



Selah's Wish (Imperial Knights MC #1)

Author: *Liberty Parker*

Category: Action&Adventure

Description: It's been a rough year with all of the changes happening in Butcher and Selah's life. It's also been one of the easiest they've had in years, which has made them complacent. They try to find a new normal routine, but it's not the same since they've been uprooted from their home. With their old enemies still in hiding, a new one rises, and their life turns into one chock full of chaos and emotions turmoil.

With the Imperial Knights, nothing is impossible as long as they stick together. During this holiday season, they'll have to make a few sacrifices as they plan on taking back their clubhouse as well as their town. This year, Selah has all of her girls in one place and has become a mother figure to her old man's son, Nitro. Butcher discovers what it means to open his heart and let the light of the Christmas spirit fill it.

Changes are coming for this club, but that's not always a bad thing—until it is.

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PROLOGUE

Selah

It's been a year since all hell broke loose and we ended up lacing up our bootstraps and moving to Roanoke. What I've learned since then is that kids are more adaptable and resilient than adults are. Way more flexible. We adults, we miss our home. I may not have lived there as long as the other old ladies and men, but I finally planted some roots that were my own and that's been a hardship for me to let go of.

All the single men ended up living in bunker style accommodations that have a common living area and dorm style showers and toilets. When I took the tour when construction was complete, I was initially concerned that they didn't have any real privacy outside of the shower curtains and stalls. But they all took it in stride and have made it work. New friendships have been formed and they have a bond that's indomitable.

I honestly don't know how they've managed to not step on each other's toes.

Couples with children ended up in mobile homes that were wheeled in, tied down, and quicker than I could blink, the water and electric lines were hooked up. The connections that Roanoke has have made it an easy transition, all things considered. The old ladies assisted in getting furniture and household items, so everyone's able to 'do life' with their own family. We're not forced to be together all the time, which is a good thing seeing as many from the Cedar Creek chapter have abilities, while those in Roanoke do not.

Butcher's in a meeting so I'm alone with the kids. All four of them are hyped up on sugar because I had the bright idea to start making Christmas candy to pass out to not only our club, but Roanoke's as well. I'd love nothing more than to take them outside and let them run some of their energy off, but since I have a glaze concoction boiling on the stove, that's a pipe dream.

The kids right now are pretending to be pirates, skidding around with homemade swords and wearing makeshift eye patches that were constructed out of kitchen utensils and tinfoil. Currently, they are running amuck, high on life, acting their ages. I grind my teeth, reminding myself that they're going to have a childhood full of uproarious laughter, imagination, and freedom unlike anything I ever knew. My sensitivity to the ruckus needs to take a backseat because this is the life I always envisioned for myself as a child and daydreamed about, and the fact that my girls are living it is beyond precious. Add in the bonus of Nitro, who has taken his position as big brother to heart, and I'm a happy woman.

"Give me ten more minutes and then we'll head outside so y'all can seize the property!" I holler around the ear shattering noise.

Amelia skids to a stop beside me, giving me puppy eyes. "Can we play in the snow?"

Shit. I forgot about that white powder that makes my fingers and toes go numb. I'm not used to the wintry months, I'm a southern girl who counts tumbleweeds in her sleep.

"Sure," I say, drawing out the word while trying to contemplate a new idea that'll keep them from losing their minds and swearing that I'm a deal breaker.

Faye, who also skidded to a stop near me, bats her eyelashes. "Promise?"

"Pinky promise," I swear, even though I really wish I'd stop opening my mouth and

inserting my foot.

“Dad will be home soon, he can take us if you don’t want to,” Nitro offers, but the look in his eyes tells me he really wants me to be the one who takes them out to dispel their vigor.

“Mom doesn’t break pinky promises. Do you, Mom?” Hannah, the manipulative one of the bunch asks, knowing damn good and well that if I’m called out or challenged, I’m going to face it head on.

“That’s right,” I reply, lightening my tone into a playful one so she doesn’t put two and two together and realize that she all but put me in my place.

Damn smart, intuitive kids. I love that they all have some sort of specialty, but I wish they wouldn’t use it on me.

“Has it been ten minutes yet?” Nitro asks with a sulking tone as he hauls himself to the front door and starts sliding on his snowsuit, boots, and hat.

“No,” I laugh. “More like three.”

“Ah, man,” he pouts, shuffling his feet. “Ten minutes takes forever.”

“You could go clean your room, that’d eat up some of that time,” I suggest, smiling to myself because I know, just like every Mom in existence does, that he’d rather sit there and sulk before picking up after himself.

Just as I expected, he gets a deer in the headlights look on his face before he turns away from me where I can no longer see his eyes. Cleaning is a sin in their eyes, they claim they can’t find their things when things have been moved from where they put them. The only problem with that is that I’ve twisted my ankles more times than I can

count navigating through the black hole they call their bedrooms. I've had my fair share of sitting down with either ice packs or the heating pad on my backside from falling on my ass when I went head over tea kettle.

"You can't hide from cleaning forever, Nitro," I remind him.

"I'll do it tonight," he mumbles.

"Before or after lights out?" I ask, continuing with our bantering. This is how he and I bonded. He's so much like his dad that it's uncanny and ridiculous.

"That's yet to be decided," he counters, a playful smirk following his words.

"Don't forget, I own a flashlight and I don't mind being your spotlight in the darkness," I tease.

"Come on, Nitro. We'll help you get your room picked up so Mom doesn't have to go all lighthouse on us." Hannah giggles, pulling on Nitro's sleeve. He's subdued as he follows her, muttering underneath his breath about how unfair life is.

Our boys room was too much to handle in one sitting, so we're taking a break now that my glaze has coated the handmade candy. The winter chill has me shivering and my nose plus fingers feels like they're icicles. But the kids need to expel some energy, and they need to get themselves some exercise outside of the house, even if it feels like we're doing so in Antarctica.

"Snowball fight!" Nitro roars as he rushes at the girls with two handfuls of packed snow in his hands.

The girls all squeal simultaneously, running behind trees to take cover.

We've built four snowmen, and my hair is soaking wet due to the angels we laid down and brushed with our bodies. Thankfully, I had the forethought to tuck extra knitted toboggans I bought online for a steal in my pockets to exchange dry ones for wet ones.

Out of the corner of my peripheral I notice Butcher, Wrecker, Striker, and Prowler sneaking up behind Nitro, each one with three to four snowballs of their own clutched in their palms. A small grin grows on my face when I see what they're up to.

Nitro is good with the girls. However, he also needs to have some male bonding and these guys always step up to the plate. They spend time with our girls too, but there are times when roughhousing is called into play, and then there are times when playtime requires a more gentle touch. To the outside world these men are outlaws who are brash and rude, but to us, their family, they're our heartbeat, lifeline, and saviors. They always have been and always will be one thing for each of the women they've put their life on the line for—our salvation.

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ONE

Butcher

Stealthily sneaking up behind Nitro, each one of us guys pull our arms back, aim, and release the snowballs in our grips. None of the four of us miss our target, causing Nitro to shift on his feet and turn to face us, utter shock painted on his face.

“This means war!” he shouts pointing his finger accusingly toward us, his battle cry heard like thunder throughout our proximity. The girls join in on his declaration, each one of them gathering their own pile of snow and packing it into a ball.

“You little hellions are going to gang up on us?” Prowler asks, sounding aghast but I can see the twitch of his lips as he conceals his smile.

“We’ll always protect our brother,” Faye declares, growling at us with her teeth showing. She crouches down low, taking us in, choosing her opponent.

“Ut oh, Butcher. You not feeding your kids enough, man? I think Faye’s protein deprived. She looks like she wants to take a chomp out of our asses,” Striker teases.

“Fresh meat,” Amelia sings, snarling, mirroring her sister’s battle stance.

Selah stands up, clapping her hands. “War has been declared, gentlemen. You each have three minutes to gather your weapons and either accept the challenge or wave a white flag and surrender. Time begins now.”

With a giddy round of laughter, the kids all stoop down and begin making their weapons. The guys and I all glance at each other and stretch low, raking up as much snow as we can and creating snowballs ourselves—the bigger the better.

In the last year, we haven't had a lot of opportunity to spend as much time with the kids as I'd have liked. We're making plans on how to reclaim our territory and our home from the alphabets of law enforcement. So times like this have become paramount toward my relationship with my son and daughters.

When we meet in the middle, after Selah calls time, I ask my children in a taunting manner, "Are you sure y'all wanna take us on? We've been doing this a lot longer than the four of you have."

"Bring it, old man," Hannah challenges.

"You may be more experienced than we are, but we're younger and are faster than you are," Amelia says with a smirk on her face.

"Yeah. Our bones don't ache like y'all's do," Nitro adds, snickering.

"Hey! Not cool, little man," Prowler sniffles. "That was one time!"

"One time that lasted a month," Faye counters. "I can't move one more box, my knees are aching. What's up with all this snow anyway?" She parrots his words used on the day last winter when we finally got our homes up and moving day came about. Our things were taken out of storage and the plethora of boxes were brought to us.

"That's low, little girl," Prowler growls.

I'll never forget the day Selah came rushing into the room shouting that all of our belongings had been tossed on the street like garbage in front of our clubhouse. After

we'd tossed our cuts at the agents' feet, we took off and didn't stop long enough to think about our belongings. Luckily, the town found out about what had been done to our possessions and they rallied the troops.

Trucks showed up in abundance before we had the chance to pick up the phone and reach out to some of our allies to ask for assistance. They neatly packed our things into boxes and seal-proof containers and locked them up in the local storage facility. Mercifully, they picked one that was temperature controlled so some of our things that were irreplaceable and important to us—like baby books and home movies didn't end up being corroded or corrupted.

We reimbursed the townsfolk for their time and efforts. When the houses were ready, we paid them handsomely to bring our belongings to us. Several of them stayed long enough to sit down with us and share what's been happening in Cedar Creek. We're nowhere near ready to take on such a profound conglomerate as the FBI and ATF, but we're gathering resources and sharing intel back and forth with ones who aren't under the belt of the pussy community.

Selah clears her throat, yanking me from my musings and asks, "Do you accept the challenge placed before you?"

"We do," the four of us say in agreement.

"Then take your place on the field and let the games begin!" Selah yells, tossing her fisted hands in the air and whistling.

Wrecker, Prowler, Striker, and I are laying on our backs in the snow, panting as we try to regain our breath. Where the hell do they get all of that energy from? Whatever Kool-Aid they're drinking, I'd like a sip of it. Getting old sucks.

"I can't believe we got our asses whooped by a bunch of toddlers," Wrecker

exclaims, wheezing the words out between huffy pants as he draws oxygen into his lungs.

“We’ve gotta hit the gym. Often,” I suggest. “We’re outta shape.”

“When did that happen?” Striker probes.

“We’ve gotten lazy over the last year, apparently,” I state. “We’ve had more church meetings than ever before which means we’ve sat on our asses since coming here. Things have been quiet, too quiet, and we’ve become complacent.”

“Because we haven’t had any enemies show their faces since being here,” Wrecker summarizes, clicking his tongue. “They’ve been laying low since we joined forces and blew up their facilities. They’re cowards, always have been and always will be. Right now, they’re using their connections to not only disappear, but cover their tracks.”

“I’m sick of being on the defense. It’s time we take more offensive measures,” I angrily state. “They’ve taken enough from us, it’s time we take back what’s ours.”

“And we will,” Wrecker insists. “Once we have all of the intel and have ourselves a solid game plan.”

“We’re waiting on our inside sources to come through for us,” Prowler reminds me.

“They will,” Striker predicts. “We weren’t the only ones who uncovered who the dirty pieces of shits are. Don’t forget, they came to us not the other way around. They aren’t playing around but because the asswipes are on the right side of the law, things have to happen a certain way.”

The twins aren’t sensible when it comes to anything serious on most days. So when

they do become rational in their thinking, instead of attempting to be the clowns of a situation, everyone sits back and listens. Their intuitions have saved our asses more often than not.

“Alright, I’ll catch y’all later,” I state as I roll over until I’m on all fours and push myself upward.

“Have fun cleaning Nitro’s room, man,” Prowler says around a laugh.

“We have to start working out more,” I mumble as I make it to my feet. My punishment for being on the losing side of the war is that I clean his room. This is going to take me half the night to complete because he’s been putting it off for days and the pile of toys and clothes has gotten higher. “Don’t forget your end of the loss.”

“Fuck,” Wrecker mutters. “I’ll get the outside toys back where they belong. You jackasses have fun painting the girls’ nails.”

“Wait! Last time we got assigned that we ended up with our nails painted too,” Striker protests.

“It wasn’t so bad,” Prowler exclaims. “I kinda liked the black polish, made me look like a badass.”

I shake my head and chuckle as I walk into the house. Life is never boring with my brothers around. They keep things interesting.

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TWO

Selah

The women and I are in the kitchen scraping pots and pans, laughing while sharing stories of our men and children after a communal meal that took place in the Roanoke's clubhouse. We try not to intrude on their group activities, not wanting to wear out our welcome, but when we're invited, we accept the invitation without a second thought.

Belle and Rory, Jingles and Banshee's old ladies, blast Christmas carols on the speaker, shaking their hips and bumping ours when we don't immediately join in on the dance. When the song switches over and Candy Shop by 50 Cent projects throughout the kitchen, her eyes widen in surprise as she gasps.

"Someone's messed with my playlist! Jingles! You're in so much trouble, mister," she bellows out a growl as she stomps out of the room.

"How much trouble do you think he's in right now?" Harper inquires. None of us answer because it's not often that Belle gets angry so there's no telling what she's going to do or how she's going to react. But we're all willing to help her get a little payback if the situation calls for it.

"She's not going to take this well," Ryleigh professes. "Her playlists are sacred."

"No doubt about that," Rory snorts. "She acts meek and shy, but I promise you, when the situation calls for it, that woman can hold a nasty grudge and in response becomes

as mean as a rattlesnake.”

Now, that’s a surprising turn of events. My interactions with her, even when Moira was missing and it was discovered she was my M, never lost her cool. She’s so damn sweet that it nearly gives you a toothache.

“Well,” Laney drawls out, “I say we don’t let a good beat go to waste.”

The other women and I glance at each other, our faces alight with beaming smiles as we nod in agreement. From there, we begin shimmying our hips and crouching low to the ground as we enthusiastically sing along with the high-energy lyrics.

We’re so invested in the music that we don’t hear the kitchen door swing open. “Hell, yeah. This is where the party is happening at,” Prowler whoops. He rushes over to us and jumps in the middle, shaking his ass and dipping down low with us.

I’m not surprised in the least when Scythe refuses to let Prowler be the center of attention and rushes over, leaping into the fray of the pulsating beat. These two guys can dance, but that shouldn’t be surprising considering they use their hips in more provocative ways from what I’ve ‘accidentally’ overheard during drunken rumblings in the club.

Intoxicated men can’t hold their tongues, constantly joking about things that I’m still not used to being so freely spoken about. That’s what happens when you grow up in a community full of religious zealots. Sex is not something you hear spoken about openly over a campfire or a communal bar. Making love is a foreign concept to them, bedding is for breeding—nothing more than that.

It chaps my hide that they’re still out there, doing what they consider as making the world a better place to live by providing it with strong, impenetrable soldiers, and beautiful, perfectly submissive breeders. Yuck, their way of rationalizing their beliefs

makes me gag. Women, men, and children are not belongings, they're human fucking beings. I can't wait until the day comes when they're obliterated from the planet and I'll do whatever it takes to help that come to fruition.

"Hey, sexy," my man whispers in my ear as he tightly pulls me into his front, grinding on me. "I can't wait to get you home. The way you're moving your body is giving me dirty thoughts."

"Hmm," I hum, lifting my arm over my shoulder and wrapping it around his neck, anchoring him to me. "Good to know that even when I'm not trying you find me sexy."

This man is good for my ego. I never believed I'd amount to anything more than laying on my back and delivering children to the cause. My girls may not have been brought about from an affectionate, committed relationship, but they're mine and I couldn't love them anymore than I do. In my opinion, they're perfect no matter what.

"Harper and Wrecker are keeping the kids tonight," he informs me.

"Are they?" I ask, glancing over at Harper and seeing her wink at me. Wrecker wasn't a part of the girls' lives, as a matter of fact neither was I outside of brief passings in the hallways, but he's making up for the lost time with them by injecting himself in their lives as much as he can now that they're home. There are more sleepovers at his house than not and it makes me happy that they love him and their aunt as if the sun rises and sets because of them.

Gabriel has also stepped up. They know him better than Wrecker because he worked it into the schedule as much as he could to be the guard of the kids room. He made a point to let them know who he was to them, and he made a pact with them that no matter what, he'd see them safely removed from the facility. It's a damn good thing my kids excel in keeping secrets.

My eyes lift, and when they meet Harper's, she winks at me again, a smirk playing on her lips. I shoot her a smile in thanks as I tilt my head sideways and capture Butcher's lips with mine. After he lays a scorching kiss on me, he pulls back and the look in his eyes has my knees weakening. My man has one of the best poker faces you'll ever cross, but when it comes to me, Nitro, Hannah, Amelia, and Faye, he's an open book with his feelings.

"When do you think it'd be acceptable for us to make our escape?" I ask, clenching my legs together to ease the throbbing ache that's suddenly made itself known between them.

"We've got this, Selah. Y'all get out of here and enjoy a kid-free evening," Laney tells me. "It's already basically done; all we have to do is finish loading the dishwasher and putting away the things we washed by hand."

"Thanks," I say, my voice coming out huskier than I intended it to.

"Come on, baby girl. You heard the lady, go say goodnight to the kids and let's get out of here. I have plans for you and this delectable body of yours."

Stretching my limbs as I climb from the bed, my mind begins to wander back to the reason behind why I'm feeling spent. A smile spreads across my face as I recall the way my old man barely let me cross the threshold of the house before he pressed me up against the door and ripped my clothes from my body. He took me there first, then decided that every surface in the house was an acceptable place to touch and possess every inch of my body.

The kids excitedly bid us goodnight last night when we sought them out but other than that, they ignored us completely. Wrecker had them enthralled with the promise of a slumber party in the living room, sleeping bags and all, accompanied by popcorn and movies. Harper and he actually bunker down with them when they have nights

like that. He's going to make a good dad. Harper will be delivering their son in a few short weeks. I should've known they'd be taking the kids seeing as they're worried they won't be able to until they establish a routine. My kids can be a handful by themselves, adding a newborn baby into the mix will have them pulling their hair out by the roots.

The couples have had too much free time on their hands. We've had an influx of new old ladies joining the group, which means all the pregnancies and births in the year that we've been here is something no one saw coming. Some of the men met their old ladies in Roanoke.

Python had a one night stand with a hairdresser in town—that one time romp between the sheets produced a baby that'll be here after the holidays. If they know what they're having, they're not sharing that information.

A woman by the name of Audrey stole Beast's heart via online. She came to town for a conference and after the two of them met, she never went home. They're like two peas in a pod, they complement each other well. They have the most beautiful baby girl that they named Remi. She's the quietest, easiest going baby I've ever met. She's simply adorable and the men fight over who gets to hold her whenever her parents bring her around.

With everyone 'wifing up', Prowler and Striker tossed their black book into the fire and have steered clear of any single woman who enters the same room as they're in.

I can't wait until a woman comes along and knocks them on their ass. There are bets going around between the men on if they'll share an old lady, or if they'll become possessive and claim one individually.

My money is on them finding their own. They're good at sharing their belongings, but I doubt their heart will end up being something they'll openly share with a

singular lady between them. I guess we won't know the answer to that until fate reveals itself.

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THREE

Butcher

Last night, I was like a horny teenager who got his first taste of pussy. I can never seem to get enough of my old lady, especially when there's no one around to interrupt. Leaving her alone in bed this morning wasn't an easy feat when all I wanted to do was crawl back between the sheets and take her again.

Sitting around this table once a-fucking-gan is grating on my nerves. I'm more of a go-getter than a sit around and count all of our ducks. But what Dragon has to say has my ears perking up.

"Agent Wallace called me last night. He had some interesting things to share. The fuckers who called for our cuts so he wouldn't mess with our Royal brethren are under agency investigation. They dug up enough analysis that ties them to the community of pussies. He's projecting the investigators will have everything they need within the next six months or so. He highly advised us to do a little spying of our own."

There's pounding on the table and whoops permeating the air as the men surrounding it get excited.

Dragon holds up his hand before continuing. "I told him we weren't detectives, but we do have some friends in the town that are keeping us in the loop. I need to get in touch with a few of those neighbors and have them start charting the comings and goings of the men and women." What Dragon just said has merit, but my gut instinct

is telling me there needs to be more than those facts marked down on a sheet of paper.

“That won’t be enough,” I interrupt Dragon. “They’ll need more than who’s going in and out of the gates. They need to be followed and photographed by people who know what they’re doing and can stay hidden in the shadows.”

“I agree,” Dragon states. “But I don’t want to put any of that on the folks from town. Do we have anyone that won’t be recognized by them who’s trained in being incognito?”

“They know each and every one of us by now,” Beast concludes. “They have a file on each and every one of us, whether we’re from Cedar Creek or Roanoke. All members have been documented and I’m sure our mugshots have been passed around to anyone guarding the premises.”

“What about asking Marcum and Xavier LeBlanc to do it for us? They aren’t technically patched in so I doubt they’re on anyone’s radar,” Animal suggests, causing a lot of moaning and groaning to pass through the room. Not from me, however. I have a smirk on my face. Those two are deadly and the three of us have had a lot of fun throughout the years. Some of those exploits are more scandalous than others. The three of us have a bloodlust that we have a hard time quenching when we get together. We feed on one another and it’s not always a good thing, but it’s a blast, nevertheless.

“Why did the mention of those two names cause everyone to let out those blubbing noises?” Brick asks, leaning back in his chair.

“Because they’re ruthless and they have zero damns to give,” Dragon answers, blowing out a breath. “Though I do have to admit that if anyone is capable of getting the job done, it’d be them.”

“Because—” Brick prompts, wanting a more thorough answer than what he received.

“I can meet—” I begin saying to a vocal round of no’s and absolutely not’s.

The men from Roanoke raise their eyebrows at that. They don’t know the man I become when I team up with the LeBlancs. They only know the guy I am since I’ve been here, and my thirst for blood hasn’t reared its ugly head. I’m sure that can be attributed to Selah and her girls coming into my life. They seem to satiate the monster residing within me.

“Do I even want to know?” Banshee asks, tilting his head in my direction.

“One night, when we’ve consumed an entire bottle of tequila, apiece, I’ll tell you all about some of the shit those three have gotten into in the past,” Saber says. “Trust me, I’ve treated them for things that should’ve killed them and it still gives me nightmares to this day.”

“You’ll need the cheap stuff,” I supply. “The more inebriated you are, the easier it’ll be to hear about and digest all the good times I’ve had with them.”

“Some of them are horror shows in the making,” Prowler says, smiling at me. “It’ll give you the shivers and the best kind of nightmares if you witness them in person.”

“Is it gory or freaky?” Scythe asks.

“It’s worse than thinking the boogeyman is under your bed,” Animal conveys. “Once you hear it you’ll never be able to forget it.”

“Sounds like I’m out,” Scythe pipes in.

“You couldn’t even handle hearing about the chop doll from China, you definitely

couldn't handle this," I say, teasing him for being a wuss.

"Oh, come on!" Scythe yells in a dismayed tone. "Tell me those things don't freak you the fuck out."

"Dolls don't scare me, people do," Brick remarks. "I can rip a toy's head off and burn it in the pit."

"You can do that to a person too," I add. "Want to know how I have firsthand knowledge of that?" I ask with a smile that I'm sure comes across as more of a vicious snarl.

"You're more than you appear, aren't you?" Jingles inquires.

"I'm one of those 'don't judge a book by its cover' example. I can be your best friend or your worst nightmare come to life," I explain.

"It just depends on what side of the bed he rolls out of," Striker inputs, being a smartass.

"Any day I'm rolling away from my old lady is a fucked up day," I counter, snapping my teeth at Striker.

"Well, that went off track fast," Dragon says, sighing. "I need my men to get in touch with your contacts in Cedar Creek and ask them if they're willing to make a log of anything they find suspicious back home."

"I'll get David and Brenda, the hardware store owners, to write down everything they've been texting me and have them start cataloging it instead," I respond. "Do we want them to stop sending us the shit through text as well?"

Dragon grunts before saying, “Nah. I still want to know everything before the feds do. I want to censor things before it goes into writing and is filed as an official document. Let your contacts know that too.” We all nod our heads in understanding.

Whereas we’re working hand in hand with some of the officials, there’s some sensitive things that are shared between us and our homestead folks that are absolutely nobody’s business. We agreed to help serve and protect our community, and in return, they’ve consented to turn a blind eye to things they would normally report as suspicious activity to local law enforcement.

We may not be law-abiding citizens, but we’ve kept the town running like a well-oiled machine and have safeguarded the civilians of Cedar Creek, no matter what their walk in life is. We aren’t heroes in their eyes, and they aren’t inside of our immediate circle, but they understand us and so far, nobody’s passed judgment on us for our lifestyle.

FOUR

Selah

With permission from Dragon, Prowler, and the other knights of the round table, I took a quarter of our money I recovered from those who seized our clubhouse, and invested it into some of the larger corporations. It was a shocking surprise when I sat with Prowler the first time and witnessed what a wiz he is when it comes to numbers. He comes off as such a playboy and philanderer that I never saw that coming.

Looking through our financial portfolio, pride swamps me when I see how our finances have soared. Prowler and I did our homework, and if this morning's numbers are any indication, we did good. As a matter of fact, I think we need to sell a few of our stocks before they plummet. That's not a decision I can make on my own and seeing how they're at the Roanoke's clubhouse in church, this is something that'll have to keep until I can sit down with the officers and get permission. While waiting for them to get done, I start browsing, looking for new companies to invest in.

I can hear the kids happily playing in the other room as I lose myself in my computer. I'm not sure how much time passes by before my phone begins ringing, playing Harper's ringtone. I give my inner circle their own song so I can determine what calls are important to take immediately, and which ones can hold off until I'm through with whatever I'm doing at the time.

Hitting the accept button, I place it to my ear and answer, "Good morning, Harp."

Heavy panting and breathing comes through the receiver before Harper says, "My

water broke. The guys are in church which means they don't have their phones so I can't get a hold of Wrecker. When I spoke to Laney earlier, she told me she was turning her ringer off and taking a nap while Nix, Naveah, and Nova were."

"Have you tried calling the clubhouse directly?" I ask her, powering down my laptop.

"It's busy," she wheezes. "Damn, these contractions are no joke!"

"Amen to that sister," I agree, snorting. "I'm gonna grab the kids, hit the clubhouse, then I'll head that way. Will you be okay for twenty minutes on your own?"

"Yeah. I'm sitting in the tub right now because I'm leaking like a faucet out of my hoo-ha. Sonofabitch," she growls.

Tilting the phone so I'm not screaming in Harper's ear, I yell, "Kids! Get your coats on right now. We have to go."

Like a herd of elephants, feet begin stomping my way and my eyes widen when I see they already have their coats and snow boots on. "We're ready, Mama. Tell Aunt Harper not to be scared, she won't deliver our cousin in the tub."

"Alright. Did you hear that, Harper?" I ask as I lift the mouthpiece back up to where she can hear me speaking.

"Yes! Tell her thank you. That's what I was afraid of," she answers around a puff of air.

Not hanging up so I can hear if she becomes distressed, I usher the kids out of the house and we quickly sprint to the main clubhouse. When we cross into the main room, I see one of the men on the phone with a notepad in front of him. They really need to invest in call waiting if they're going to tie up the line like this.

Even though it's not his fault, I still snap at him, "You shouldn't be on the phone for a ridiculous amount of time. There was an emergency with one of the old ladies and she couldn't get through!"

He jerks back in shock and looks at me as if I've lost my mind. "There was an accident up town and the phone lines were taken out. I've been trying to get a dial tone for thirty minutes at the minimum. I was trying to call the operator to see if it'd go through and I could get an ETA on when we'll be able to make calls."

"Sorry," I call over my shoulder, feeling like a gigantic bitch. But damn, my sister-in-law is in labor and needs her old man by her side. I could hear the fear and wobble in her voice which means some of her old demons are rearing their ugly heads.

"It's okay," he remarks, tossing down his pen. "Make sure you knock first so you don't get shot!"

"Got it!" I holler.

This isn't my first rodeo interrupting a club meeting. Of course, most of those times they were expecting me so I could give them information as I came across it. This time, they aren't anticipating my arrival and they have been known to have a trigger finger.

Before I make it to the closed door, I start bellowing, "Wrecker! Harper needs you, now!" Since I'm in a panic, I begin banging on it once I get my feet settled before the slab of wood. "Knock, knock. I'm coming in."

"The fuck?" I hear Brick wonder. Once the door is swung open, I'm looking at a frazzled president. "Selah, these meetings are sacred and it's not acceptable for you to come barging in."

Wrecker is up on his feet, a few steps behind Brick as he scans me trying to dissect why I'm in such a state. "Wrecker. Harper's water broke and the phone lines are down. She's been trying to get a hold of anyone, but nobody was available. I told her I was coming to get you. So move your ass, mister!"

Like a bull being released to the pen, he stumbles over Brick before tripping over his ginormous boots and landing face first on the ground. "Fuck!" he shouts as he leaps back onto his feet and begins running down the hallway. Nitro finds this hilarious and is bowled over in laughter as my girls cup their mouths, snickering behind them.

"No time to make fun of your uncle, kids. Let's go," I instruct them, jogging out of the building, hoping that they're on my tail because there's no time to dawdle.

When I cross the threshold, I hear Brick yell out, "Church dismissed! It's baby day!"

Rounds of cheer reverberate throughout the enclosed structure, I can hear their calls of cheer through the walls. I can say this with certainty, these men are all about family whether it's from their blood or chosen.

Gabriel and I are pacing the waiting room, waiting for word from our brother that our nephew has been born. I know these things take time, but damn, we're going on six hours now and my patience is waning.

"Baby," Butcher says, stepping in front of me to stop my steps. "You're wearing a hole in the linoleum. Take a break and come sit with me for a minute."

I sniff at him. It feels like if I stop moving, everything else will too. When I look up at my old man, I see concern instead of humor on his face. Acquiescing, I say, "Okay."

When he has me sitting in the seat beside him, my knees start bouncing. I swear it's

like some kind of switch has been turned on inside of me. I can't seem to stay still no matter how hard I try. A warm cup is handed to me, and I don't even look up to see who gave it to me before telling them thanks.

The door to the waiting room slams open, hitting the wall and Wrecker is standing there in a daze. "He's here."

Shouts of congratulations are shared as I stand up on shaky legs. Laney and I clasp hands as we shuffle our way in front of him. Both of us synchronously asking, "How's Harper?"

"Tired, but she's resting," he states.

"And our nephew?" I continue seeking answers.

"He's perfect. So fucking perfect. Here, I have photos." Gabriel, Laney, and I close in on him as he scrolls through his phone's album.

"What did you name him?" Gabriel asks.

"Stone. His middle name is Gabriel," Wrecker proudly tells us, slapping our brother on the back. If our youngest sibling had questions on whether Wrecker has forgiven him and accepted that he had no other alternative than what he was forced to do at the community, this answers that confusion.

"I'm honored," Gabriel says, his voice choking. "Thank you, brother. I'll make my nephew proud to carry a piece of my name."

"I know you will," Wrecker agrees, pulling Gabe into a backbreaking embrace, pounding him on the shoulder. "I know he will because I'm already proud of the man you've become."

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FIVE

Butcher

As the old ladies gather around Harper, oohing and aahing at the baby boy in her arms, Wrecker stands back at my side wearing a smile I've never seen him have before. I remember this feeling well when Nitro was born. Unlike him, I didn't get to experience it with the woman I love. Instead, I was put into a father's room, one where they put men, who for one reason or another can't be in with their baby's mother.

In my case, it was due to the fact that a club whore entrapped me by poking holes in the condom, thinking if she wound up pregnant, I'd claim her as mine. It had the opposite effect of what she wanted. After Nitro was born, I kicked that bitch to the curb once she got a wad of cash and signed on the dotted line giving up her parental rights. There was no way I was going to share custody with a manipulative, shady ass bitch. There's no telling what she'd end up doing with my boy. I may not have a bucketful of values, but I'd never trick someone and mess with their future.

I may hate the way he came about but I don't regret Nitro. I never will. My son is everything. He's the best thing outside of Selah and the girls that ever happened to me. Looking around the crowded room I release a chuckle. There's a reason Wrecker paid a wack to have this particular post-partum room. It's due to its size considering it's now crowded with men and women who belong to the Imperial Knights. I stand shoulder to shoulder with Wrecker on one side and Brick on the other.

Wrecker pats me on the shoulder as he walks toward the middle of the room where he

loudly clears his throat, ceasing all conversation taking place. “We had a hard decision to make in regard to our son and who would become his godparents. We both have siblings we love with every beat of our heart, but we also have brothers and sisters within the club that we’d both lay our lives on the line for.”

Cheers reverberate around the room accompanied by the stomping of feet. We may not be religious in the aspect of godparents but we have our own version of what that means to us. When we make these determinations, it’s not necessarily because we want you to be responsible for them monetarily if we were to pass in the line of our club duties, but because we want you to be there for them, teach them, make sure they stay as safe as humanly possible. Family, nine times out of ten, will end up with custody of our children, but our club will step in, play the big sister, and brother roles—if we end up roaming in the spirit realm.

Wrecker picks up his speech where he drifted off from a few seconds ago. “If we had our choice, every one of you would be declared his godparent. You all mean something to us,” he says, patting his chest. “But when we got to the heart of the matter, we decided we wanted our son to know he belonged to the Imperial Knights, to both the Cedar Creek branch and the Roanoke branch of our wild and unruly family. Therefore, our Roanoke choices are Brick and Ryleigh.”

Brick has a shocked look plastered on his face, and his old lady, Ryleigh, has tears dripping down her cheeks. “I’m honored, brother. We won’t disappoint you.” Ryleigh perks up and shoots both Wrecker and Harper a beaming smile, nodding her head in thanks.

“We know you won’t, Brick,” Wrecker confirms. “You do your name proud, my brother. You’re as hard as stone, but your brick and mortar will protect him, even if that’s against himself.”

Harper clears her throat and picks up where her man left off. “Cedar Creek was a

little harder to decide. Since we aren't your typical mom and dad, we figured going outside of what's considered normal wouldn't be unexpected."

"You got that right," Prowler whoops, laughing.

Harper giggles, then says, "We wanted all of our siblings to play a key role in Stone's upbringing. So, in our will it'll state that Dragon and Laney get custody of him should something happen to the both of us." Laney gasps, her hands cupped over her mouth and Dragon has a proud smile stretched across his face. "Gabriel and Butcher will be his godfathers and Selah, as well as Joceline, Butcher's biological sister, will be his godmothers."

"Joceline may not be patched into the club yet," Wrecker stops speaking, giving Barracuda the side-eye. Okay, what the fuck? Joce is married to a motherfucker, but married, nonetheless. There's a story there I'm missing, and I'd like to know what it is because that's my sister they're sharing covert looks about and I should be let in on any secrets regarding her. Looks like Cuda and I'll be having a come to Jesus moment before the day is concluded. "But she's been like a sister to me since the day I joined forces with Dragon and Butcher so she was a top candidate for the job in our opinion. Now, my old lady needs some bonding time with our boy, so I'm gonna kick all of you motherfuckers out."

After a round of farewells and slaps on the back to Wrecker and kisses on the cheek and forehead to Harper, we rally the troops and head home. As we're walking through the hospital's corridor, I grab Cuda by the scruff of his neck and meet his eyes with mine. My look is meaningful, no words need to be shared for him to get the hint.

"I'll be at the firepits with a bottle of whiskey when we get back. I'll meet you there," he tells me as I release him.

Selah's hand slips into mine as she watches him walk away. "Whatever is happening, remember your sister is a grown ass adult, Butcher. If they've crossed any sort of line, she doesn't need you going all caveman on her, she's a loyal person. I can't help but think if something did take place between the two of them, then her homelife isn't as good as she wants you to believe it is."

"I know, and that's what worries me, Lah. She's back home with that fuckface without me there as her backup. If she's not sharing with me, then it's bad. Really fucking bad," I say, disdain laced in my words.

"Just be there for her, for both of them," she encourages, squeezing my fingers.

"Always, Selah. But that doesn't mean I appreciate being left in the dark, and I will be letting that fact known."

"I haven't slept with her," Cuda says as soon as I flop down in the camp chair beside him.

"Then what have you done?" I ask as he passes the bottle to me and I chug a shot glass worth down my throat. "Because that sly look that you and Wrecker shared, says it's something. I don't like not being in the know when it comes to my blood, Cuda."

"She begged me not to tell you, and I agreed. Not lightly, it took a lot of convincing on her part for me to keep my lips sealed," he vows. "I gave her a timeline two days ago; she has until the day after Christmas to confess what's been going on to you."

"You're my brother, Cuda. There should never be any secrets between us," I growl. "Never. Otherwise, the circle of trust is broken, and when that happens, a lot of people die because there are doubts where there shouldn't be."

“I know,” he murmurs, downing his own shot once I pass the whiskey back over to him.

“Tell me now,” I encourage, doing my best to reign in my temper.

“Okay,” he sighs. “It started like this?—”

SIX

Butcher

“Repeat that,” I demand through clenched teeth. During his first round of confessions, I went numb and my brain blurred. That motherfucker is going to end up on the wrong end of my knife for what he’s done to my sister. And Joce, she’s going to get the tongue lashing of her life. His head hangs as he recenters himself to retell the same story he just spewed. Before I react, I need to make sure I didn’t imagine some of the shit he informed me was happening.

“I went to meet a few of my clients at the bar inside of the Blackjack Inn. They traveled to see me so when they asked me to join them, I didn’t want to say no. As I was walking through the parking lot, I saw your sister crying over her steering wheel. I knocked on her driver’s side window and made the motion for her to roll her window down. When she did, streaks of mascara were staining her cheeks and I noticed that the kids were in the back of the car, buckled down in their car seats. They were fast asleep so I kept my voice down when I asked her what was going on. When she whispered to me that she just saw her husband walking into the lobby with another woman on his arm, and it wasn’t the first time she’d caught him cheating, I listened. It was then that I saw the fading bruises on her cheeks, as well as fingerprints embedded in her arms.”

“So let me get this right, not only is that shitstain is not only cheating on my sister, but he's also laying hands on her?” I thunder out the question, my entire body quaking with anger.

“Yeah, and after speaking with her, I found out those are only the bruises you can visibly see on her skin. After a bunch of probing and prodding and her clutching her ribs, I forced her to lift up her shirt just enough for me to see what was going on. Dude, there were shoe prints painted on her ribcage. It was then and there that I pulled my phone out to give you a call, only she stopped me by placing her hand on top of mine, keeping me from dialing your number.”

“What was her reasoning for not wanting you to place that call?” I inquire, my fists now clenched in my lap.

“Blackmail. He's blackmailed her,” he confides.

“With what?” I ask because my sister is as wholesome as one can get. At least to the outside world. She's somewhat involved in our lives with me and Dragon being her brothers, but nothing that should be traceable. There should be nothing he has that'd keep her stuck in that sort of abusive relationship.

Only, Cuda says the one thing that I was hoping he wouldn't. “You.”

“Explain,” I rumble.

He tilts his body sideways so we're facing one another and says, “From what I could gather from her, he's had a private investigator on her tail since the day they married, and during that time, he managed to get a few photos of unlawful things that could damage a few people in our club.”

“He has intel that could send us away?” I confirm.

“Yeah,” he admits. “I've been helping her track down this investigator, so I could rid him of the evidence and she's been searching through his office and files while he's at work or off playing with one of his mistresses. We've managed to find a few things

and destroy them, but we haven't been successful in getting our hands on anything having to do with you, Butcher."

"That's not good," I say, blowing out a heated breath. "That's why she's keeping her mouth shut and staying in a home where that piece of shit is laying hands on her? Y'all should've come to us, Cuda."

"I've been working on her telling you, Butcher. She's determined, at all costs, to protect you and Dragon. Even if it's detrimental to herself. We've had a few blow ups over it, but I didn't want her to not trust me and confide in me anymore. I feel like I've been stuck in the middle, but hear me out on this, Butcher, I've never been against you or the brothers. If anything, I'm working in the background trying to protect you and the club as a whole."

"I'm seeing that, Cuda. However, in a roundabout way, you've gone against the club. As your VP, I'm ordering you to have a sit down with Brick and Dragon. Tell them everything," I stress. "We could end this and free my sister from her chains."

"If I do that, she'll know I betrayed her," he sighs.

"How did Wrecker find out?" I probe, because if he's kept things close to the vest as he claims, there's no way that fucker should know anything about this.

"How do you think?" He raises his eyebrows at me and it's then that everything clicks.

"Fucking dreamwalkers," I snap. "Which means there's a reason, spiritual or otherwise behind why he's kept his trap shut."

"He sees things that we don't. If we jump the gun things could have a different outcome than if we play it the way it's been set into motion," he concludes.

“New plan, don’t say jack shit until I have myself a little chat with my brother-in-law. In the meantime, it’s in your best interest as her friend, or whatever the fuck you are to Joce, to let her know I cornered you. She knows if I want to know something, you don’t have a leg to stand on until I get the information I want.”

“Alright. I’ll send her a message in the morning letting her know when she’s able to, she needs to call me,” he promises.

“Good enough for now,” I state, standing up and walking away. For fuck’s sake, when are we going to catch a break from those using us for their own gain?

When I make it to my yard, I see Wrecker leaning against my front porch. “Thought you may need to talk,” he says in greeting.

“Shouldn’t you be at the hospital with your old lady and boy?” I ask, using the steps to clear the snow from the bottom of my boots.

“Probably. But she has a guard stationed outside of the room and our family is important to us, Butcher, and that includes you,” he says, sending me a cunning smile. “You’re more than club to me. I told her you’d need me and she all but kicked me out stating she and Stone needed some sleep and me pacing the room was preventing her from resting.”

“Reasonable, considering who our old ladies are,” I laugh. Not a selfish bone in any of their bodies. They are the most giving, generous women one will ever meet.

“You can take the old ladies out of the club, but you can’t take the club out of the old ladies. You and Laney are our family, Butch,” he reiterates, sounding more serious than previously. “So if one of you needs us, no matter what’s going on in our lives, we’ll be there.”

“Should this be taken to the table, Wrecker?” I switch topics, needing to know.

“Not yet. And once Cuda calls her and tells her you figured out what’s going on, you need to get in contact with her, Butch. It’s not that she didn’t want you to know, it’s that when all this happened, you could’ve become a lifer behind bars. Give her a chance to explain everything from her point of view and don’t go off on her. Really listen to what she has to say, a few lives could depend on it.”

Looking upward, I gather my thoughts on what he’s saying. It’s not going to be easy keeping this from my best friend and brother, but if it’s for the greater good, I’ll find a way. “I can do that. It’ll be hard keeping this a secret from Dragon, he’s going to lose his shit when he finds out, but if you say it’s for the best, then I’ll keep my lips zipped, for now.”

“I wouldn’t steer you wrong on this, brother. It’s been hard for me too, but I’ve been shown the outcome if I don’t by Jericho, and it’s not a pleasant future for any of us if we jump into this head first without thinking through all the scenarios.”

“You’ve never misled me, Wrecker so I’ll concede to you on this. However, if I think she’s sinking, I’m going to send out an S.O.S and be her life preserver. I won’t watch my sister drown. And if I feel her life is on the line, those ropes you’ve tied my hands with, will be unraveled.”

“Understandable. I won’t let it come down to that, Butcher. But fair warning, it’s not going to be anytime soon that we can step in. You’re going to have to find your patience.”

“Great. Just fucking great,” I mumble.

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SEVEN

Selah

“Is it bad?” I ask Butcher as he stomps his way into the living room. I put the book I was reading down after putting a bookmark inside of it. I’m not a page bender, that ruins the pages in my opinion and each and every novel I hold in my hands and read is a precious treasure.

“I’m gonna need you to do something for me and I need you to swear you’ll never mention it to anyone,” he exclaims.

“Anything you need from me, Butcher, you know that. Including keeping my mouth shut, no matter how critical it is. Tell me what’s going on, biker man?” He lays it all out on the line for me, and when he wraps up, I’m pissed. I know what it’s like to be on the other side of a man’s hands, and considering she’s allowed this to happen in order to keep our family safe, I’m more determined than ever to take this man down a peg or two and get her out of that abusive situation. I just have to be slick about it, make sure that whatever they’ve gotten their hands on has no digital footprint.

Standing up, I go over to my laptop and fire it up, ready to start digging and erasing anything out on the web. “I can make anything on the cyber end of things disappear, but what about the physical copies they claim to have?”

“I’ve got a man on the outside I’ll be getting in touch with tomorrow that’ll be helping me out with that. I’m just worried about the consequences,” he discloses.

“Have another conversation with Wrecker before you take that step,” I suggest. “He knows things we aren’t privy to; he’ll know if you’re doing the right thing or not.”

“I already texted him and asked, but he’s on his way back up to the hospital to be with Harper and Stone, so it could be a bit before he gives me an answer.”

“Either way, I’m not only going to get rid of anything with an electronic trace, but I’m going to dig into the men themselves. Babe, if your sister knows the man her husband hired to follow her, it’d help, but if not, don’t stress about it. I’ll find out who it is and begin unraveling their lives. This person, whoever he or she is, is going to find themselves in the hole both financially and professionally. I’ll have them blacklisted and their reputation ruined before the end of business day tomorrow. Nobody messes with ours and gets away with it.”

“Vicious,” Butcher laughs. “I like it. You’re the perfect woman for me, Lah.”

“And don’t you forget it,” I return.

“Never,” he avows. “Every day I’m reminded of how you’re my idyllic woman. We complement each other and that’s something I’ll forever be grateful for.”

“Are you trying to woo me and reel me in, Butcher? I’ve got news for you, you don’t have to because you already have me hook, line, and sinker,” I declare. “Heart, body, and soul, I belong to you.”

“Dammit, woman. You just made me hard as fuck. My dick is going to have imprints of my zipper on it for days,” Butcher huskily says.

“That’ll have to keep behind the bars of your jeans until I have buried this person so deep they’ll never climb their way out,” I remind him. “But after that, nothing will be holding us back.”

“Why am I always the one having to sacrifice?” he asks, scratching the back of his neck. “You know what? Fuck it, that’ll have to keep.” He points at my computer before stalking over to me and lifting me out of my chair and tossing me over his shoulder. “Tonight, you’re mine, Lah.”

Could I argue with him and insist he put me down? He absolutely would, without any arguments. However, my man needs this intimacy with me so I won’t deny him this. I already have a program running that’ll start doing searches on Joceline’s husband. It’ll store that information and I can browse through it tomorrow.

The kids went down not too long ago, every one of them were drowsy once we got home. There hasn’t been a peep coming from either of the bedrooms so I know they’re passed out. They’ve had a few busy days here lately and were feeling the draw of exhaustion since it quickly pulled them under.

Once I’m carted over the threshold of our bedroom, Butcher slowly lowers me down his muscular body, the friction of our shirts cavalierly brushing against my erect nipples has a muted moan escaping my lips. When our hips meet, I’m met with the steel erection of his dick. The mere thought of possessing one another has fueled us both with desire. Butcher walks me backward until my backside is flush with the wall.

The passion and fire in his eyes makes me want to shred his clothes and mount him. The same look he’s wearing must be mirrored by me because without any words spoken between us, he leans forward and slams his lips onto mine. Butcher doesn’t do anything halfway, when he does something, he does it with a flare.

When he rips himself away from me, he utters one single word, “Mine.” Before I get the chance to blink, he’s on me again. His hands are roaming beneath my shirt, he lightly brushes my skin until his hands find my breast. He cups them and massages them, plucking my nipples. “Strip for me, baby girl.”

As I rip my shirt over my head and toss it to the ground, he repeats my movement. Next, I unbutton my jeans and slip them down my legs, and again, he does the exact same thing I do. This occurs with each article of clothing I remove until we're both standing naked before each other.

"So goddamn beautiful," he rustles out, his voice deep and guttural, but comes out no louder than a whisper. He drops to his knees and pushes me back against the drywall. He pushes my legs tightly together then takes his fingers and spreads my labia open with his thumbs. "Look at this pretty pink clit of yours. It's just begging for my mouth to suck on it."

"Yes," I moan, my fingers embedding themselves in his hair.

When he flattens his tongue and licks on that bundle of nerves, my eyes cross. He laves that section for fuck knows how long since I've lost all sense of time before he sucks it into his mouth, manipulating it with his tongue. He takes one of his hands away from cupping my ass and slides it between my thighs. He instinctively knows that I'm feeling empty and inserts two of his digits inside of me. He scissors his fingers before locating my G-spot where he quickly begins adding a savage amount of pressure to it, causing my hips to buck.

"Butcher," I whimper, knowing that even if I were to beg, there's no guarantee he'd give it to me. My man does everything on his own timeline, and sometimes, that means he edges me a little. The only reason I don't whine and simper about it, is because no matter how long it takes for me to get there, it's always a memorable experience.

Once I detonate on his tongue, he pulls back and looks up at me, he has a smug smirk on his face, looking like the cat who got his cream. "On the bed, Lah."

Stripped of speech and all cognitive thoughts, I nod my head and on shaky legs, I

walk over to the mattress and crawl on it. When I make it to the middle of it, I situate myself in his favorite position.

The perfect submissive pose.

I never thought after my past I'd find myself here, willingly submitting to an alpha male. But Butcher has accomplished a feat I thought would always be impossible—he makes me feel safe, cherished, and secure, even in such a vulnerable position.

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EIGHT

Butcher

This amazing woman of mine makes me feel like the king of a castle. Her imminent trust in me still astounds me to this day. After the life she lived before we found one another should've made this an impossible task.

Vulnerability isn't a stance you'll find her in often or voluntarily—only with me, and only in our bedroom where nobody can witness her giving into her innermost hidden desire. To be conquered, branded, and most of all, loved because everything between us is full of nothing less.

“Fuck. What you do to me, woman,” I acknowledge, putting my knees on the bed and shuffling my way to her.

“I give myself to you willingly and freely because I love and trust you, Butcher,” she states, wiggling her ass in the air.

If there's ever been an invitation so enticing and encompassing, I can't remember it.

All I can see is her.

My life.

My everything.

My Selah, offering herself to me with no trepidation.

“Damn, Lah. You make me crazy sometimes,” I admit, lining the head of my dick up with her opening and slowly pushing myself inside of her sheath.

Before her, I wasn’t a man who shared my emotions with others, I held them close to my chest. She’s opened the vault that held them locked inside and they pour out in rivulets whenever she says something so damn sweet it makes my teeth ache.

My breath hitches alongside hers when I bottom out inside of her. Tilting my head back to where I’m staring at the ceiling, I take a brief second to get myself under control so I don’t shoot my load before shifting my hips and beginning a steady pace of plunging inside of her. I draw back until only the tip is inside of her before thundering back in.

“Yes.” Selah hisses, burying her face deeper into the pillow. My fingers dig into her sides, where I’m sure she’ll be wearing my prints tomorrow, and swivel my midsection, hitting every nerve ending inside of her.

As I pick up the pace and become lost in a rut like haze, I start chasing our combined pleasure.

Her chimes of, “yes,” and “don’t stop,” encourage me to piston into her deeper and faster. This is going to be a fast act, one full of need and connection. Neither of us appear to be anxious to draw it out, so I don’t take my time like I normally would, we don’t want that.

After getting the news about everything that’d been hidden from me, I was detaching from myself, from reality, and from my life. Desperation to feel this link to my woman is what kept me from falling over that cliff. She was and is my salvation from the darkness that always tries to drag me into the pits of hell.

Screams and moans of satisfaction ring through my ears as I feel Selah's walls clamp down on me, drawing my balls up as cum shoots out of my cock, painting her insides.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," I chant as I fall onto her back, both of us collapsing as we fight to draw oxygen into our lungs. Not wanting to squish her between me and the mattress, I fall to my side, rolling her with me so we're still connected in the most carnal way a man can be with his woman.

"I love you, Lah."

"Love you too, biker man," she mumbles.

Soon after both of our breathing evens out and we fall asleep, neither one of us interested in breaking apart from the other. Things will be messy in the morning, and we'll have to strip the sheets and replace them but it'll be worth it.

"It has to be RiffRaff," Wrecker says, adamant that it's the way it has to be.

"Why him?" I ask, confused because the man has been through hell and back. Putting him in this position feels cruel. I don't want the weight of this task to be on his shoulders.

"Because he's one of us and they won't be looking for him. Think about it, Butcher. On paper, he has dementia. Everyone thinks he's lost in his head and hasn't regained his faculties. They've all but dismissed him as a threat. If my sources are right, his file has been shredded, they won't know his face or know about his association to the club."

"Brick's going to have a shit fit if we send his dad out there without telling him why," I press, thinking this idea needs to be explored further.

“There’s a reason he won’t think twice about it,” Wrecker reassures me.

“What would that be?” I wonder, thinking the first night with his son has his synapses misfiring. I remember those days and how lack of sleep can come close to making one hallucinate.

“It’s not my business to share, Butcher,” Wrecker admonishes. “It’s not a secret, nothing that could harm the club, but he’s not ready to spread it outside of a few people. We need to respect his privacy.”

“RiffRaff’s got himself a woman, doesn’t he?” I cheekily ask. It has to be, that’s the only thing I can think of because RiffRaff is close to the members of the Roanoke chapter, most especially his son and he doesn’t usually keep anything from them. But sometimes, when a man finds himself a woman that he wants to claim for himself, he isn’t always ready to put her on display. There are times we have to coax a woman to accept our lifestyle because it’s not for everyone, and sometimes, we’re just stingy motherfuckers who don’t want to share their time.

“In due time, he’ll loosen his lips and we’ll know for sure.” Wrecker chuckles before he sends me a reassuring smile, one that tells me I’m on the right track with my thinking.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” I whistle. “Go, RiffRaff.”

“I didn’t confirm anything,” Wrecker defends.

“You didn’t deny it either,” I state, laughing.

“Fuck you,” Wrecker chuckles.

“No thanks. I did that with your sister last night and my dick’s a little sore,” I tease.

“Shit,” he hisses, giving me a narrow eyed look. “That’s my sister, motherfucker. There are things a brother doesn’t need to know about when it comes to his sister and her relationship. In case you were wondering, that’s one of those things that shouldn’t be talked about. Fuck, I’m gonna need a bleach bath because my skin is crawling with that vision floating through my head. You’re an asshole, you know that right?”

“I’ve never pretended to be anything else,” I confirm, slapping him on his back. “So, six weeks, huh?”

“I’m gonna buy you a one way ticket to hell, Butcher,” he vehemently says, punching me on the shoulder blade.

“Been there, done that, have the scars to prove it,” I counter, punching him back.

“Haven’t we all,” he complains. “Okay, if we’re done with this little pow wow, I’m heading back to be with my old lady and son.”

He stands up and begins walking away. Not wanting him to have the last word, I call out, “Keep the sunny side up, brother. Heaven isn’t too far away; I know because I visited it last night between your sister's legs.”

He stumbles before he tosses his middle finger up in the air over his shoulder. All the way home I chuckle. Getting one over my brothers always lightens my mood.

NINE

Selah

“You’re walking funny this morning,” Laney teases as she feeds Nix his bottle. Naveah and Nova are fast asleep in the playpen we sat up in my living room. When she showed up, she looked frazzled and in need of some female bonding.

“What can I say, my man has a big dick,” I remark. As we banter back and forth I never lose the flow of typing on my keyboard—as a mother, one has to be able to multitask.

I had some interesting things pop up overnight in regard to Joceline’s husband. He has some shady business dealings and just as shady associates. This isn’t a guilt by association thing either, he’s buried so deep in their dealings that if this got leaked to the right people, he’d be doing some time of his own. But I can’t do that yet, there are things that need to be found and destroyed first.

“Oh, I know all about big dick ego’s,” Laney snickers. “Dragon and Butcher have that in spades.”

“That they do,” I concur, squinting at my screen. “That slick motherfucker.”

“Okaaaay,” she says, drawing the word out, looking over at me with skepticism. “I’m a little confused here, Selah. Are we still talking about Dragon and Butcher in this regard, or someone different. Because I agree, they can both be sly assholes, but by the expression on your face, I think we’re having a separate conversation here.”

“Sorry,” I say, brushing my hand through the air. “I’m following a lead on a target and I’ve found some shit he’s tried to hide.”

She snorts before saying, “With a sleuth like you on his trail, I doubt there are many skeletons in his closet that won’t be exposed.”

Bobbing my head, I respond, “That’s because when I want to know something, I dig deep like a dog trying to unearth his bone, no matter how deep it’s been buried, I’m gonna find it.”

“That’s not a bad thing, Selah. Why do you sound as if it is?” Laney inquires.

“I’m still dealing with a few demons of my own,” I say, unmasking myself.

I don’t like to admit that I still hear the assholes from the community whispering their degrading words in my ear—that’s a battle I’m going to have to overcome myself. It’s a war battling itself out inside of my head and heart that I hope one day dissipates. I’ve joined the forum that Harper and Laney did, and whereas the therapist who created it is fantastic at helping us deal with our past traumas, there are still some things that linger in the background, things that are going to take years for me to process so I can become victorious.

“Well, those demons are pieces of shit and need to shut their damn mouths,” Laney spits out, her eyes full of fire and brimstone.

Since she was all but auctioned off, and spent some time in the clutches of the society I was raised within, if anyone understands what I’m going through, without any doubts, it’s her. It’s an eye-opening experience when you discover there are people out there who have no compassion in their hearts. I grew up there, and I still shudder at the fact that their endorphins fly off the charts and they get their rocks off on the torture and detriment of others. I didn’t meet one leader in the entire colony that

wasn't either a pedophile, rapist, or murderer, or had the potential to become one.

"Couldn't agree with you more on that," I respond as I open my file folder on my screen and put the documents I've uncovered into it for safekeeping.

I'm not sure if I should be sharing this one with Beast or not, so I leave it marked as personal. He and I have access to each other's computers, but if it's not club related, or financially beneficial to the club, we don't invade each other's personal space. I'm the money-maker, and he's the protector when it comes to all things technical. We join forces when the situation calls for it, and when I get the go-ahead from Butcher, I'll make sure all of my discoveries are made accessible to him.

"Mom!" Nitro shouts as he comes bounding into the room. The girls stir in their playpen so I place my finger to my mouth, silently reminding him that we have little ones trying to nap. "Sorry." His voice lowers and he wears an apologetic look on his face. Laney and I both silently chuckle when he tiptoes to us, trying to be as quiet as possible.

"What's up, kiddo?" I ask him when he's within a normal hearing range.

"We're bored. Can we go in the front yard and play?" he asks, his eyes pleading with me to say yes. I bite my bottom lip in apprehension because my fear-laced anxiety is screaming, "hell no."

Since getting the girls back, I've become a bit obsessive with having them in my sight. It's become a phobia of mine. I know I'm considered a helicopter mom, but I can't help it. My biggest fear is losing them again. And unfortunately for Nitro, who has had a lot of leeway and freedom with his dad, he has fallen under that umbrella of protection, much to all of their chagrin.

"Please, Mom. We'll stay in the perimeter of the house," he begs.

Laney pulls the bottle out of Nix's mouth and begins patting him on his back as he nods off. "If you'll listen out for these three, I'll go out and watch them," she offers. "They've all been fed and changed, we have at least two hours before they'll wake up."

Even though her kids are all over the age of one, they are chunky monkeys who demand food every four hours like clockwork, and their naps rival that of a newborn. What has me endeared to them the most, is they still let their mom hold their bottles while they eat. That's not always the case, but they somehow know that she needs that bond with them now and again and let her have that one-on-one time with them.

"That should be fine, I have work to do anyway. Mind your Aunt Laney and stay inside of the ring of the house. If I call you, you need to be able to hear me. Are we clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," he rushes out before his feet carry him down the hallway toward his sisters, still walking on the tips of his toes.

"He's a good boy," Laney wistfully says.

"The best," I tack on. "They're sneaky little shits when they gang up together, don't let them run all over you, Laney. Don't let them talk you into anything, because trust me, they talk circles around me and Butcher at times."

"Got it. It'll be good practice for when these three hit their age," Laney states.

I snicker before telling her, "I hope those are your good running shoes." I glance down at her feet and huff. How she wears sneakers in this weather is a mystery to me. My toes would be nothing but frozen nubs if I tried wearing such little protection on my feet.

She side-eyes me before declaring, “Snow boots hurt the soles of my feet. Every single time I’ve attempted to wear and walk in them, I end up with blisters.”

Before we can continue on with our conversation, the kids come out dressed in their winter gear, bouncing in anticipation.

I point my finger at them in a reminder and they all nod their heads. Yeah, I’ve got this mom shit down.

TEN

Butcher

Thanksgiving has come and gone, the Roanoke clubhouse looks like an explosion of tinsel and strung lights. Never in my lifetime have I seen anything like it. Last year when we invaded their clubhouse, I was so fucking numb and lost in my own head that it didn't compute how obsessed their old ladies are when it comes to Christmastime.

I've been playing cat and mouse games with my best friend, hiding from him and leaving a room whenever he enters to avoid him. I've had to gnash my teeth together anytime Dragon brings our sister up in conversation. He knows all of my tell signs, which makes it next to impossible for me to keep what I know about her fucked up situation to myself and not blurt it out, which is why I have been blending in with the shadows unless we're in church.

When Wrecker is adamant that something needs to play out a certain way, you listen. I don't discuss my 'special gifts', I don't use my abilities because afterward it makes me vulnerable to my surroundings—my system shuts down for hours and sometimes days thereafter, I'm all but comatose, but that doesn't mean I don't know that when fate talks, that shit is not dismissible.

When Selah found out that not only do I have telekinesis, but I can astro project, she damn near lost her shit. When one moves their body through space and time, they can get stuck there even if they have a guide and anchor on standby. Confessing that to her after she dug it up in one of Joceline's husband's files was an intense

conversation. She had no clue I had that aptitude, but that's because I don't tell anyone about it. Not because I don't trust a lot of people in my life, but because it's such a rarity that nobody understands the ramifications of it and they expect me to put it to use without understanding that I could die if my concentration breaks.

Was Selah hurt that I kept that to myself and didn't tell her about it? Absofuckinglutely. It wasn't a pleasant conversation, she had a meltdown, some things may or may not have flown by my head, but after she calmed down and when I laid down the bulletin points of why I don't ever speak about it, the tension between us eased.

Today, I'm wound up tighter than a nun's asshole. My entire body stiffens as the gavel is banged on the wood top, getting ready to bolt and make a run for it when Brick and Dragon call an end to church. I should've known the gig is up when Brick leans back, crossing his arms across his chest. Dragon points at Cuda, Wrecker, and me then growls, "You, you, and you, sit your asses back in your seats. You are not dismissed."

Wrecker and I share a forlorn look before exhaling and plopping back in our seats. Dragon knows we won't be easily broken, so he narrows in on Cuda who's shifting in his seat like he's got ants in his pants.

When Dragon points at Cuda, I see his Adam's apple bob before he looks our president square in the eye, and states, "I plead the fifth."

"You can't plead jack shit," Dragon barks.

In an attempt to save our brother from being stripped down, Wrecker speaks up, saying, "We can't tell you yet, Dragon. It'll fuck up the timeline and someone will get hurt, maybe dead."

“You fucking with me right now, Wrecker?” Dragon poses it as a question, but the rest of us know it’s not.

He is pissed and doesn’t take harbinger warnings well. He has an issue with Jericho’s cautions, he thinks they’re bullshit. We’ve argued with Dragon time and again that he’s not one-sided, he sees the bigger picture and advises us in ways that’ll leave the least death and destruction in our wake.

“I wish I was,” Wrecker murmurs. “It won’t be much longer now.”

“How long are we talking about here?” Brick interjects, asking a question of his own. “Need to know if this is going to interfere with Christmas or not because if so, I need to start setting the scene for my ol’ lady. Otherwise, she’ll have my balls.”

I bite my tongue because there’s so much I can do with that statement, he left that hanging wide open for a pun, but I know it won’t do anything other than amp up the tension growing in the room. There are times when too much testosterone in an enclosed space isn’t a good thing, like now.

“Why?” Dragon starts off low and smooth before his octave rises to that of a stormy roar when he shouts out a myriad of questions, “Am I suddenly on the low end of the totem pole? Why do my men think they can take the word of a spiritual advisor over my own and put me in a need-to-know category? Since when does my order mean so little around here?” My eyes widen because it’s been months since anyone’s awakened the dragon inside of him. He’s been a calm and cool presence in the last ten or so months. I was beginning to wonder if he’s gone soft since the birth of the triplets and co-leading the MC with Brick.

“We’re waiting for all of the stars to align, so to speak,” Wrecker confesses, not perturbed or affected by Dragon’s fire in the least.

The second that statement is complete, the doors bang open before slamming shut again. RiffRaff looks up at our two leaders and whistles. “Keep your britches on, boys.” He looks over at Wrecker and says, “I’m ready. Let’s put these guys out of their misery before they pop a blood vessel.”

My back goes ramrod straight in anticipation. I knew that Cuda and Wrecker have been working with the powers that be, both in the spiritual realm and in our stomping grounds. The people of Cedar Creek have rallied around Joceline, and a few of them who have been known for breaking and entering without detection have infiltrated her house when both her and her husband were away, and they hit pay dirt.

When the door flies open again, and Selah comes rushing in with her laptop in hand, declaring, “I’m here,” the tightness in my body expels and I slump back in my chair. Then she narrows her eyes at Wrecker. “The next time you’re going to talk to me in my damn head, give me some warning. I had just taken a sip of my coffee and nearly choked on it.”

My head swivels on my neck as my jaw hangs wide open. “Since when can you do that?” I ask him.

“His power is evolving,” Selah answers for him, shooting him a triumphant smile. “It goes hand in hand with his daywalking ability.”

“Great. That’s just what we need. Another brother who can probe our minds and invade our brain anytime he wishes,” I state, shooting Dragon an accusatory look.

He holds his hands up in the air before defending himself. “How the hell am I blamed or responsible for his power spike? That shit’s not up to me and it’s not like I’ve trained him on how to do it.”

Brick blows out a heated breath before playing referee and asking, “Can we get back

to the matter at hand here? Y'all can duke this shit out later."

"In other words, one of you start telling me what's been going on behind my back!" Dragon howls.

"Don't blame me, I wanted to tell you right away. Blame him," I clarify, leveling a finger in Wrecker's direction.

Dragon steeples his fingers, placing the temple over his lips before constricting his eyes at the four of us. Selah gulps so I reach over and place my hand on her leg. I pull out the chair directly beside me and nod my head at it. She lightly places her laptop on the table and gracefully takes her seat. Cuda looks like he's about to shit his pants and Wrecker is lounging against the backrest of his chair, acting nonchalant. Me on the other hand, I'm antsy, ready to get the air clear so we can come up with a definitive plan to get my sister and her kids out of their abusive situation.

ELEVEN

Selah

We started off with Cuda telling Dragon about finding Joceline crying in her car to the bruises and lacerations he saw on her skin. Then we move onto Wrecker and how he managed to put the pieces together and confronted him on his suspicions. Butcher picked up the conversation, telling him about how when we were in Harper's hospital room he noticed something off between Cuda and Wrecker when the godmother announcement was made and cornered him. Now, it's my turn. As the guys were telling their side of the story, I fired up my laptop and have my file open.

"That's where I came in," I fess up. "Butcher asked me to do a little digging on the slimeball and what I found isn't up to par with what he projects himself as being in the public eye."

"How so?" Brick asks. And since he and I both don't know the man personally, I can understand his interest between the jackasses' two identities.

Not wanting Brick to think I'm not taking his question seriously or respecting the fact that he wants me to expand on what I've said, I look him in the eye and tell him what I've discovered. "He has the persona of one who works in politics." A gleam of understanding lands in his eyes. But he doesn't interrupt me and ask any further questions, so I turn my computer around and point out some photos I found online of him as he commutes through town. "As you can see, he disguises himself as a family man. He says hi to everyone he passes on the street and kneels to play with all of the babies. What they don't know is that he's a con man, a predator of a different sort

than that of the men we've been dealing with in the community."

"Can you explain that further?" Dragon asks, head canted to the side as he digests the little bit I've shared.

Blowing out a breath, I continue talking. "He enjoys the chase. Married women are his repertoire. He likes the cloak and dagger as well as the potential of being caught. Ruining marriages means nothing to him, it's an adrenaline rush for him."

"And my sister? He doesn't give two shits if she finds out?" Dragon asks me, clamping his eyes shut as he processes the hell his sister's been going through.

"Nope," I answer, "he has her right where he wants her. He's aware of what her family means to her and uses it against her to keep her where she is. She has a role to play and he'll accept nothing less."

"They don't share a bedroom anymore," Cuda inserts.

"And how the hell do you know that?" Dragon asks as Butcher stiffens.

"We're friends," Cuda explains. "She keeps the house clean, cooks his dinners, goes to the office parties, but she refuses to sleep with him in any capacity."

"Can't blame her on that one," Brick slips in, shaking his head in disbelief. "What have you uncovered, Selah?"

"He has two P.O. Boxes in different towns. One in Cedar Creek, and one in Kemp. He doesn't receive mail at either location, so I think he's using them as a lock box of sorts. I have a man on the inside of the Kemp location, we've become buddies on the web and he is going to take a look inside of them for me during his next shift. If by any chance it holds incriminating evidence, I'm going to have him snap pictures for

me.”

“Would he be willing to remove the items and save them for us?” Butcher asks me, his eyes bouncing back between me and Dragon.

“That won’t be necessary,” RiffRaff interjects. “Once we have confirmation, I’ll be taking myself a road trip. I’ll dispose of any incriminating evidence I come across and then I’ll rescue Joceline and her children.”

“Why you?” Brick asks, looking uncomfortable. “You’re still recovering, you don’t need to be going on any solo missions.”

“I’m recovered just fine,” RiffRaff objects. “Stop worrying so much, son, or you’ll put yourself in an early grave. I’m not going to relapse, and if I do, it won’t be anytime soon. Everyone has seen to that. I’m as fit as a fiddle.”

“He’s the only one who won’t be seen as suspicious since nobody knows his face,” I add. “Wrecker has found him a sponsor who’s going to act as if RiffRaff is a distant cousin who hasn’t visited the town.”

“We’ll be reconnecting,” RiffRaff chuckles. “It’s been a while since I’ve had myself a vacation. I think I’ve earned myself one.”

Brick sighs when he realizes RiffRaff won’t be heeding his worry and staying home. “You’re an honorary member, we can’t ask you to put yourself in danger. Those days are behind you,” Brick reminds his dad.

“You aren’t asking, I’m offering. Plus, the higher beings say this is the way it has to be,” RiffRaff remarks.

“I don’t like it,” Brick professes. “You need to take some back up with you. Someone

needs to protect your six.”

“I have connections of my own,” RiffRaff expresses. “I know a few old timers that wouldn't mind coming out of retirement. Wouldn't even blink their eyes if I were to ask them. And for fuck's sake, stop acting like I've got one foot in the grave. I'm not that fucking old, and thanks to Angel, I'm in better health than I was before I lost my mind.”

“That's what we need,” Brick mumbles. “A bunch of bored men riding the streets and painting the town.”

“Sounds like a good time to me,” RiffRaff says, and for the first time, I see his smartass demeanor. He reminds me of Prowler and Striker in this moment, which has me cupping my mouth to hide my humor.

“Not to interrupt here,” Dragon states. “But if you're going, RiffRaff, I'd like to have a few of my contacts back you up.”

“Hell, yeah,” Butcher whoops. “Please tell me you're calling in Marcum and Xavier LeBlanc.”

I've heard stories about these brothers. They're nomads who aren't known for using their common sense. RiffRaff may have fun touring with them as they shed light on the dirty dealings of a certain lowlife residing there, but I'm not sure Cedar Creek can withstand the fallout of their visit.

“Good call,” Wrecker conveys, nodding his head in approval.

“Wait!” Brick shouts. “Aren't these the two you warned us about not too long ago? I'm not sure they are the best men for this job.”

“This is the only way I can guarantee that nothing will happen to your dad,” Dragon proposes. “They're a little off hinge, but nobody is as protective as they are when it comes to family and friends. And I have a feeling if anyone can stand up to them and have them toe the line, it'd be RiffRaff.”

“Or he'll join them and we'll be bailing all three out of jail,” Butcher helpfully adds.

“Not helping,” Dragon hisses as he nails my old man with a ‘shut the fuck up’ look.

“Look at Brick,” Butcher chuckles. “He looks like he’s having a Jesus take the wheel moment.”

“Naw, that’s his I’m about to shit a brick look,” I tack on. Brick looks at me with a slack jaw, shaking his head. I could’ve sworn I heard a “fucking women” escape his lips before he raps his knuckles on the table and stands, walking out of the room.

“I guess he needs a minute,” RiffRaff guffaws. “If things don’t go his way, he puts himself in timeout.”

“Life around here is going to be fun,” Dragon huffs. “Nobody goes anywhere or makes any moves without my say-so. Got it?”

Everyone left in the room nods their heads as he follows Brick out of the room.

“Good job, baby,” Butcher says, kissing me on the temple. “Let’s go home and spend some time with the kids.”

“Sounds like an excellent idea to me,” I agree. Together, we walk out of the room. I have my laptop nestled in one of my arms and on the opposite side, my fingers are laced between his. This love, this companionship is what I dreamed would come to fruition, and I’m beyond joyful that it has.

My reality is better than any dream I ever had for myself.

This lifestyle we lead may not be for everyone, it's a hard and brutal world, but it, along with the man at my side, saved me.

TWELVE

Butcher

Plans are still being hashed out in regard to my sister's rescue mission. There's still a lot we need answers to before we go in with guns blazing. Not all documentation has been accounted for, and that's what's holding us up when it comes to letting RiffRaff ride in. We won't let him go into that situation blind.

In the meantime, Christmas is in the air. Everywhere I turn, holiday music is being blasted through the surround sound. The outside pavilion isn't safe from the tunes either. Even when I put my air pods in my ears and try to listen to some of my favorite rock music, it's drowned out by all of the holiday cheer.

It's not that I'm opposed to celebrating this time of year, it's that every now and then, a guy needs a break. Old ladies from both charters got together and put a big ass fucking Christmas tree in the middle of the communal yard. No matter where I go, somehow, tinsel gets stuck in my hair and snowflakes settle on my eyelashes—both the fake and authentic shit.

Can't even relax in my own home without hearing Christmas carols being sung by the kids. I'm beginning to understand the mindset of the Grinch when he stole Christmas. I don't mean to be humbug about the whole thing, but it's getting to the point where it's ridiculous. My woman though, she gets me. She walks up to me with two helmets clutched in her hands. My eyes roam up and down her as I release a whistle. She's wearing leather pants and jacket that both fit her like a second layer of skin.

“Hot damn,” I sing, adjusting myself in my jeans.

“Feel like a ride, biker man?” she asks in a sultry voice, strolling up to where I’m sitting, trying to catch my breath. Thank fuck the roads have been cleared by the sand trucks because feeling the wind in my face as I wind through the mountains sounds like a good way to unwind.

“What kind of ride were you thinking, Darlin’?” I ask, steadily drinking her in. She’s a man’s wet dream in that getup.

“The kind where we let the wind lead us,” she purrs. “And if we take a break along the way, we’ll find a way to fill the time until we get back on the bike and head home.”

“Home,” I repeat, letting the word resonate. Home isn’t a structure or piece of land, it’s wherever she and the kids are. That’s something I sometimes forget when I’m lost in my head, but anytime that occurs, she’s there to remind me.

“Come on, baby. I’m ready to feel your steel horse revving between my legs.” Her innuendo has a certain part of my anatomy perking up and taking interest.

“You love it when I rev my engine,” I joke, reaching up and yanking her into my lap.

“I do,” she giggles. “It’s the highlight of my life.” She winds her arms around my neck and begins combing her fingers through my hair. “Let’s get away for a little bit and leave life in our rearview mirror.”

“Where are the kids?” I ask, not worried about their whereabouts, just curious.

“With Dragon and Laney. They’re snuggled in their cabin with them. When I left, they had hot chocolate in hand and were laying in front of their fake indoor fireplace.

There were talks of animated holiday movies, popcorn, and making a gingerbread house.”

“Lucky man,” I say, referring to Dragon. Unlike me, he bows down when it comes to this holiday shit and has accepted it as a way of life that thankfully, only rolls around once a year.

“One day, Butcher, you're gonna tell me why Christmas bothers you so much,” she insists. And one day I will, maybe today, but for now, the mountainous roads are calling my name.

“One day,” I parrot, lifting her up in my arms and marching through the snow toward the shed that houses my motorcycle. We won’t be going for a long ride, I don’t know these roads well enough in the wintertime to avoid black ice, but the fact that they’ve been sanded helps ease my concern.

“It’s beautiful,” Selah says, admiring the view. We found a nice layout with a spectacular backdrop and stopped to take in the sights. Hands roamed which led to other things, and now, we’re butt ass naked with a blanket I had stored in my saddlebag wrapped around us as we watch the snow drift from the sky.

It’s chilly, but our body heat is helping us keep warm. I bury my head in the nape of her neck and decide now’s the time to give her a piece of me she’s been longing for.

“When I was ten, Dad got laid off. Things were tight, and we came close to starving. Whereas in the Christmas pasts, we had a buttload of presents under the tree, the lack of gifts that year is not what ruined it for us. It was the tears that settled in my mom’s eyes that stayed there for the entire day, and the desolated look in my dad’s saying he felt like a failure. They didn’t have the heart to play carols in the background and dance to them like they always did, instead, they tiptoed around one another. The three of us could care less that we got underwear and socks for presents and our

stockings were basically bare, consisting of apples, oranges, and a bottle of water. We only wanted them to be happy. The tension between them was like a powder keg waiting to be detonated. That's when their relationship went from loving to tolerable. It broke a part of us when it came to celebrating the holidays that we never recovered from."

"Oh, Butcher. I'm sorry," Selah whispers. "That must've been traumatic for you as a kid. Did they stay together after that?"

Digging my nose deeper into her neck, I answer, "They stayed together until the day they died. They took their marital vows seriously. They didn't cheat on one another, they just never healed from the disappointment and the financial struggle. They never danced around the house, they didn't cook supper together, they didn't go out on dates, they simply existed in the same house."

"So Christmas brings you nothing but sad memories," she concludes.

Shame swamps me as I tell her, "I get twitchy when the holiday season approaches. Always watching and waiting for the shoe to drop. I fear that the day will come that somehow, I'll let you and the kids down. It's always in the back of my mind because if it could happen to my parents, it could happen to us. To me. I can't lose y'all, Selah."

"We're not going anywhere, Butcher. We may not have said vows in front of a preacher, but you have me and the kids for better or worse. Thick and thin, biker man, we'll be a family. If the time comes when Christmas resembles the one you experienced, we'll still dance and celebrate. Together. Money keeps the lights on, but it doesn't keep the house warm. I'm sorry your folks let something as mundane as money separate them, but I grew up in a way where that's not something that'll keep me from loving you. Money is just paper, love is everlasting. I'd take you over financial security any day of the week."

“Fuck. I love you, woman,” I say, kissing her shoulder.

“And I love you more than words can say,” she rebuts, leaning back into my chest.
“You can’t get rid of me, Butcher. You’re stuck with me and my love until the end of time.”

“Best Christmas present I could ask for, Lah.”

“And you’ll get it every year from here to eternity. My love for you is infinite, Butcher. I’ll even gift wrap it for you if you ever forget.”

“Yes. That means I can unwrap it underneath the tree,” I tease, moving her head sideways with my fingers, plastering my lips to hers.

This is the day where I start learning how to love Christmas again. With her guidance and perseverance, there’s no room for failure.

THIRTEEN

Selah

“It’s been confirmed,” I announce to the top tier men of the Imperial Knights, who are sitting around a circular table in the common room. It’s been a week since I told them that my man at the post office was going to do some digging, and he came through for us in a big way.

“Now that Kemp has been confirmed, we just have to figure out a way to have someone get into the Cedar Creek box,” Dragon states.

“Done,” I tell them with an ear splitting smile on my face. “My guy, Ambrose, has a brother, Antonio, who works at the Cedar Creek facility, and they sent me snapshots with the proof needed that my assumptions were right.”

“Now that those documents have been revealed and we know their location, it’s time to get your sister away from that piece of shit and bring her here,” Brick declares. “I’ve had a hard time knowing an innocent woman has been playing the red herring role and putting herself at risk while having hands put on her in the meantime.”

“And take him down once she’s been secured,” Butcher adamantly demands.

“That’s the end game,” Wrecker declares. “Selah, any luck finding out who’s in his back pocket?”

“Yep, and I have definitive proof that’ll take them down alongside him,” I declare.

“Is leaking that information to the town’s chief high enough, or do we need to go higher up on the chain?” RiffRaff inquires. “I have no problems whatsoever walking into the station and personally delivering it to him. But if he’s not on the up and up, I’m not handing jack shit to him.”

“I’m still on the fence about him,” I admit.

“Why’s that?” Dragon asks, his eyebrows raised high into his forehead. “We’ve had a decent, workable relationship with Chief Matthews since he took office.”

“I agree that he’s been a good guy and has turned a blind eye to some of your less than lawful dealings in town, but it’s the fact that he’s so squeaky clean that one would think he didn’t exist before taking office in Cedar Creek.”

“What’s that mean?” Butcher asks, pulling me into his lap, wrapping his arms around me and hugging me into his chest. “Does he not have a paper trail?”

Nestling deep into my old man, I convey, “He does, but it’s the basics. School transcripts, a driver’s license that he didn’t obtain until he was older, those types of things.”

“Only enough to make him seem legit,” Brick sighs out. “Does he have any medical files to trace back to his childhood?”

“Nothing,” I confess. “No shot records, no broken bones, nothing that your typical boy has in his background. That’s what makes him suspicious to me. It’s like somebody thought him up and made him magically appear.”

“Sounds to me like you’ve got a skunk burrowing in the closet, waiting for the right time to perfume, and take the town as well as its inhabitants down with its stench,” RiffRaff supplies, rubbing his hand over his scruffy jaw as he considers what he

wants to say. “Something stinks where he’s concerned.”

“I still have a program running a background check on him and a few of his deputies I find suspicious.” I let them know. “I agree with RiffRaff, the odor reeks to high heaven in that station. There’s more going on there than the eye can see.”

“We need to give those names to our contacts in the alphabet agency,” Butcher insists. “If anyone can figure out who they are and what they’re up to, it’s them.”

“Unless they’re not who we think they are, and they’re working against us,” Dragon spits out.

I shake my head before interjecting, “They’re legit and on our side. Beast, Hawg, and I have done a thorough search on them. Whereas they may not be thrilled to be working with us, they know it’s a necessary thing. We both have the same objective. They’re aware of the fact that they can’t get rid of the foulness in the agency without our help.”

“We know they’re the good guys because they’ve sent us some intel that should’ve been blacked out,” Hawg inserts. “That’s how we found out that they’ve been shipping cargo overseas.”

“Cargo,” Butcher grits out, grinding his teeth. “What he means is they’re shipping people across the ocean so we can’t rescue them.”

“That terminology helps us digest the information easier, biker man,” I say, consoling him by patting his hand that’s laid over my belly.

After bringing Gabriel and Hannah home, alongside Moira, he’s been sensitive to the predicament these innocent people find themselves in. Most of their victims not having a voice in the matter. They’ve been ripped off the streets or stolen from their

beds. If the community finds someone they want for their cause, they don't ask permission—they take.

“We're playing a game of chess and need to determine our next move,” Brick states, sighing as he crouches down in his seat.

“First things first,” Dragon says, his lips lifting in a snarl. “We bring Joceline and the kids here. Ensure their safety, then we start moving the rest of our pieces around.”

“Check and mate,” Wrecker snickers. The smile on his face tells me that we're making the right decisions.

“Well, fellas. It looks like it's time for me to pack my bags, pick up my lady, and hit the road,” RiffRaff reveals as he stands up and walks away without another word spoken.

“What lady?” I ask, my head canted to the side. This is the first I'm hearing about RiffRaff having a woman in his life.

“Don't worry, sis. He hasn't been ready to share her yet, but when they get back, I have a feeling they won't be able to stay away from each other,” Wrecker says as he stands up and leaves.

“That didn't answer my question,” I mumble underneath my breath. The guys laugh at me and my need to solve puzzles before they abandon Butcher and me. I cross my arms over my chest and pout. “Sharing is caring.”

“Babe. Give them a break, huh? Some ladies need to be slowly introduced into this madness,” Butcher acknowledges. “I have a feeling his woman has been sheltered and has an opinion of how MCs are run. She most likely has watched some shows that depict us as horndogs that do nothing but drink and fuck in public.”

“I mean, that’s not too far off from the truth,” I tease him.

“That depends on how adventurous our woman is,” he says, nipping the lobe of my ear with his blunt teeth. Shivers race up and down my spine when his heated breath hits my neck.

“I think an open field, with no spectators, is as adventurous as I’m willing to get,” I breathlessly admit.

“Seeing as I don’t want anybody but me to see you without clothes on, I agree with that,” he confides.

“Good to know, biker man.”

We sit there for another twenty minutes, simply existing and enjoying it being the two of us before we decide it’s time to grab the kids from the playroom and head home.

FOURTEEN

Butcher

It's Christmas Eve and we're volunteering at one of Roanoke's businesses. I'm enjoying grabbing gifts from the back and bagging them up for parents to wrap up and place under the tree for their kids. I wish programs like this existed when I was younger. If they had, my family may not have fallen apart the way it did. The more I get to know the group from Roanoke, the more respect I have for them.

As soon as I put the last article of clothing into a bag for my latest family, Selah walks in with another approved application. "Do we have any more tricycles? This little peanut had to have surgery on her leg after a car accident, the family lost their only car and had to sacrifice a lot in order to pay for her surgery. She's just finished physical therapy and asked for a bike for Christmas."

"How old is she?" I ask, wondering why if she's asking for a bike we're looking for a tricycle. "And what did they lose making sure she'd be able to walk again?"

"She's three. The dad broke his arm in the accident so he hasn't been able to work so they had to let the lease on their apartment go. The landlord had some grace and gave them until the first of January to move out or come up with the back rent as well as January's. The mom is a stay at home parent, so they don't have a secondary paycheck coming into the household. She has no work history to speak of so nobody is willing to hire her. And like I said, they only had one car for the family and lost that in the accident. Damn slick roads. The other person hit a patch of black ice and spun out. He too was out job searching and is down on his luck and his insurance

lapsed. It's a sad situation all the way around."

"Can we adopt the family? I'd like to help them out if I can," I ask. "I can make a few phone calls, I could have their rent paid until the dad can return to work and I'm sure I could find a decent, used vehicle that's reliable and could help them get to appointments. Maybe we can get together with the guys and get a pot together to pay off their medical debts."

My old lady has a heart of gold and wants to help everyone she encounters. But that's not realistic, and her next words prove that. "Whereas I know we can't adopt all of the families and help keep them afloat, I think it's acceptable with this one. Some of the stories I've heard make me want to dig out my checkbook, but we can only do what we can to pay it forward. I need to talk to Ryleigh; they may have a charity that we can donate to for the others in need."

"What's going on?" Dragon asks as he and Brick head our way. I tell them what I've learned from Selah in regard to the Peterson family. When I'm finished, and tell them what I'm thinking, they both demand they be able to pitch in.

Within twenty minutes, Brick has a new/used SUV on its way. He even paid a year's worth of insurance in advance through the dealership.

Dragon has grabbed an unclaimed stocking from the cabinet and has taken it around, sharing the story and getting monetary donations.

Selah made a call to the hospital and paid little Marissa's bill in full, using club funds that both Dragon and I approved. After all, she's made us a wack with all of her investments.

I got their apartment's name and number and placed a call to the landlord. He's a decent man but his hands were tied with the management and he could only offer so

much on his end. He gratefully accepted payment for the next six months and agreed to call me if the family has a hard time after that time period has expired.

When we all accomplished our goal, and raised six thousand dollars for the family, Selah wraps her arms around me from behind and buries her nose between my shoulder blades. “This is the true meaning behind Christmas, my love. I wish your community had pulled together for you, Dragon, and Joceline back when you needed it. Take this in and let it be a reminder to you that not all families will break due to the lack of finances. Let it prove to you that the spirit of the holiday isn’t lost. You’re a good man, Butcher, and I’m proud that you’re mine.”

Her words hit me in the gut and I close my eyes, savoring the feeling. If my parents had let go of their pride and asked for help from friends and family, they may have made it through the fallout of Dad’s layoff.

“Thanks, baby,” I rasp out.

“Always and forever, Butcher. I love you to infinity and back.”

“Butcher. Selah,” Brick calls our names. “Come on, it’s time to reap the benefits of your hard work.” He waves his hand in the direction of the front room. “We just closed the doors and asked the Petersons to stick around for a bit. They were hesitant, but when we told them we had a surprise for their family, they decided to stick around.”

Selah’s smile is bright and full of excitement.

Dragon comes up behind me, slapping my back. “Giving feels good, doesn’t it?”

“It does, brother. It really does,” I say in response.

I give myself a few moments to mentally prepare for the onslaught of emotions that'll be permeating throughout the room before trailing behind my brother. I'm not an empath by any stretch of the imagination, but I feel things down deep in my core, especially when there are kids involved.

The Petersons are sitting together in the middle of the room, looking uneasy about being surrounded by the lot of us. They'll soon find out that we may be a little rough around the edges, but we have giving souls. The husband looks up at us as he tucks his wife deeper into the embrace of his arms.

"What's going on?" Mr. Peterson asks.

"We heard about your situation," Brick states. "And we decided that instead of simply giving you presents to give your kids in the morning, we wanted to help your family as a whole."

Dragon steps forward and says, "My brother, Butcher, voiced his concern for your family and asked us to all pitch in and adopt your entire family for Christmas."

Clearing my throat, I announce, "I may have had the idea initially, but the men and women of the Imperial Knights stepped up and got the ball rolling. We made a few phone calls and your medical bills for Marissa are paid in full thanks to my old lady, Selah. I got in touch with your landlord, and your rent has not only been paid up, but you don't have to stress about making a rent payment until June, you're paid up through May."

Brick slaps me on my back in thanks before telling them, "We also managed to stuff this stocking with a few thousand dollars to get you through until you land on your feet. I also have a buddy who owns a used car lot in town, he gave us a family discount for a vehicle. You won't have to worry about how you'll get your daughter to any of her follow up appointments nor how you'll get your groceries home."

“I read on your application that you’re a bike restoration expert as well as a mechanic, is that right?” Jingles asks, stepping forward.

“Yes, that’s right,” Mr. Peterson answers. “My specialty is motorcycles, but I also dabble in classic cars too when it comes to restoration. I am, however, a certified mechanic. If it has an engine, I can work on it.”

Jingles pulls out a card and jots his name and number on the backside of it. “After the New Year, get in touch with me, I may have a job lined up for you.”

“Is this a dream?” Mrs. Peterson asks, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“If it is, nobody’s going to pinch you and wake you from it,” Selah says, walking over to her and placing a soothing hand on her shoulder. “We’ve all experienced what life is like when there’s nobody around to lend a helping hand, this is our way of reaching out and offering you our assistance.”

“You aren’t alone,” Dragon professes. “Now, how about we head outside and load these toys and clothes into your new car.”

“Don’t worry about insurance, it’s been paid as well,” I explain. “We wanted to make sure you had time to catch your breath before life starts throwing you more curve balls than it already has.”

“Thank you,” Mr. Peterson chokes out. “You’ll never know what this means for my family.”

“We have an idea,” Selah tells him as she walks over to me and slips her arms around my waist. “Like I said, some of us have been in your shoes.” I squeeze her to me before letting go and helping my brothers gather their items.

“Come on,” I say once my arms are loaded down with bags. “Let’s go check out your new ride.”

FIFTEEN

Selah

“You’re all angels,” Mrs. Peterson, or Melissa as she made me promise to call her, says.

“There’s nothing angelic about these men,” I tease. “But there’s also nobody you’d rather have at your back than any one of them. They’re hard as steel on the outside, but on the inside, they’re squishy marshmallows.”

“When it comes to kids or people down on their luck, they do more than open up their wallets,” Ryleigh says as she bounces a newly awakened Aubree in her arms. “They’re good men.”

Thankfully, they have a room in the back that was set up like a daycare center and the club girls volunteered to watch them while we distributed gifts to families. We wrap our arms around Mrs. Peterson and walk her over to the car where her husband is checking out the motor.

“It’s solid,” Mr. Peterson announces. “Could you rev it one more time?” I look over and see Butcher behind the wheel, happily following directions with an amused smile on his face.

Brick walks up behind Jack, which is Mr. Peterson's given name, and asks him, “Do you ride, Jack?”

“I do, but now it’s in an enjoyable type of capacity. I prospected for a club in my younger days, before Melissa and I decided to settle down and raise a family. They called me Blackjack.”

“Why’d you step back?” Dragon asks.

“The club I was vying for weren’t leading a lifestyle that was conducive to raise children in. Not for us anyhow,” Jack admits. “They were doing some things I couldn’t get behind.”

As he reminisces, his eyes taking on a longing look, Melissa turns our way, facing us and clarifies, “On Jack’s last run with the Demented Sons, he discovered they were into human trafficking. With me pregnant at the time with our oldest, the thought of him crossing some sort of line in their eyes, and our baby paying the penance for that supposed transgression terrified him. He overlooked a lot of convoluted things, including their drug and gun pipelines, that’s sorta expected with one percenters, but selling and trading kids, women, and men, that’s something he can’t and won’t condone.”

“I’d think not,” I rush out, my breath hitching as I say the words.

I make a mental note to look into this felonious club, dig as deep as I can because they could be just as nefarious as the Fundamentalists of the Communion—the religious cult I was raised in. Whereas the communion hides behind the cloak of their zealot beliefs, the Demented Sons hide beneath a leather cut. One just as scary as the other and both of them holding power they shouldn’t be capable of.

I tune back into the men's conversation and hear Brick state, “When the weather lifts, and your arm is back to one-hundred percent, you should take a ride with us.”

“I’d like that, thank you,” Jack says, holding his hand out and shaking Brick’s before

making his rounds and showing his gratitude to them all. “This is what I always thought brotherhood was about. Thank you for reminding me that not every club is rotten.”

After a few more hugs and well wishes, we stand together as a collective and wave goodbye to them as they drive out of the lot, loaded down with Christmas goodies. We also may have included a few extras for the family. Not only did they receive a full Christmas meal from us, but we also tossed in some cookies for Santa too.

Later that night, after a bout of lovemaking and construction of toys, I’m cuddled in bed with Butcher. My mind is racing, unable to forget the words Melissa spoke.

“What’s on your mind, baby girl?” Butcher asks, tugging me deeper into his chest.

Sighing, I lay out everything that was shared with me in regard to the Demented Sons. When I finish, I tell him, “I think we should invite Jack and Melissa over sometime soon. Show them that even if we aren’t completely lawful, this club is full of good men and women and we stand tall for family.”

“I can bring it to the guys, but seeing as Brick invited him along for a ride, I don’t see it being a problem. We did kinda adopt the family,” he jokes.

“I think he’d make a good brother one day if we open the right doors,” I convey as I lightly brush the tips of my fingers over his torso. “Melissa would be a good sister.”

“You may be right, Lah. But we won’t know that for certain until we spend some time with them and see if they’re a good fit. We may like them as people, but that doesn’t mean they’ll mesh well with the club.”

I think over his words, and he’s right, but he’s also wrong. But seeing as I’m not a card carrying member of the Imperial Knights, I’ll have to let them discover that on

their own. There have been some losses in the club, and I believe Jack will fill a piece of that void plus help the members heal.

Heartbreak can split your soul in half until something or someone comes along and starts mending it. There's something soothing about him and Melissa that calls to me—they feel like kindred spirits. It's almost as if they're long lost family members who are slowly finding their way home.

“Sleep, beautiful. The kids will be up before the roosters.”

“You think? They had a hard time falling asleep. They were up really late,” I remind him.

“It's the girls' first Christmas home together. They never celebrated the holiday within the walls of the compound. You can take my word for what it is in this instance... solid, they'll be up and rearing to go regardless of the fact they'll only have gotten a few hours of sleep.”

“This whole gift giving thing is still new to me,” I admit as my eyes close, exhaustion pulling me under.

Before I completely pass out, I hear Butcher respond, “Welcome to your new life, Lah. You'll never go without again.”

My sleep is packed full of beautiful dreams featuring me, Butcher, Nitro, Hannah, Amelia, and Faye. Years of laughter, love, and contentment. In warped speed, I foresee a future's worth of presents being unwrapped, dancing in the living room, the girls and I cooking in the kitchen as Butcher and Nitro are in front of the television set. If this is what I have to look forward to for the rest of my life, I'm all in.

We are brutally awoken from sleep with four kids pouncing on the bed, all of their

eyes lit with excitement.

“It’s Christmas, Mama. And Santa came to see us. Does this mean we were good this year?” Amelia asks me.

“You’ve been good every year, baby,” I tell her, placing a peck on her forehead.

“Then why didn’t he ever come to see us before now?” Faye asks.

“He did,” Butcher interjects. “But the bad men hid your gifts because they didn’t want you to believe in anything but them.”

My old man is a rip the Band-Aid off type of guy, he doesn’t believe in bullshitting the kids. Other than letting them believe in such things as Santa, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and other mystical creatures. They knew the people in control of their lives before coming home weren’t good, they know the evil that resides within them. They’ve seen more than any kids their age should, so they can fathom their things being hidden from them.

“That was rude,” Amelia states, crossing her arms across her chest.

“Very,” Butcher agrees.

“Okay,” I say, clapping my hands. “Let’s go see what’s all under the tree.” Four sets of eyes swing my way before they all yip in elation and leap from the bed.

“You ready for this?” Butcher asks me as he tosses a sweatshirt over his upper body, keeping his flannel pajama pants on.

“I am. I’m excited,” I confess as I slip my house shoes on my feet.

“Then let’s go see our kids smile,” he says, reaching out his hand for me. Once I have my fingers laced with his, he drags me from the room. The first thing that reaches my ears are the kids’ squeals, causing my face to split into a grin.

SIXTEEN

Butcher

My sister, niece, and nephew's toys and other presents are still wrapped underneath our tree. Their stockings are still hung on the wall, loaded down with gift cards and other small items, including an abundance of candy, which my sister is going to be thrilled about. Not really, she may take a baseball bat after my ass.

I long to see them here with us, excitement dancing in their eyes as they unwrap each and every one of them. We had hope that they'd be here today with us, but there was some sort of delay. RiffRaff swore it was nothing to be concerned about, but until I have them here with me, I won't be resting easily.

Nitro and the girls are bent over his new Nerf gun set, dreaming of going outside and shooting at the trees and other targets. The living room is stacked with dolls, board games, books, clothes, shoes, and other toys. Selah and I pick up wrapping paper and stuff it into the trash bags. When she grabs four extra bags and shakes them until they open up, I shoot her a quizzical look.

"For the last year, your toys and clothes have been mounting up. With what you got today, I think it's a good idea for us to go through your clothes and toys and pick the things that either no longer fit you or that you don't enjoy playing with and donate them. Not all kids are as lucky as you guys are. What do you say? Are you in?"

"That's a great idea," I say in agreement. Selah and I aren't the only ones who've spoiled the kids throughout the year, they have a plethora of aunts and uncles who

pitched in and made sure they had plenty to keep them occupied and clothed.

“We’ll work the rooms together,” Hannah inserts. “It can become a family tradition.”

Reaching out, I pull her ponytail until she leans into me. When she’s nestled into my arms, I tell her, “Love you, Hannah. You make me so proud every day.”

“Love you too, Papa,” she replies, burying her face into my abs. The kids have slowly started coming around and accepting praise and words of affection.

“We should start with the closets first,” Amelia suggests. “We’ll need the hangers to put up our new shirts.”

My eyes well with what some would call misty tears, I call it being around too many festive decorations and my allergies paying the price for it. “I’m so proud of each and every one of you. You make a man happy to call you his.”

“We’ve learned by watching you, Pops,” Nitro states, causing me to sniffle much to Selah’s delight.

“Don’t get all emotional on us now, biker man,” she taunts. “You have a reputation to uphold.”

“I’m not emotional,” I rebut, scowling at her.

“It’s okay to feel, Dad,” Hannah reminds me. “It means you care.”

“Whatever,” I huff out. “We got a job to do, ladies and gentleman, let’s get to it. Those bags aren’t going to fill themselves.”

Nitro has more than the girls do combined so we end up needing three trash bags for

his room. He's such a giving kid that he inspects each and every toy and article of clothing before deciding if it should be donated or trashed.

"Will Wyatt and Willow be coming with their toys, Dad?" Nitro asks as he looks at his handheld game he got two Christmases past. He received an updated version of it this year, so he's not sweating getting rid of the one in his hand.

"I think so, buddy," I answer. "But we can hold onto that and the games until they get here and know for sure."

"Okay," he says, nodding his head as he grabs another bag out of the box and sets it in another corner. We now have three piles growing. One for donation, one for trash, and one for his cousin.

"What size is Willow?" Selah asks me, and as I turn toward her, I can see the cog wheels turning in her brain.

"I'm not sure," I admit. "It's why we got them gift cards instead of clothes, remember?"

"I guess we should just donate what we have and start fresh for them," she concludes, nodding her head.

"A fresh start all the way around might be a good idea," I say, hoping that the kids aren't carrying demons with them the way I'm sure Joce does.

"When they get here, we'll plan a shopping day with the old ladies," Selah tells me, a little too enthusiastically in my opinion.

I have a bristling feeling my credit card is going to be getting a work out. If I gave a shit about that, I'd hide it from her, but I don't. Not to mention, she's got herself a

nice little nest egg of her own, she may not even let me pay a single dime for any of it.

“You’re going to let me pitch in for the shopping extravaganza, right?” I ask, giving her a look that lets her know she’s not going to get away with not accepting my help.

“Of course,” she says, batting her eyelashes at me.

I choose not to call her out on her little lie, instead, we continue along this path until all of the rooms, including our own, have been gone through with a fine tooth comb.

“Come on, kids, we’re due up at the clubhouse for family dinner,” I announce, cupping my hands around my mouth so my voice carries down the hallway.

“Coming!” they shout in unison causing Selah to giggle.

“There are times I think they practice doing that,” she tells me. “It’s like a chorus, especially when they’re up to no good.”

“What do you think they’re up to?” I inquire, raising my brows at her.

“They did take Hannah’s new art set into her room earlier,” she reminds me. “They tried to be sneaky, but I saw them.”

I don’t get a chance to reply before they all come into the room, their hands hidden behind their backs. “What do y’all have there?”

Hannah steps forward, and announces, “We didn’t have any money to buy y’all gifts, so we made you both a card.”

Hannah reaches out her hand, shaking a folded up piece of cardstock at me. “For

me?" I ask.

"Yes," she shyly clarifies. When it's in my hands, she steps back and Amelia and Faye take her place, passing theirs over to me.

I open them in order and nearly drop to my knees.

Faye's reads,

"Thank you for being my dad. I love you. Merry Christmas."

Amelia's states,

"To the best Dad in the universe. Thank you for being mine. Merry Christmas."

Last, but not least, I open Hannah's and a knot forms in my throat when I open it up and digest the words.

"Thank you for choosing me. I always wanted a Dad and am glad you decided to love me back. Merry Christmas, Daddy."

"Dad," Nitro hesitantly calls me close to him. "Is this okay to give, Selah?"

When I open it up, my chin falls to my chest. "Yeah, buddy. This is perfect," I reassure him, reaching up and ruffling his hair. "Love you, buddy."

"Love you too, Pops." He reaches over me, simultaneously hugging me and passing Selah her card to her over my shoulder. "This is for you, Mom."

I twist my head and watch her read it. Tears stream down her face as she hiccups. "Oh, Nitro. Yes, I'll be your forever Mom." She stands over me, stretching down and

plucking my boy from my arms. “I love you too, son. Merry Christmas.”

EPILOGUE

Butcher

We're all seated around the table, passing food around as parents fill the kids' plates as well as their own. I feel a manifestation come up behind me which has my hair standing on end. I'm usually more on guard and know when there's a foreign presence in the room, especially one nearing me. It's the only way one can survive in our world. Be aware and cognizant at all times, even during a holiday feast apparently when I shouldn't have to worry about such things.

"Merry Christmas, brother," a feminine voice whispers into my ear. My entire body jars as I whip around and see my sister, Wyatt, and Willow standing there.

"Joce," I choke out. "You're here!" I gather her and the kids into my arms, my face buried into her stomach. "Are you okay?" I scan her over, and other than some old bruises that have turned an ugly shade of yellow, she appears to be whole and uninjured.

"I've been better," she tells me.

"Nobody will ever hurt you again, sis," I avow. "You hungry?"

"Famished," she answers, her eyes swinging to Dragon. "Hey, big brother."

"Hey, back at you, little sister. How about you coming over here and giving me some love too," he commands.

With tears in her eyes, she abandons me and rushes over and buries herself in Dragon's arms, weeping. Wyatt and Willow watch their mother with critical eyes, hoping that nobody here betrays her and raises a hand in her direction.

"She's safe. You all are," I assure them. "Come on, let's get you two plates. Want to sit over there with Nitro?"

The kids decided they didn't want to sit with us adults, they have more fun without us hovering over them, making them mind their manners. So we set up a card table a few feet away from us, still within our line of sight, but far enough away they feel grown up.

They nod their heads yes to my question, so Selah and I jump up and start showing them what's available. The menu is vast, and their eyes shine when they're given choices. Once we have them settled, I watch as Laney reintroduces Joke to the triplets since she hasn't seen them in a year, she's missed all of their milestones and they've grown by leaps and bounds.

Nearly unrecognizable.

Laney moves over, emptying her chair, placing Joke between herself and Dragon to make sure my sister isn't feeling uncomfortable around all the new faces surrounding her.

"To family," Selah says, lifting her wine glass and tinkling it against my beer bottle.

"To family," I repeat, leaning over and giving her a kiss, one full of claims and promises. "Love you, Lah."

"Love you too, Butcher."

We decided against exchanging gifts with one another this year. Instead, we'll give

each other something each month, something that's not necessarily a physical gift, but one that's significant, monumental, and meaningful. Something that shows our true feelings—ones that can't be expressed on one singular day.

Each month throughout the year, we have a date night planned. One that won't include kids. We may give each other a token of our love, or we may just cuddle up in bed, talking. Those are some of the most insightful nights I've experienced with her.

She completes me in a way I never thought was possible. She's shown me the error of my ways on more than one occasion. She's not just my lover, my better half, she's also my teacher. With her, I've learned what love and sacrifice is about.

She's a breath of fresh air. She doesn't bow down to me, she stands her ground and that's a trait I respect. I don't want a submissive partner—I want one who challenges me and makes me strive to be a better man. I'll fight tooth and nail until my dying day for her and our children. After all, my life isn't worth living without them at my side.

New Years Eve

My eyes narrow at Selah when she once again passes up another offer of a champagne flute. It's New Year's Eve, and she should be letting loose and having fun.

Having had enough of it, I march over to her and bend low, asking, "Why aren't you drinking? Are you sick? Do we need to go home?"

"No," she answers, peering down at the ground. Just as I'm about to get onto her, demanding answers, the countdown begins. Once we reach midnight, she kisses me with a passion that ignites my soul before lifting up on her toes and whispering words in my ear that'll stay with me for the rest of my life.

“Congratulations, Butcher. Our family of six will be expanded to a family of seven by this time next year.”

It takes me a second for her words to sink in, and once they do, I whoop as loud as my throat allows before lifting her off her feet and backing her into the wall. “You going to have my baby, Lah?”

“Yeah,” she huskily replies, her eyes growing glassy. “I’m gonna have your baby, biker man.”

Unable to resist, I lean forward and grip her lips with mine. I pour every ounce of happiness I’m feeling into the kiss.

“You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Selah. You and our kids,” I say, reaching down and cupping her still flat belly, “are my entire world.”

“And you’re ours,” she rebuts. “Are you happy?” She chews on her bottom lip. We never discussed adding onto our family, I was content with it being just the six of us, but the thoughts of a little one running around, a blend of the two of us, makes me soar with exhilaration.

“More than you’ll ever know,” I confess.

“Happy New Year, Butcher.”

“Happy New Year, Lah.”

I cart her out of the clubhouse and toward our home. I’m not worried about the kids—they were staying overnight with Joceline. Tonight is going to be a night full of celebrations.

To a New Year.

To a new life.

We have enemies still out there lurking in the darkness, waiting for the right time to strike. But with the MC and our families standing beside us, there's nothing we can't overcome.

The End