting up in her eyes. There she was. There was my woman. "Make me," she seethed, finally getting angry.

Without a word, I moved to the bathroom, knowing my door was locked and Jesup had put two men outside of my door and my window. She wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon. She wasn't escaping again.

After turning the shower on, I stripped out of my clothes and walked back into the bedroom. I didn't miss the way her breath caught in her throat as she ran her eyes over me, but I was beyond giving a shit anymore.

She wanted me to make her get a fucking shower? Fine. I wasn't being the fucking nice guy anymore. Being nice to her when she was like this wasn't going to damn work.

I gripped her wrists and shoved them behind her, thrusting her chest out so her nipples brushed against my chest. My dick instantly went hard, but I pushed down my

desire for her, instead grabbing a pair of cuffs from my dresser.

“Tristan, what are you doing?” she screeched, panic flashing through her dark eyes and bleeding into her voice, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. She was always pushing buttons. That, at least, had not changed in the year she’d been missing.

Leaning down so that my eyes were level with hers, I stared down into their dark depths, giving her a silent challenge. She swallowed thickly as she slightly leaned back from me. “You’re not the only one who’s changed, Addy baby, and I promise you that I will bring the old you back,” I quietly swore.

“I’d like to see you try,” she snapped at me, trying to hide her panic, but I needed her to break, needed her to come back to me.

I smirked down at her, and her throat bobbed nervously. “Oh, you will, Addy, and I’m going to break you down as I do,” I promised. There was no escaping me, and there was no escaping my plan to destroy the demons that burned inside her.

I cuffed her wrists behind her and dragged her to the bathroom. She fought me, but I just dragged her. Once we were in the small bathroom, I thrust her toward the running shower. “Get in the shower,” I ordered.

“Go fuck yourself, Tristan,” she snarled, her breathing quickening.

Without a word, I swept her off her feet and stepped into the shower with her. “I fucking hate you!” she screamed, those beautiful, brown eyes sparking fire at me.

A humorless smirk twisted my lips as I set her on her feet. “If that’s the case, baby girl, your hatred is only going to grow,” I warned her.

She glared at me with nothing but cold hate and disgust shining in the depths of her

eyes, but I swallowed down my guilt and that need to apologize to her. Because if I wanted Adelaide back— my Adelaide—I had to break her down, no matter how much it pained me to do so.

She would understand why I had to do this in the future, and she might even thank me for it. So, for now, she could fucking hate me.

“You’re a mother fucking asshole!” Adelaide shouted from my room after I shut the door to my apartment behind me. I hated leaving her like that, but I didn’t trust her to not run away again. I needed her to stay. Needed her to stay with me so that I could fucking help her.

Jesup arched an eyebrow at me. “Sounds like everything is going swell,” he sarcastically stated as Adelaide screamed at the top of her lungs. Just fucking screamed .

I ran my hands down my face, exhaustion and guilt weighing down on my shoulders. “I have to do it to her,” I said quietly. “I hate it, but I don’t know how else to bring the real her back.”

“Tristan, get your ass back in here and uncuff me!” Adelaide shouted.

Jesup barked out a laugh. “You cuffed her?” he asked, his eyes shining with humor.

“To the bed,” I said, not even ashamed. If I didn’t, she was going to try running, and I knew how sneaky she could be.

Jesup only laughed harder.

You’ll forgive me for this later, Adelaide .

Chapter Twenty-Three

Adelaide

I squeezed my eyes shut, desperately trying to fight the panic attack that was threatening to overwhelm me. I needed to be uncuffed. God, I would do whatever Tristan wanted me to do if it meant I got uncuffed. I couldn't stand being restrained anymore. Not after everything that I had gone through.

Tristan had to come back in here and uncuff me.

"Tristan!" I shouted, squeezing my eyes shut again. Tears burned in my throat, and my chest tightened. I couldn't fucking breathe .

I watched as Vin stepped into the room, his heavy boots making soft thudding noises as he made his way closer to me. Fear clawed at my veins, shredding me apart. I pulled at the shackles that held my wrists to the wall, my breathing quickening as panic began to settle in. Vin officially had his hands on me, just like he'd always wanted.

He was going to ruin me. Destroy me.

Vin was going to break me in the worst way possible.

"You know you're mine now, right?" Vin taunted as he pulled his shirt off, revealing his heavily muscled form.

“What is your obsession with me?” I choked out, fear making my heart slam heavily against my breastbone. It was beating so hard, I thought I might have a heart attack.

“You’re the only one to escape me, love.” Tears slid down my cheeks. I hated when he called me that. “And I can’t have that. You’re supposed to be mine.”

“Vin, please,” I begged, tears streaming down my face.

He undid his belt, and I sobbed. “Oh, I’m going to love listening to you beg me to stop.”

I yanked at my cuffs, tears streaming down my face. Tears of relief slid down my cheeks when I looked down and realized I was still in Tristan’s clothes.

I was still dressed.

I wasn’t naked.

I was on Tristan’s bed. I was okay. Vin couldn’t hurt me here.

I squeezed my eyes shut, turning my face to the side as silent tears streamed down my face.

Unable to fight it, another fucking flashback dragged me under, and my entire body trembled as I cried.

A scream tore from my lips, my heart pounding hard in my chest. My eyes snapped open when the door flew open, and Zyla rushed in with Tank and River. “Please get me out of these,” I sobbed, my eyes searching out River’s. I’d paid enough attention to River a year ago to know he would go against his president, and he wouldn’t give two fucks about the consequences as he did it either.

River ran by his own book, and I was relying on that. I needed him to help me.

“Let me help her,” River said softly as he gently moved Zyla aside so that he could get to me. Zyla nodded, standing back, wringing her fingers in front of her.

Tank placed a hand on River’s shoulder. “You know Tristan will be pissed,” he warned his friend.

“You think I give a fuck?” River growled, swinging furious eyes to him. “This is fucking inhumane, Tank. She doesn’t deserve this shit. What Adelaide needs is fucking love and support, and Tristan is being a goddamn dick.”

I squeezed my eyes shut, desperately fighting against the images wanting to rise to the surface. A sob ripped from my sore throat, and I pulled at my cuffs again, losing the battle. My chest was caving in, and my entire body shook.

I fell into my tortured memories again. But before I could completely succumb to the darkness, to the pain and torment, River’s lips brushed my forehead. “Just come back to me, darlin’,” he whispered before I disappeared inside of my head completely.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Tristan

When I walked into my room, I did not expect to see Adelaide no longer cuffed to my bed. And I was even more shocked to see Tank leaning against the wall beside my door like he was standing guard, all while River sat on the floor with Adelaide in his lap, gently rocking her as she sobbed, her entire body shaking. Zyla was whispering soothing words to her, but they didn't seem to be helping.

I didn't know whether to be pissed or jealous. She was clinging to River as if he were her lifeline, clinging to him in a way that she had never done with me. His forehead was resting against hers as he whispered soft words to her, being her rock, taking my place and doing what I should have been doing.

But once again, I was fucking failing her.

"What the hell happened?" I snarled as I stepped further into the room, glaring down at River.

"She flipped the fuck out, Grim," River grumbled. He swallowed hard, shaking his head. His arms flexed protectively around Adelaide, and it took everything in me not to snarl down at him. "Someone fucked her up bad, Grim." He glared up at me, rage burning in his eyes. "Cuffing her to the bed triggered numerous flashbacks, so real good fucking job there, Prez," he sarcastically snapped at me.

I opened my mouth, my fingers twitching to permanently shut River up, but Adelaide

jumped up from River's lap before I could and rushed over to me, shocking the fuck out of me. I caught her before she knocked us both to the ground, instantly wrapping my arms around her, my body relaxing as I held her tight to me.

"Please don't cuff me to the bed and leave me like that again," Addy sobbed into my chest. Guilt swirled in my stomach, and I closed my eyes, drawing in a deep breath in an attempt to steady myself. "Please don't," she begged again, her voice trembling.

I soothed my hand over her hair. "I won't," I quietly promised, feeling like a real jackass.

What the fuck had I done?

Zyla, Tank, and River left the room, closing my bedroom door behind them quietly. I sat on the bed with Adelaide in my arms, leaning against my headboard with her cradled on my lap.

"Don't let him hurt me," Adelaide whispered as she clutched my cut in her hands, her head falling onto my shoulder. Exhaustion pulled at her limbs, making her go slack in my arms. Just how long had she been falling apart in River's arms on my fucking floor?

Before I could ask who she wanted me to protect her from, she passed out in my arms, her soft snores letting me know that she was out cold. As I looked down at her, I realized then that everything she had said to me when she had gotten there had been a lie.

Someone ruined her, and I had a feeling that someone had been Vin.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Adelaide

I looked up at Tristan when he stepped back into the clubhouse. He'd been out most of the day working in the garage, but he hadn't cuffed me to the bed again, for which I was thankful. And he'd given me free reign of the clubhouse too instead of locking me up in his room.

But I couldn't stop the itch beneath my skin. I needed a way out. This shit with me and Tristan was toxic as fuck. I couldn't do this. Not again.

Where the fuck was Joey? Why wasn't he here? Why hadn't Tristan told Joey that I was back home? If he had, I knew Joey would've been here already, wrapping me up in his arms and doing his best to make me comfortable and help me heal, just like he had before.

My eyes caught River's from across the room. His lips tilted up the slightest bit in my direction, warming my heart, giving me strength that I hadn't even known I'd been seeking. I'd always thought that River was attractive, but the way he'd held me yesterday when I had completely fallen apart? My heart skipped a beat in my chest. He was warm and strong. Safe, which was something I hadn't been in a year.

Zyla handed one of the guys a beer, her lips tilting up a little as Jesup walked in behind Tristan. "Things changed a lot, didn't they?" I asked her, noting the way Jesup shot her a wink that had her cheeks burning red.

She shrugged as she turned her attention to me. “You were gone for a while, Adelaide,” she reminded me.

I was only supposed to be gone for a couple of hours at most, but Rodney had found me. Everything went fucking downhill from there. The last time I’d been in the clubhouse had been the last time I’d tasted freedom.

I glanced at River again. His blue eyes were already focused on me, and when they caught mine, they softened slightly, understanding and strength for me in their depths. My chest swelled. I hadn’t been looked at like that... well, ever .

River had come to my rescue that night. I didn’t want to call Tristan, and I hadn’t wanted to call Joey.

I wanted someone who never looked at me with judgment. Someone who looked at me without pity.

River jumped out of his truck, his boots making a soft thud on the dirty ground. He had made it to me in record time, just as I knew he would. When he’d given me his number in case of an emergency, he’d told me anytime day or night, call him.

I was so glad that offer still stood.

“Fuck, darlin’,” he breathed as he kneeled next to me on the trash-littered ground, but there was no pity in his eyes. Instead, there was a burning rage in them. “It’s going to hurt like fuck for me to move you, but I need to get you to the hospital.”

“Okay,” I whispered, my voice sounding hoarse to my own ears.

He eased his arms beneath my back and knees, easily lifting me against his chest as his arms flexed around me. He wasn’t wearing his cut, and he had a beanie on his

head, hiding his dark hair and mostly concealing his identity from anyone that might see him.

I whined in pain, my breaths shallowing. He brushed his lips to my bloody forehead. “Easy, darlin’,” he soothed. “I’ve got you. You’re not alone. I’m here.”

Tears slid down my cheeks. “I feel like I’m dying,” I choked out as he set me in the passenger seat of his truck.

He gripped my face in his rough, calloused hands, locking those beautiful, blue eyes on mine. “Live for me, Adelaide,” he pleaded. I swallowed thickly at the raw pain and fear for me in his eyes. “Can you do that? Can you live for me?”

Slowly, I nodded. He brushed his thumbs over my cheekbones. “No matter what hell you endure, darlin’, live for me, yeah?” He brushed his lips over mine. I sobbed. Everything hurting so much, but he was doing his best to soothe me. “Just live.”

Troy and Kyle stepped up to the bar, drawing me out of my memory—that sweet, bittersweet memory where River gave me a taste of what it was like to truly be cared about.

Live for me.

I’d fucking lived. I hadn’t done a goddamn thing else, but I fucking lived . I kept my promise to him.

“You here to stick around this time, Adelaide, or are you just going to leave and fuck everyone up again?” Troy demanded to know as Zyla slid him a beer.

I clenched my jaw. He didn’t know shit. “Watch yourself,” I snarled at him.

“She’s not going any fucking where,” Tristan snapped, shooting his cousin a nasty look. I fisted my hands but forced them to relax. I just needed a plan to make Tristan fucking get rid of me for good. I needed to destroy him. I couldn’t keep going round and round in this endless, vicious cycle. Vin was dead. The threat hanging over my head was gone.

I just wanted out. Away. This cycle was heartbreaking, and I couldn’t keep doing it.

I got up from the stool and sighed. “I need my own clothes,” I informed Tristan.

He smirked. “I like you in mine.”

I huffed in aggravation, not enjoying his playfulness. “I still need my own,” I retorted, not playing his game.

We stared at each other for a good minute, and when he realized I wasn’t in the mood for his shit, he blew out a breath. “Give me fifteen minutes to grab a shower, and then, we can go shopping.”

“Shopping?” I asked incredulously. “I just need you to take me to my place to get my things,” I told him. I didn’t want him spending a dime on anything. I had clothes at the apartment Vin had housed me in. Since I was now gone and Vin was dead, I doubted anyone was guarding it, waiting on me to come home.

Tristan shook his head at me. “I’m not taking you anywhere near Vin’s territory, Addy. It’s too fucking dangerous considering I just potentially started a war by shooting him yesterday. So, we’re going shopping.”

“Whatever,” I grumbled, not in the mood to argue with him further. I was still tired, my body still begging for rest.

“In the meantime, ask Zyla if she’s got something you can wear. You two should be about the same size.”

I only closed my eyes as I turned away from him.

I needed out. Needed freedom.

Eyes burned into the side of my head, and when I turned, my eyes locked with River’s again. And we stared at each other until my shoulders drooped a little, some of the tension bleeding from my shoulders.

As it turned out, Zyla and I were the exact same size since I had lost so much weight in the year that I had been gone. I hadn’t been properly fed, only allowed to eat when Vin allowed me to. He’d done everything in his power to tear me down and make me weak.

And he had accomplished it. Vin had ruined me.

I opened the door to Tristan’s room to find him buckling his belt, his shirt tossed on the bed. I swallowed thickly, my grip tightening on the door handle as my eyes trailed over him. I may not have wanted to be in a relationship with Tristan, but I couldn’t deny that he still turned me on. He was well built, his muscles rippling with every move he made.

“You continue to fuck me with those pretty eyes, Addy baby, and we won’t be going shopping for a few more hours,” Tristan huskily warned me.

My eyes snapped up to his, and I subconsciously licked my lips. I wanted this, at least. I wanted a distraction. Something familiar.

And I was familiar with having sex.

With a muttered curse, Tristan walked over to me, his hand sliding into my hair as he tilted my head back, his lips sliding against my own. I moaned softly, my body curving into his as he closed the bedroom door, pushing me against it as he easily lifted me, his lips attacking mine. I wrapped my legs around his hips, my hands clutching at his shoulders as his tongue slid against mine, making my body shudder against his.

This. This was what I needed for at least a little while. There was nothing to sex. It didn't require much thought, and there didn't have to be emotions involved. It was nothing more than a transaction of mutual orgasms.

Tristan grabbed the bottom of the shirt I was wearing and tugged it over my head, tossing it to the floor. I whimpered as he ran his rough, calloused hands over my smooth skin.

He was distracting but not distracting enough. My mind kept flitting to other shit, burying me further in my internal torment.

Even though I was no longer in the mood, in very little time, my clothes were on the floor, and Tristan had me on my back on his bed. His hands ran over my body, and he kept teasing me by going so close to where I wanted his fingers the most and then retreating.

I released a frustrated sigh, and finally, he moved over me, his eyes meeting mine. He slowly slid into me, and I sucked in a sharp breath of air, arching my back off of the bed as my walls clutched at him, my body desperate for a release. A release that was all my own, of all my own control, even if my mind was no longer in this.

With a gentleness that Tristan had never really possessed when we were younger, he made love to me, bringing me over the edge over and over again, until exhaustion was weighing me down like a brick.

When Tristan left the room a little while later after I demanded space, surprisingly not fighting me on it, I rolled onto my side, burrowing beneath the blankets.

And I cried.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Adelaide

Tristan was sitting at his desk when I woke up, a pair of sweatpants riding low on his hips, his muscular, upper body bare. He had the club books spread out in front of him, obviously working on budgeting and paying bills that needed to be paid.

I stretched out my body, feeling that familiar soreness of being used, but at least this time, it had happened on my own terms. My movement drew Tristan's eyes over to me. He smiled softly, and my throat closed up with more tears. Tristan's smile no longer comforted me or made my heart swell like it used to. Now, it just made me feel trapped. "Sleep well?" he asked gently.

I nodded. "Extremely well," I told him, meaning it. I hadn't had any kind of decent sleep for a little over a year. Probably helped that I'd cried until I felt empty enough to sleep.

Tristan stood and moved over to me, sitting beside where I was lying. He brushed his fingertips over my cheek. My eyes slid closed as I reveled in his touch, wishing it still comforted me like it used to. Tears burned at the backs of my eyes, but I forced them not to fall.

I would not cry for something lost.

"I have to leave for a couple of days," he informed me. I opened my eyes to look at him again. "I'm leaving River here with you."

My heart picked up pace in my chest. River—the man that I was pretty sure I was gaining feelings for. The man who hadn't judged me when he'd saved me.

His words rang in my head on repeat. Live for me .

“Where are you going?” I asked Tristan.

“Joey needs me at his club for a few days to deal with an inside problem.” Joey . Oh, God, I fucking missed him. “He knows you're back, but he asked me not to bring you—not until he dealt with this problem.” I frowned, my mood dimming again. “He'll come to see you when shit is taken care of on his end.”

I sat up, shaking my head as I held the sheet around my chest, hiding my body from Tristan, suddenly feeling vulnerable. “I'm capable of taking care of myself, Tristan. I want to come with you.” I wanted to see Joey. I needed to see the one man who'd been my rock without question.

Tristan shook his head. “Out of the question, Addy,” he told me, his voice stern.

I glared at him as I slid out of bed, beginning to slide my clothes back on. I didn't even give a fuck that he was staring at me. I was angry. Furious.

Joey's words whispered through my head. Hold me with you.

Well, Joey, I really fucking need you right now, and you're not letting me hold you here with me .

“Try and stop me,” I snapped at Tristan as I tugged my jeans up my legs.

“That a challenge, Addy?” Tristan asked, quiet anger in his voice.

I tilted my chin up at him, a defiant gesture that I knew Tristan both loved and hated. “I’m coming with you, Tristan.”

He snatched my shirt from my hand, tossing it onto the bed. I swallowed thickly as he took a step closer to me. Fear spiked in my veins, but I hid it from him. I would not cower in front of him. “I’ll be damned, Addy.”

“And I’ll be damned if I’m going to be kept a fucking prisoner in this mother fucking clubhouse,” I snapped back at him. I’d been a prisoner long enough. I would not be one now.

“For the love of all that is holy, Addy, why the fuck is it always so fucking hard for you to just listen to me?!” he shouted.

I clenched my jaw and shook my head, backing down. “Fine,” I snarled, giving in and stepping back from him. That was what he wanted, right? For me to be a good old lady and shut my fucking mouth?

He sighed. “Addy—” he started, his tone softening, but I shook my head, hating him at that moment.

Trapped. I was always fucking trapped .

“I said fine , Tristan!” I shouted at him, snatching the shirt off the bed and pulling it over my head.

I stormed out of his room, shutting his room door shut behind me with a resounding slam that rattled the walls and silenced all of the voices in the clubhouse.

“Adelaide, it’s getting dark.” River stated as he stepped out of the garage office from where he’d been sorting through some of the books. His long legs carried him over to

where I was currently working on a junk bike, trying to keep my mind off of the shit that I was always buried in. “I think it’s time to call this quits until tomorrow, darlin’.”

My heart rate quickened at the sound of that familiar term falling from his lips. I had noticed he never called any of the other women that name. Almost as if he reserved it solely for me.

Stupidly, it made me feel special. Special to him. And fuck, I needed to feel special to someone .

“Don’t want to be out here, River, then go on inside,” I snapped at him. I needed to work on this bike. Keeping my hands and mind busy was vital to my sanity.

If I didn’t, I was going to self-destruct.

He sighed, opening the fridge in the garage and grabbing a beer. “I can’t leave you out here, darlin’. You know that. Strict instructions from the president himself,” he reminded me, though he sounded sour about following orders. River had always struck me as the kind of man that ran by his own book. It always shocked me that he was a member of a club and not its president.

I looked up at him. “You ever thought about telling your president to shove his fucking commands up his ass?” I questioned seriously.

River barked out a laugh, his blue eyes glinting with humor. “Numerous times, darlin’, but that’s not something you do if you don’t want a damn good ass beating to remind you of your place.”

I snorted. “You ever get sick of playing babysitter?”

He shrugged. “Zyla got on my nerves a lot,” he confessed, “but you’re a breath of fresh air, darlin’.”

My breath hitched in my throat at his words. I sat back on my heels and let my eyes run over the man in front of me. River wasn’t really a looker. He was rugged, not as handsome as Joey or Tristan, but there was something about him that drew me in and made me crave him. Neatly trimmed scruff lined his jaw and around his lips, and his dark hair was shoved back on his head, needing a haircut. Tattoos littered his skin, not leaving a single part of him bare.

I couldn’t deny that I was attracted to River, that I wanted to be his in some kind of way. It was fucked up. I loved Joey. I even loved Tristan. Yet, there I was, falling for yet another man.

I was a fucking mess.

I knew River had to be from somewhere in the south because of his southern accent, and he wore flannels better than any other man there, Tristan included. Tattoos swirled over his skin, disappearing under the sleeves of his flannel only to reappear back on his neck. He was broad-shouldered, and his arms flexed with each movement he made.

Why the fuck hadn’t I made a move on him before?

Because right then, I wanted him. Fucking badly. I wanted him to claim me as his, but I knew that would be asking too much from him. I’d never seen River show any real interest in a woman.

But I would have him in any way that I could.

“River, you got an old lady?” I asked him as I grabbed a wrench from the floor,

yanking my eyes from him.

“Nah. Tried that once. She divorced me six months after we got married.” He didn’t seem bothered by it though.

“That’s got to suck,” I commented as I continued taking the bike apart.

I saw him shrug from the corner of my eye. “It was five years ago, darlin’. I’m over it.”

I stood up, deciding to take a chance. Fuck it. The worst that River could do was deny me. But I wanted someone to distract me from the shit my life had become. Someone that wasn’t Tristan.

I wanted that someone to be River. If I could have this with him, I would take it. He’d shown me kindness. Shown me what it was liked to truly be cared about.

Not in the fucked-up way Joey did.

Not in the tainted way that Tristan did.

I walked over to River, swallowing nervously as I did so. He only watched me, and his blue eyes didn’t give anything away. It was a little nerve-wracking, but I didn’t let his lack of emotion stop me. “Want to do me a favor?” I asked him, stopping when I was a couple of feet in front of him.

He tilted his head to the side the tiniest bit as he studied me with an unreadable expression on his face. “Depends on the favor, darlin’.”

“Make me forget?” I quietly asked him.

His eyes softened all while they blazed with a lustful heat that made my nerve endings curl. Understanding passed over his features, and I knew right then that he wouldn't turn me away.

He wanted this, too.

"You trying to get me in trouble, girly?" he huskily asked me as he set his beer on the toolbox next to him.

"No one has to know," I told him. "It can be a secret."

His eyes darkened at my words, and his brows arched the slightest bit. "We'll keep it a secret if that's what you want, darlin', but I fucking want you, and I frankly don't give a fuck who knows about us."

Before I could respond, he gripped the back of my neck and crashed his lips to mine. His other hand gripped my hip tightly, yanking me against him. I gasped when I felt his hard, powerful frame press against my softer, bonier one, a soft moan falling from my lips as I completely lost myself in him and the need already running through me.

Gripping my hair in his fist, he tilted my head to the side, pressing hot, open-mouthed kisses to my jaw and neck, nipping lightly at the spots that made me moan the loudest.

"River," I gasped, gripping his cut in my fists.

"You sure you want this, darlin'? I'm not going to be gentle," he warned me, his voice husky. He drew back some to look down at my face, those gorgeous, mesmerizing, blue eyes locking on my own dark ones.

"Yes," I breathed, feeling like I may lose my fucking mind if he didn't finish what he

had started.

“ Fuck .” His lips molded with my own again as he knocked everything off of the work bench behind me.

Tools clattered loudly to the floor, but he gave no fucks as he lifted me and set my ass on the cold metal, his lips moving back down my neck. His hands gripped the bottom of my shirt, and I lifted my arms, allowing him to pull it over my head. With quick, sure fingers, he unsnapped my bra, tossing it down on the concrete floor with my shirt.

I moaned his name as his rough, calloused hands slid over my body. I curved into him, a whimper escaping my lips as he trailed his rough fingertips around the swell of my breast. “River, please—oh, fuck!” I gasped as his lips closed over one of my nipples, his hand molding my other breast.

“You’re fucking perfect,” he rasped as he lifted his head, his lips meeting mine again. My heart swelled in my chest at his words.

He quickly unsnapped my jeans and tugged them and my panties down my legs. I quickly pushed his cut off his shoulders, and I began fumbling with the buttons on his flannel as he peppered hot kisses all over my skin. I moaned, trembling already and we’d barely gotten started. Desperation clawed at me. I needed to feel his skin on mine.

“Oh, fuck it,” I grumbled right before I ripped the damn shirt open, the buttons popping everywhere and scattering across the floor.

River’s husky laugh met my ears before he gripped my chin, bringing his lips to mine while I ran my hands over his hard chest and his rippling abs.

Fuck, he was carved beautifully.

He let me push his flannel shirt off of his shoulders, and I pushed his jeans down his legs a moment later, licking my lips in anticipation as his cock sprung free. He was hard, thick, and long. Just fucking right.

Oh, God made him absolutely perfect when he created him.

My eyes locked on his when he gripped my chin, tilting my head back. “Last chance to back out,” River warned me.

I shook my head at him. There was no fucking way that I could walk away now. He was right there. So fucking close. I didn’t give a fuck if anyone walked in on us. Someone could set the garage on fire. I was not walking away from him. From this.

We were inevitable.

He pushed me back on the worktable so that I was on my back. He spread my legs, and in one swift thrust, he was buried deep inside of me. My back arched off of the table, his name falling from my lips as I clutched at his forearms. He felt like Heaven inside of me.

“Fuck, darlin’,” he choked out, his eyes momentarily rolling back in his skull. “You feel a fuck ton better than I thought you would.”

He set my feet on the table, so my legs were bent and spread wide. Then, he gripped my shoulder, his other hand still gripping my hip, and he proceeded to ruin me for every other man.

And right then, I fell hard for him because even though he was fucking me hard, he was still treasuring every bit of my body and this moment between us.

I was ninety-nine percent sure that River was the one Joey had told me would come around and be the one for me.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Adelaide

When River stepped into the bar room, freshly showered and ready to start another day, my eyes instantly drifted over to him like a magnet. He was dressed in a red and black checkered flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, revealing his tattooed forearms. He adjusted his cut as he fully exited the hallway.

God, why was he so damn perfect?

His eyes met mine from across the room, and a slow, sexy smile tilted his lips the slightest bit, making my cheeks flush and a throbbing start in my core.

He had taken me over and over yesterday in the garage, and I had enjoyed every single moment of it. And then, after we'd tugged our clothes back on, he'd sat on the floor of the garage and just held me in the dark silence. Not a word was spoken between us, yet he comforted me more than any other person in my life ever had. Even Joey.

"Adelaide, Tristan is trying to get in touch with you," Zyla announced as she came out of the kitchen, her phone held in her hand, Tristan's name on the screen.

"Tell him I said to go fuck himself," I snapped, knowing very well he would hear me himself.

"Watch yourself, Addy, or I swear when I get back—" Tristan snarled, Zyla

obviously having him on speaker.

“You’ll what?” I angrily demanded, snatching a bottle of vodka from under the counter. River’s eyes darkened momentarily at Tristan’s unfinished threat, but he held himself in check, keeping his mouth shut. “Fuck me into submission?” I heatedly asked. “Handcuff me to your fucking bed again?”

“This will hold until I get back,” Tristan sneered.

I twisted the top off the vodka bottle, glaring at the phone in Zyla’s hand, wishing he were in front of me so that I could slap him. “Touch me when you get back,” I dared him, “and I will personally chop off every single one of your fingers.” I moved away from the bar, storming to the clubhouse doors, the bottle of vodka still in my hand.

But even in my anger, I didn’t miss the proud smile on River’s face as I walked out, and it made my chest swell with pride.

“Morning, Adelaide,” Dameon greeted from under the hood of one of the cars in the garage.

“Not now,” I snarled, storming into the office. I didn’t want anyone’s pleasantness. I just wanted to be angry and alone.

“Little early to be drinking, darlin’,” River drawled as he stepped into the office with me, shutting the door behind him.

I snorted before I took a long drink from the bottle. “This is the longest I’ve been fucking sober in a year, River,” I informed him. River stayed silent, that unnerving, blue gaze locked on my face. I frowned down at the bottle in my hand. When he only continued to silently stare at me, I sighed. “He pissed me the fuck off,” I quietly admitted.

“He used to be your entire world, darlin’—him and Joey, that is.” I swallowed thickly, my heart throbbing as I thought of Joey, and a distant ache started in my chest at the thought of everything that used to be between me and Tristan. “You used to never even look in another man’s direction when one of them was around. What changed?”

“I changed, River,” I told him, my voice sad. I turned to look at him. There was no judgment in his eyes, just a tenderness that I was clinging to. I never wanted to lose that tenderness. “I’m not the same young girl that he was in love with four years ago, and I’m certainly not the same woman he loved a year ago. I changed. It was the only way I could survive.”

River quietly locked the office door, striding over to me after checking to make sure the blinds were closed. I tracked every move he made with nervous, uncertain eyes. Anyone could see us, and I didn’t want him to face the end of Tristan’s gun if word got back to Tristan about us.

River gently took the bottle of vodka from my hand, setting it on the desk behind me while I stared at him, my breathing quickening. My heart slammed against my breastbone with every rapid beat.

“What...” I swallowed when he cupped the side of my neck and wrapped an arm around my waist, drawing me against him. “What are you doing?” I breathlessly asked, my heart pounding hard in my chest all while anticipation of his touch curled in my belly.

“One night with you wasn’t enough. It’ll never be enough,” he huskily confessed right before his lips molded against mine.

My mind shut down as I wrapped my arms around his neck, my fingers plunging into his soft, damp hair, tugging gently on the dark strands. I pressed my body closer to

his, needing to feel him against me.

A quiet rumble sounded from his chest as his arms flexed around me. Right as the kiss deepened, a knock sounded on the door, bursting our little bubble. I sucked in a sharp breath, abruptly yanking myself from River's arms. He cursed softly, clenching his jaw, anger flaring up in the beautiful, blue depths of his eyes. Closing his eyes, he drew in a deep breath, then cupped my face in his hands, soothing his lips over mine. My body instantly relaxed, my anxiety calming.

Oh, God, he was so fucking perfect.

He released me and walked over to the door, quickly unlocking it and swinging it open as I grabbed the bottle of vodka from the table and tipped it back to hopefully calm my body down because fuck , we'd been getting hot and heavy quick. We had almost gotten caught , and I wouldn't be able to live with myself if River got a bullet between his eyes because of me.

"River, we've got a problem," Wren said. "We're a bar of coke short for the shipment tomorrow."

"Fucking hell," River growled, running a hand down his face. "I'll ride out there. I need you to tail me."

Wren nodded, walking away. River pointed at me. "You're with me."

I rolled my eyes at him. He didn't have to drag me with him on this ride just because of Tristan's orders. Someone else could easily babysit me to appease the mother fucking president. "I'm not going to run the fuck away, River."

He smirked at me, and every nerve ending in my body curled, making me want him just as badly as I had last night. "Oh, I know, darlin'. I just want you on the back of

my bike.” My heart tripped in my chest. “Now, bring your cute ass on so we can hit the road. Time’s wasting.”

I was shocked to see Tristan, Jesup, and Tank at the warehouse when we got there, but I hadn’t expected to see Joey there, too. My eyes widened, and I sucked in a sharp breath at the sight of the beautiful man. The moment he spotted me on the back of River’s bike, he moved away from the desk, heading toward us while River parked. River gave my hand a subtle squeeze as he looked at me over his shoulder, understanding in the depths of his mesmerizing eyes. Tears threatened because Tristan would never understand the bond I had with Joey, yet River did. And he wasn’t even jealous.

I slid off the back, taking my helmet off and handing it to River. Then, I dashed forward, jumping on Joey. He caught me easily, his arms wrapping around me as I locked my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist.

“Hey, pretty girl,” he whispered as he pressed a tender kiss to my temple. My bottom lip trembled, and I sniffled as tears burned in my eyes. “Easy,” Joey soothed as he ran his hand over my hair, his other arm holding me just a little bit tighter.

“I’ll close the doors to give you guys some privacy. Tristan will understand,” River quietly spoke up as he passed us. I doubted Tristan would actually understand, but I figured River would make him.

I looked at him over Joey’s shoulder. His lips tilted up the slightest bit, and I gave him a watery one in return. He nodded once at me. My heart squeezed in my chest.

“Fuck, pretty girl, I’ve had people searching for you everywhere ,” Joey rasped. I closed my eyes and buried my face in the crook of his neck. “I was so fucking terrified that you were dead somewhere.”

“River took me to the hospital that night,” I quietly told him, my voice muffled by his neck.

Joey took a seat on his bike, keeping me wrapped around him. He gently pulled my head off of his shoulder so he could properly look at me. His eyebrows pulled together in confusion as he brushed a tear off of my cheek that I hadn’t realized had fallen. “What do you mean?”

“I called him,” I confessed. Pain flashed in Joey’s eyes for a moment before he smothered it. I swallowed thickly, my hands trembling on his back. “He asked me to live for him.” Joey’s eyes widened in shock. “So, I did. Vin found me pretty quickly, and he threatened to hurt all of you if I didn’t find a way out of that hospital.” I sniffled. “I wanted to die, Joey, but I lived because River asked me to.”

Joey smiled at me. “Remember that one I told you about?” he softly asked me. I frowned, my heart squeezing painfully in my chest. He reached up and cupped my cheek in his hand, his smile now sad. “It’s time to let me go, pretty girl.”

I shook my head at him, panic clawing at my throat. “I’m not ready,” I choked out.

He brushed the pad of his thumb over my bottom lip. “You can still hold me with you,” he promised. A tear slipped down my cheek. “But this thing between us? You need to let it go, pretty girl. You’ve got a good man in there. I saw the way he looked at you. It’s the way he’s looked at you since Tristan took you back to his clubhouse a year ago. He’s the one for you, Adelaide.”

“I can’t lose you,” I pleaded, my voice breaking.

He shook his head at me and cupped my face in his large, calloused hands. My chin wobbled. “I’m forever with you as long as you’ll keep me,” he promised. “But you need to move forward with him.”

A tear ran down my cheek. “Promise?” I asked, hating how wobbly my voice was.

He nodded. Then, he tightened his hands on my face and took my lips in a savage kiss. I burst into tears as I kissed him back, my tears tasting salty on my lips. I sobbed as I gripped his cut in my fists, so much pain spearing through my chest I could barely fucking breathe.

“Keep me with you,” he whispered against my lips. “But be with him, pretty girl. Let him love you.”

“The fuck is she doing here, River?” Tristan angrily demanded as I strode into the clubhouse with Joey.

“Couldn’t leave her at the clubhouse when I’m instructed to be by her side every damn second,” River retorted. “You want me here? She comes, too.”

Joey snorted. “So much for telling Tristan that she was outside with me,” Joey retorted.

River only smirked at him. Joey rolled his eyes, but River’s carefree attitude brought a small smile to my face. River’s eyes caught mine, and his smile widened the slightest bit.

Tristan strode over to me, and my smile dropped. I glared up at him, my hand tightening in Joey’s. Joey drew me a bit closer to him, his body tensing. “Drop the fucking attitude, Addy,” Tristan snapped.

My upper lip curled at him. “Go fuck yourself.”

His eyes flashed with anger. My heart knocked hard in my chest, fear pulsing through my body for a moment. I instinctively stepped closer to Joey. “You’re pushing your

fucking luck, Addy baby,” Tristan swore quietly.

He reached out to grab me, but I flinched back, fear spiking in my blood. Joey stepped in front of me at the same time River stepped forward, clearly ready to knock Tristan on his ass. Jesup grabbed River’s shoulder to keep him in place. I stepped back a pace, swallowing hard. “Don’t fucking touch me,” I snarled at Tristan as I fought down the flashback that was threatening to bring me to my knees.

“Fuck off, Joey. This is between me and Adelaide,” Tristan warned him.

“Back the fuck up, Tristan,” Joey growled, his voice cold and threatening. “Pretty girl, go on outside.” His voice was more soothing as he spoke to me, but he didn’t turn to face me, instead keeping his eyes locked on Tristan, the two men staring each other down.

My eyes caught River’s, where he was standing beside the table that the bars of coke were sitting on, rage flashing in his eyes on my behalf. “Leave her be, Grim,” River spoke up.

My eyes snapped back to Tristan’s as he stared at me with hurt eyes before he quickly smothered it and shook his head, turning away from me and striding toward the table.

Did he know ?

Joey turned to me and met my eyes. A sad smile appeared on his lips, breaking my heart because I didn’t want to taint him. But one look in his eyes, and I knew he could see I’d been ruined. Destroyed. “You alright, pretty girl?” he asked softly.

“I’m just going to get some air,” I muttered, turning on my heel to stride out of the warehouse. I could feel someone’s gaze on my back, and when I looked over my shoulder, River’s comforting eyes met mine. Those blue eyes warmed me, giving me

strength. I tilted my chin up slightly, and a small smile played on his lips before he turned his eyes away from me.

River

I kept my eyes on Adelaide's back until she strode out of the warehouse and from my sight. Gritting my teeth, I focused back on the task at hand. "Someone fucked her up bad," Joey stated, shaking his head as he ripped his eyes from her as well.

I didn't know what had happened between them outside, but her eyes had been red and puffy when she'd come in with him. Judging by the way they'd been holding hands though, it wasn't horrible. But it was probably heartbreaking.

"She won't fucking talk to me," Tristan grumbled. "I can't do anything if I don't know what happened."

I arched an eyebrow at my president, someone I was quickly losing all fucking respect for after the way he'd treated Adelaide. "Have you tried being nice to her instead of threatening her all of the time?" I asked him, most definitely overstepping my boundaries as a patched member but not really giving much of a fuck.

I never really gave much of a fuck about anything until Adelaide popped back up a little over a year ago. And the way he'd been treating her since he'd found her again? I'd lost count of the number of times I'd almost overstepped my boundaries and punched him in the fucking face, especially recently.

"I don't fucking threaten her, River," Tristan growled as he turned his dark eyes to me. "Learn your fucking place."

I shook my head at him, keeping my mouth shut, not wanting Adelaide to catch heat

if Tristan decided to think that I had feelings for her. I did, but he didn't need to know that. Everything between me and Adelaide was only mine and Adelaide's business. She didn't want anyone knowing right now, and as long as she wanted it that way, I would keep it that way, no matter how much I wanted to openly claim her as my woman.

Jesup met my gaze from across the table, a knowing look in his eyes. I clenched my jaw, worried he might say something, but Jesup surprisingly kept his mouth shut. We all turned, watching as Adelaide strode back into the warehouse.

"You've got company, boys," she drawled, sounding careless, but I could see the fear in her eyes. I moved away from the table, my hand going for the gun in my cut on instinct.

Tristan moved from the table. "Who?" he demanded.

"Oh, brother, remember me?" Red asked, stepping in behind Adelaide, his gun pointed at the back of her head. I clenched my jaw in fury, stepping forward before Jesup clamped a hand on my shoulder. He gave a slight shake of his head at me to warn me to keep my cool. Reacting like this would set Tristan off.

And Adelaide didn't fucking want that.

But right then, she was in danger. I could give less of a fuck about how Adelaide felt about Tristan knowing about us. I would not let her get hurt just to save Tristan's feelings. My brother, who I hadn't had contact with in years was not someone to fuck around with. If he was showing his face, he wanted something, and he'd hurt anyone who stood in his path.

Including my fucking woman.

"Let Addy the fuck go," Tristan ordered, his tone hard. He knew Red was my brother,

and he knew about the bad blood between us.

Red's eyes met mine, the same blue of my own reflected back at me. "Grim doesn't know, does he, River?"

Fuck. How the fuck did he know ? "Shut the fuck up, Red, and let Adelaide go," I ground through clenched teeth.

He shoved Adelaide onto her knees, the gun held at the back of her head. Her knees hit the concrete floor with a sickening thud. Her pulse was jumping wildly at the base of her neck, her eyes begging me to save her. I clenched my jaw, forcing myself to keep a clear head. Thinking with my rage would only get Adelaide hurt. "You going to suck my dick as good as you sucked River's, baby girl?" Red taunted, his lips twisted into a sadistic smirk.

"How the fuck do you know?" I glared, ignoring the rage on my president's face. I would deal with him later. Adelaide was my main priority. I just needed to give one of these dimwits enough time to incapacitate my brother.

I watched Joey move out of the corner of my eye, but I didn't turn to look at him, not wanting to alert Red. He was laser-focused on me, and that was how I needed it to remain.

"Fucking with the garage doors open probably wasn't your brightest move, brother." Red smirked. "Especially with how loud she was screaming your name, begging for your cock. I didn't think you were worthy of all that, but fuck, what the hell do I know, huh?"

I quickly raised my gun, pointing it at him. "Two seconds to let her the fuck go," I warned. And he knew I would pull the trigger.

Red smirked and kicked her to the ground with his boot to her back. I rushed forward,

shoving my gun back in my cut, ignoring Grim's angry gaze on my back. Joey punched Red in the side of the head, knocking him out cold as I moved toward Adelaide and grabbed her off of the ground, drawing her shaking form into my arms.

"What the fuck, River?!" Tristan finally roared.

I pressed my lips to Adelaide temple, ignoring him. She shook her head, her hands grasping my face, tears shimmering in her pretty, dark eyes. There was so much fear in her eyes. Fear for me. "Go to Joey," I softly instructed.

She swallowed thickly, her lips trembling. "I'm sorry, River," she whispered, hot tears sliding down her beautiful face.

I smirked down at her, trying to soothe her by pretending none of this was affecting me. I wasn't afraid of death, and honestly, if I was going out all because I loved her, then it wasn't a bad way to go. "I'm not. Now, go," I gently coaxed.

She moved over to Joey, where he slung an arm around her shoulders and pulled her against his side, supporting her. "You fucked my woman?!" Tristan roared when I turned to face him.

"She's not your fucking woman, Grim. You've been treating her like shit ever since she got back," I snapped at him. "How you could expect her to even want to be yours with the fucking way you've been treating her is fucking beyond me."

"I'm a hairsbreadth away from putting a bullet in your skull," Tristan threatened.

If I was getting a bullet in my skull, he was going to get a fucking wake-up call, and I hoped that Adelaide would choose to go back to Joey. The man had changed in the year she'd been gone, and I knew he would finally love her how she deserved to be loved if he got a second chance with her.

“If you would treat her right, Grim, you wouldn’t ever have to worry about another man like me,” I told him honestly.

He reached for his gun, and I clenched my jaw, my eyes flickering to Adelaide’s panicked ones. “No!” she screamed, shoving Joey off of her before he could get a better hold on her. She roughly crashed against me. I stumbled with the force she knocked into me with, wrapping my arms around her as I steadied us to keep us both from falling to the concrete floor.

“You’ll kill me first,” Adelaide seethed at Tristan as she clung to me, using every bit of her strength to stay with me.

He clenched his jaw, hurt flickering in his eyes. “Why him, Addy?” he asked her, sounding broken. I almost rolled my eyes. How the fuck could he be hurt about this shit when he had been doing nothing but treating her like pure garbage? Like a dog that might bite someone? “The first second that I’m gone, you hook up with the one man that I trusted with you mere hours after I just fucking had you in my damn bed.”

“I’m not the same woman I was a year ago, Tristan,” she told him, her voice apologetic. I knew she still loved him. Still cared about him. She didn’t want to hurt him, and she didn’t want him finding out this way.

I smoothed my hands over her back, holding her with me, giving her the strength that she needed to say what she needed. She couldn’t keep biting back her feelings.

“I don’t give a fuck, Addy!” he roared, thrusting his hands through his hair. Adelaide flinched. I tightened my hold on her, narrowing my eyes at Tristan. “Fucking hell, woman, you know that I fucking love you! Why would you do this?!”

She audibly swallowed, pain flashing across her face. I gritted my teeth. “You never saw me, Tristan,” she quietly told him, sounding broken. “You saw the girl you wanted me to be. You only saw who I was before you ruined me on my eighteenth

birthday.” His face shattered, revealing the broken man beneath his mask. The man all of us knew he would be without her. Her bottom lip trembled. “Please, Tristan, if you love me, you won’t kill him.”

With that, she reached up and trailed the tips of her fingers over my jaw before she strode out of the warehouse, trusting Tristan to make the right decision for her.

She had a hell of a lot more faith in him than I did.

Tristan’s eyes met mine. I was blown away by how shattered he looked. But this shit? It was his own fault. I didn’t feel bad for him at all.

“You’re banished from my fucking club, River.” I had figured as much. Not like I wanted to stay anyway. “You’ve got twelve hours to pack your shit, turn in your cut, and get the fuck out of my town. The only reason I’m not putting a bullet through your traitorous heart is because Addy cares about you, and I won’t hurt her more than she already is.” He looked toward the doors she had disappeared out of. “I’ve fucked her up enough as it is.”

With that, he turned on his heel, disappearing into the office inside of the warehouse.

Joey looked at me, and he heaved a sigh as he shoved his hands into his pockets. “I fucked up with her numerous times, River. That woman... she has a fucking heart of gold. Love her like she’s always deserved to be loved.” He drew in a deep breath. “She’s going to fight you at first. The woman loves me more than she probably should, and she’s going to do her damnest to try not to completely betray the love she feels for me, but I talked to her. Tried to talk her into letting me go.”

So that was why she’d come in looking a mess.

“She’ll always hold you with her, Joey,” I told him. He sighed as if he knew that, too. “I can bear that, and I can bear her love for you.” I shrugged my cut off my shoulders,

holding it out to Jesup. He nodded once at me. I was surprised to see a prideful glint in his eyes as he took my cut, almost as if he were proud of me for finally standing up for what I believed in. I looked back at Joey. “But as long as you make her happy, I don’t give a fuck how long she holds you with her, even if that’s the rest of her life.”

With that, I strode out of the warehouse so I could go pack my shit and get the fuck out of Sons of Death’s territory.

I threw my duffel bag onto the back of my bike and strapped it down, ignoring the sound of the pounding music from the clubhouse behind me. Tristan hadn’t come back to the clubhouse yet, probably staying away until he got the word that I was gone.

Adelaide had disappeared from the warehouse before I had left, and I had only received a single text from her telling me she was safe and that she would see me before I left. But she wasn’t there yet, and I didn’t want to wait around any longer just in case Tristan changed his mind about sparing my life.

I straddled my bike, getting ready to strap my helmet to my head when I noticed a slim figure walking through the gates to the clubhouse, her arms wrapped around herself. Those beautiful, brown eyes that I loved so much locked on me. “Leaving?” she softly asked as she drew closer.

“Got to,” I informed her as she continued making her way over to me. “Grim’s orders.”

“I’m sorry.”

I grabbed her hips, pulling her closer to me. Her hands settled over my shoulders. I slid my arms around her waist, drawing her between my knees as I propped my ass on my bike seat. “Don’t be. I’ve been dying to have a taste of you since you came back from Joey’s club,” I admitted. “I’ll never regret anything that happened between

us, darlin'."

"Where are you going to go?" she asked, reaching up to run her thumb over the stubble on my jaw.

I shrugged. "Wherever the road takes me, I guess," I told her. But I had a feeling I would be going back home. Home to Texas and to the club I was born and raised in before family shit drove me away.

"You'll take care, right?" Her eyes ran over my face, shiny with more unshed tears. Today was the most I'd ever seen this woman cry.

I reached up to cup her cheek. "Always, darlin'."

She leaned down and pressed her lips to mine. I deepened the kiss for a moment, wanting this with her one last time. I knew she and I were destined to be together, but I had to be patient. She would come to me when it was time. And I knew when that time came, she would find me without even meaning to.

After a moment, I released her, strapping my helmet to my head as she stepped back from me, wrapping her arms back around herself.

"Live for me," I told her as I started up my bike.

She swallowed thickly, tears sparkling in her beautiful, brown eyes. "Always," she promised.

I peeled out of the lot, leaving the last bit of my happiness behind with her.

But I knew she would find her way to me when the time was right.