



Solo the god (BLP Motorcycle Clubs #17)

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Category: Urban

Description: Tash

All I wanted was my freedom.

A way out of a bad situation but I ran straight into the arms of a devil dressed as a god.

Solomon Solo Godfrey was cruel, calculated, and merciless but he was also the savior I needed.

I should have backed out the moment he pierced me with those soulless eyes.

I shouldn't have let him kiss me, but I did.

I should have listened to the heart that was beating out of my chest.

but I'd bent around ruthless men before, so I made a deal with Solo.

Now he owned me, and every part of my body will bare his name.

Solo

I'd ever planned a destruction as well as I planned hers.

She was the perfect victim.

Innocent, sweet, and unsuspecting.

Her dark skin glistened in the night.

And those thighs were made to be parted.

I couldn't wait until she realized what she had done.

Her lips would call my name.

Her tongue would beg me for mercy she would never get.

She came to me for protection, but I'd never known a man more

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“I got your slippers, your dinner, your dessert, and so much more.”

I sang along to “Cater 2 U” as the music filled the air. I danced around the kitchen, putting the finishing touches on our dinner. It was our ninth wedding anniversary, and Tyson would be walking through the door at any minute.

The last nine years hadn’t been peaches and cream, but we had survived them together. Tyson and I had been joined at the hip since the first day we met in ninth grade. Now, we were celebrating nine years as a married couple. The only thing that could have made this moment better were children. In due time, we would have them too.

I’d put on my favorite jeans because he loved the way they made my butt sit up. The shirt I wore didn’t leave much to wonder about as my titties were perky and spilled out. My toes were painted to match my nails perfectly, and the heels I wore helped to fill out my small frame. The bouncy curls that took hours to perfect sealed my look.

I heard Tyson’s key turn in the door and rushed from the kitchen to meet him. I stopped by the mirror on the way to check my reflection. When he swung the door open, I was there to meet him. A smile tugged at my lips as I ran right into his arms.

“Happy anniversary, baby.”

“Happy what?”

The smell of Hennessy on his breath and the slur in his words brought my attention to the perfume that lingered on his clothes. I couldn’t place the smell, but I knew it

wasn't mine.

"It's our anniversary, Tyson. Don't tell me you forgot." The scent was so strong I was sure it'd be stuck in my nose for days.

"Don't start that shit, Tash. I didn't forget. You just caught me off guard."

He stumbled as I released him from the hug. I stepped back because I needed to let the reality of what was happening set in. This man had not only forgotten our anniversary but had the audacity to be out cheating.

"So, let me get this straight," I said, holding up a finger. "Not only did you forget our anniversary, but you come home drunk smelling like another bitch."

I turned on my heels and walked back to the kitchen. If I didn't put some space in between us, I would never be able to calm down.

"Look, Tash, I'm not in the mood for the bullshit. Is the food done?"

I leaned against the kitchen counter with my arms folded across my chest. My weight rested on one foot while the other tapped against the ground at rapid speed. Tyson didn't pay me any mind as he took off his coat and threw it over the couch before stumbling in the dining room to take a seat at the table. He'd been out with another woman on our anniversary, and she couldn't even bother to feed him. This was becoming a pattern I knew all too well.

I turned off the music and blew out the candles before plating our food. I would always make sure my husband ate, but he didn't deserve the mood I'd set. He didn't even deserve to have me at the table with him, but I was hungry. I'd been slaving for hours over the stove trying to show him a little bit of appreciation, and this was the thanks I got.

“You don’t hear me talking to you, woman? I asked if the food was done.”

This was the asshole I’d married. He still demanded total obedience, even after coming in drunk on our anniversary. Any remnant of the boy I fell in love with was gone. I couldn’t for the life of me make sense of why I was still holding on to something that would never be the same.

“Yes,” I mumbled. I tossed Tyson’s plate in front of him. “Here’s your food.”

Tyson’s disrespect was at an all-time high, but I didn’t have to put up with it. I didn’t have to continue being the dutiful wife. I had options.

“Damn, this looks good, but you didn’t have to throw it at me.”

I set my own plate at the other end of the table and sat down in front of it. I admired the steak, mashed potatoes, asparagus, and lobster tail before picking up the bottle of wine and pouring myself a glass. Tyson had already had enough to drink, so I didn’t offer him a drop.

I sipped my wine and thought back on all the good times we’d had. Like in the ninth grade, we’d skipped fourth period to go Downtown to the arcade. We were both so competitive. We used to play those games until the streetlights came on and still didn’t want to go home. We were both running from our own family drama. Being with each other felt like we’d finally found peace.

By the time we were seniors, we’d graduated from skipping class to just not going to school at all. It was a miracle we graduated, but I was still able to maintain my honors, and I never let Tyson slip on his schoolwork. Whether we were there every day or not, the work always got turned in.

After I turned eighteen, nobody could tell me that Tyson and I weren’t going to get

married and ride off into the sunset together. He hit the milestone a couple months earlier, so two days after my birthday, we marched down to the courthouse and got married. There was no one to object.

The clinking of my fork raking around my plate for the thousandth time brought me out of my trip down memory lane. I surrendered to the fact that I'd lost my appetite. I had only taken one bite of my steak, and I was sure my mashed potatoes were cold by now. As excited as I was preparing this meal, it was now the furthest thing from my mind.

"So, who's lipstick is on your collar? You may as well tell me her name since you clearly don't give a fuck if I know you're cheating."

"Tash, don't interrupt my meal to ask me dumb questions. Even if I did care about you knowing, I still couldn't tell you her name. I don't know it." He smirked with pride before taking another bite of his food.

"And you're proud of sleeping with women you don't even know? Women who can't even cook you a decent meal?"

"How do you know what they can do?"

"Clearly you ain't ate shit. You're over there shoving down the food I spent hours cooking while you were out running the streets."

My voice raised with the last words. I was so tired of Tyson playing with me. He was making it clear that he didn't care anything about how this made me feel.

"Honestly, Tasha, I'm sorry this happened on your anniversary, but I'm happy everything is out in the open. Now, I don't have to lie about where I'm going."

“And you expect me to be okay with that?”

“You’re going to have to be. I pay all the bills in this house, and you don’t have nowhere else to go. That nursing degree has been collecting dust since the day you got it.” His chuckle was laced with sarcasm, but he was right. I’d never even seen a bill in our home.

“We will see about that.”

I got up from my chair and stormed into the bedroom. Pulling a bag from the shelf in the closet, I stuffed it with the first things I could find. I didn’t have a penny to my name that wasn’t given to me by Tyson, but I knew I could at least spend the night with my little brother. My degree may have been collecting dust, but I could still put it to use.

“Where you think you going?” Tyson snatched my bag from my hand and threw it to the ground.

“I’m leaving you, Tyson. It’s over. We’ve been over for a long time and I’ve done everything I can to revive this relationship. Tonight, you showed me you don’t care, so why should I? I am done.”

I’d heard you should never let a man tell you he doesn’t want you more than once, and Tyson had more than said the words. He showed me with his actions every day how little he cared about me. I was pathetic for still holding on to what used to be, even though there were clear signs that we would never get to that place again.

I picked up my bag from the spot where Tyson had flung it and threw it over my shoulder. Grabbing my phone from the floor, I shoved it in the back pocket of my jeans. I tried to push past my husband when the back of his hand connected with my face. I fell to the ground, holding the spot where he’d smacked me.

“I will kill you before I let you leave me, Tasha.”

He lifted his foot and crashed it into my stomach.

“I refuse to live without you. Do you hear me? I will kill you!” he yelled before kicking me again.

I wanted to grab my stomach from the pain but I needed to protect my face. I balled up into a fetal position to protect myself from whatever came next. If he kicked me again, I could at least prevent the little food I did eat from spilling onto my room floor.

“Tyson, please just let me go!” I screamed.

“I will never let you go. You’re the best thing that ever happened to me.” He bent down and lifted my head from the ground so we were eye level. “Clean yourself and this house up then come your ass to bed.”

Tyson was already asleep by the time I was done cleaning. Walking past the bed, I went into the bathroom to shower. I pulled my phone from my back pocket and placed it on the sink before I undressed. Pulling the shirt over my head was painful. I knew I would feel like I’d got hit by a bus in the morning, but the bruises had already started to show on my caramel skin.

It stung when I stepped into the shower and let the hot water hit my body. I slid down the back wall and let the water fall on my head. I was not the girl whose husband beat her. I deserved better than that. I owed myself more.

I went through the motions of trying to wash away the day. The soap I used or how long I scrubbed didn’t seem to stay in my mind long. I did everything I could to avoid the mirror as I dried myself off and pulled on the jogger set I’d placed on the toilet.

My mind was going a mile a minute, and there was nothing I could do to slow things down.

How did I get here? How did I become the woman who tied herself to a man like Tyson? I'd missed all the signs. From the moment we'd met, I'd saw him in a light that even my friends couldn't dim. Now, that light had gone out.

I grabbed my phone from the sink and called the only person I knew would come to my aid. It only rang twice before he answered.

"Can you come pick me up?"

"Yeah, what's wrong, big sis?" my brother Rebel asked.

"I just need to get out of here before Tyson wakes up. Can you be here in an hour?"

"I'll be there in half."

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“Where do you plan on going, sis? You know when Tyson wakes up he’s going to have his whole crew out looking for you.”

“I know. I’m sorry for getting you involved in this.”

“Don’t be sorry. I’m your brother. I’ll do anything to protect you. I would have been came over and checked that nigga if I knew he’d been putting his hands on you.”

Rebel was only eighteen years old and fresh out of high school. I was sure he meant every word he said, but there was really nothing he could do to help me.

Tyson was the Southside Burners’ second in command, which meant he was well connected. Right or wrong, his whole club would be behind him no matter what. There was no way Rebel could stand against them by himself, which meant I only had a few hours to figure out what the fuck I was going to do. Going home wasn’t an option.

“Where we going?”

It felt like Rebel was driving in circles. I honestly couldn’t blame him if he was. Neither of us had a plan, but I appreciated him for coming when I called.

“I’mma take you to God’s Alley. There’s only one person I know that can help us. I just need to get close to him.”

“Since when did you start hanging out on God’s Alley?”

God's Alley was the home of the notorious Steel Gods Motorcycle Club, but they were more of a gang than club. Anybody who believed different was a fool.

"When I joined as a prospect." Rebel reached into the back seat with one hand and held the steering wheel with the other. He pulled back a vest and tossed it in my lap. It was a simple black vest with the word prospect written across the back.

"Are you out of your damn mind? You can't join the Steel Gods. You know it's a gang, and that is not the kind of life you want to live."

"I just want to ride, Tash. Besides, they don't let prospects get into all that."

"And what happens when you become a full member?"

"I'll cross that bridge when I get there."

Rebel parked his car and hopped out.

"Come on." He motioned with his hand. "Aye, don't forget the vest. Gotta put that on."

I'd never been on God's Alley. Even though it wasn't too far from where we grew up, I never needed to come this way. I had no idea how many people spent their night walking up and down the dark streets around their clubhouse until I walked them myself. I immediately knew I didn't belong here.

The air held the stench of weed and bad decisions. "Sticky" by Tyler, The Creator boomed from the speakers of an old school Monte Carlo parked two spaces down. Engines revved high as bikes raced past us on the street. Every time my eyes glanced in a different direction, it was something else I couldn't believe.

The temperature outside was every bit of thirty degrees, and women were walking around in G-strings and high heels. Hairstyles ranged from lace fronts and braids to locs. The men acted like hounds as they chased every tail that walked by. I was sure I looked out of place in my pink jogger set and Ugg boots.

I walked in Rebel's footsteps and held on to his shirt as he dapped up everyone on his way up to the clubhouse. I could hear the whispers as I walked through crowds of men. Trying to make it to the door was like fighting your way through the lion's den. I was starting to think coming here was a bad idea.

"Welcome to Gods' House." The bouncer stared me down after letting my brother in. He stood in front of me, blocking my entrance. "Who you got with you, Rebel?"

I twisted my nose up at his question. There was no way in hell he thought I would be interested in him.

"This my sister." Rebel turned back and grabbed my hand to pull me past him. "She's good. We just came to see Solo."

"Cool, but he's up in his office. You already know they not about to let you up there." He laughed before focusing his attention back on me. "Maybe you and me can make our own fun down here."

I rolled my eyes and kept walking.

"Big Ray, stop smiling at my fucking sister. It's plenty of hos on their way up in here."

"Alright, bro. You got it."

"Don't talk to anyone while we're here, sis. I'm going to find you a seat at the bar

while I try to get upstairs. They keep security tight here, and Solo only allows one person in his office. As you probably already guessed, I am not that one person. I got to try to make him see this is an emergency, or we will be waiting on him to come down all night.”

“Okay, but please don’t be long. I already feel like this is a bad idea.”

“It’s going to work. Trust me.”

“I trust you.” My brother kissed my forehead before leading me to the bar.

“Just sit here,” he said, looking around like someone was watching him. “And remember, don’t talk to anyone.”

“Rebel, who am I going to talk to?”

“I’ll be back in ten minutes tops.”

He walked away, and I settled into my seat. The smoke in the clubhouse was so thick everyone had to have their own blunt. The music had the crowd moving, and everyone looked to be enjoying the vibes—except me. I was ready to go before the smoke got stuck in my hair.

“A pretty lil thing like you shouldn’t be sitting all by herself.” A man walked up beside me before draping his arm around my neck. “Can I buy you a drink?”

“No,” I said simply before removing his arm.

“Don’t be like that, pretty girl.”

“Come on, Tash. He’s not up there.”

Rebel came back just in time to save me from whatever this was.

“What up, prospect? This your girl?”

“Nah, Tone. This is my sister, Tasha. Tasha, this is Tone. He’s the second in command here, and the only person allowed in Solo’s office.”

Tone looked at me with a smug look as if hearing that would somehow change my mind. It didn’t.

“Have you seen Solo? I need to talk to him about something.”

“He’s at the pool table.”

Tone pointed behind the bar where I could see a crowd forming. Rebel walked toward the crowd, and I was right behind him. There was no way he was leaving me there with Tone’s sleezy ass.

“What about that drink, sweetheart?”

“Maybe next time,” I tossed over my shoulder and quickened my step to catch up with my brother.

It felt like the building got colder the closer we got to the pool table. There were men standing around wearing their Steel Gods vests. Each of them had women on their arms who looked no older than Rebel. They were either turning up a bottled or pulling on a blunt between their lips.

“Solo, I need to talk to you.”

“Slow down, prospect. Run it by me first.” A big dude held Rebel in place with his

gigantic hand.

“Six stripes, corner pocket.” Solo’s voice was deep and intimidating without being raised.

He never looked up from the pool table before shaking his head to Rebel’s request. He looked different now from when I first stared at him from across the courtroom the other day. The suit and glasses he wore gave him a sophisticated look, but he wasn’t wearing either of those things now. Tonight, I was up close and personal, and I could see him clearly.

His caramel skin was painted with tattoos. His face was home to the deepest waves I’d seen in a long time. The diamond earring in his ear accentuated his side profile, and his thick beard made the cutest shadow around his pink lips. I didn’t know if the tattoos on his face made him look dangerous or delectable, but the fight to stop looking was hard fought.

I tore my eyes away from him just in time to see Rebel drop his head. The disappointment on my brother’s face was evident. He’d put all his hopes in Solo being able to help us, and this bastard couldn’t even bother to look at Rebel when he spoke. He was high on his horse, but I wasn’t trying to be a part of Steel Gods, which meant I had no problem speaking my mind.

“My brother came here because we need your help. He had so much faith in you, and you can’t even look at him when he’s talking to you.”

I knew opening my mouth to Solo wasn’t smart. I’d spent more than a week getting the rundown on all the horrible things he’d done, but I had very little to lose.

“Chill, Tash. Let’s go.” Rebel tried to grab my arm, but I pulled away.

“No. You’re wearing his prospect vest. The least he could do is hear you out when you have something to say.” I took my eyes off Rebel and focused them back on Solo. “Is that the kind of leader you are? One who doesn’t give a shit about the men trying to join his club?”

I placed my hand on my hip and rested my weight on one leg. His eyes traveled up before he stood. I could tell he was over six feet when he was fully upright. For a moment, he just stared at me, and I did the same. If we were having a staring contest, I refused to back down. I only knew what I’d heard about him from other people. He was a ruthless thug, but I also knew any real man would respect the stance I took for my little brother. After all, I was the whole reason we were here.

“Take your sister home, Rebel. I don’t want to mistake her for one of my girls.”

He spoke to my brother, but his eyes never left me. I watched them travel up and down my frame before a corner of his mouth curved into a half smile.

“That would be impossible,” I snapped.

His smile widened. His teeth were perfectly straight and insanely white. I was envious of people who had the perfect smile but not him. I was sure his smile was rarely being used and probably going to waste.

“Tash, please... let’s go,” Rebel begged, and I finally listened.

After we were away from them, I glanced in Solo’s direction one last time.

“Run away, little girl,” Tone, who’d made his way from the bar, chimed in, making the rest of the crowd around the table laugh.

I didn’t care what any of them thought of me, but I wasn’t looking forward to

walking back out that door.

“Let’s just get a drink.”

I nudged my brother in the direction of the bar, and he followed. Once we were there, I ordered a lemon drop, and he ordered a shot of Crown Apple. He tossed his back as soon as the bartender placed it in his hand.

“Damn, sis. I really thought this was going to work.”

“It’s okay, Rebel. This is my problem. You don’t have to try to solve it for me.”

“I don’t want you going back to that house though, Tash. No man is about to be putting his hands on my sister.”

“I’m not going back. I just have to figure something else out.”

I sipped my drink while I let my mind wander. I didn’t want to stay at Rebel’s because that would be the first place Tyson looked. I also didn’t have any money for a hotel and using a credit card was out of the question. That would sure enough lead him straight to me.

“You think you can loan me some money for a hotel? I need it in cash.”

“Yeah. Come on. I’ll take you to an ATM then help you find somewhere to stay. I’m sorry I couldn’t do more.”

The cold air smacked us in the face as soon as we stepped out into the night. The scene pretty much looked the same from when we walked in besides the straight line of headlights that lined up at the top of the alley.

“I guess someone else is about to race again.”

“Nah, that’s too many headlights for a race.”

My brother grabbed my arm and quickened his pace toward the car.

“Come on. Let me get you inside.” Rebel held my hand as we walked toward the car, but before we could cross the street, the trail of lights was headed straight for us. My heart almost fell out of my chest when I saw the first vest with the words Southside Burners printed on it. He’d found me.

The line was so long it stretched from one end of the alley all the way to the other. Tyson parked his bike right in front of us and walked straight over to me.

“Let’s go, Tash.”

“My sister ain’t going nowhere with you.” Rebel spoke up before I had a chance to. He pushed me behind him so his body was a barrier between Tyson and I.

“Can’t you see adults are talking, Reb?”

“Nah. You put your hands on my sister. You got me fucked up.”

Rebel reached back and swung a fist across Tyson’s face. He stumbled backward, knocking his bike over. Rebel was outnumbered, and I knew once the bike hit the ground this wouldn’t be a fair fight.

I ran back into the clubhouse in search of Solo. He had to do something, or my brother wouldn’t make it out of the shit I’d dragged him into. I found Solo in the same place we left him, fully immersed in a game of pool.

“Solo, please come. The Southside Burners are jumping my brother. You have to help him! They are going to kill him. Please! This is all my fault.”

The crowd surrounding the table moved at the mention of the Southside Burners, but Solo held up one hand that stopped them in their tracks. I could see looks of frustration on their faces, but no one said a word. Everything around him moved or stopped at his command.

“He is your prospect, and the Burners are on our side of town,” Tone spoke low, but I could still hear him.

“I’m at peace with the Burners. Prospects know that.”

“Still, they came here. Pulling up to our club without an invite is an act of war.”

“That’s slight. I’ll overlook it. You know what I got going on right now. I can’t risk bringing attention to myself or this clubhouse.”

“I’m on the jury!” I yelled, pulling his attention back to me. “For your trial... I-I’m on the jury. If you protect us, I’ll make sure you get a not guilty verdict.”

He finally dropped the pool stick and walked in my direction. Stopping just in front of me, Solo lifted my head with one finger.

“I knew you looked familiar, Peach.”

It was the color of the outfit I’d worn to court today. I hadn’t noticed the tattoo that ran down his forehead before this moment. His eyes had never looked so dark either, but with only inches of air keeping our faces from touching, I saw him more clearly. The more he stared into my eyes, the more tears pooled.

“Please! This is all my fault,” I begged, letting the tears fall freely from my eyes.

Solo pushed past me without another word, and it seemed like the whole club followed him outside. I watched as he found my brother in the crowd and pulled Tyson off him. Tyson swung and struck Solo in the mouth before even looking to see who’d grabbed him. Once his eyes met Solo’s, they widened.

The blow Solo released made my stomach churn. The sound his fist made when it connected with Tyson’s face was sickening. Tyson’s body hit the ground with a loud thud. This was not what I wanted. I’d left home in search of safety and ended up in the middle of a gang fight.

Two shots rang out, bringing everyone’s attention to the shooter. Everyone stood in silence waiting for the shooter to speak.

“Solo, we have had over ten years of peace. If you don’t let Natasha leave with us tonight, that peace is over.” It was Burner, the Southside Burners leader.

I recognized him, but besides his name, I didn’t know much about him. Tyson was good at keeping me away from that side of his life.

“I thrive better in war. Rebel is a prospect of this house, and Natasha belongs to me. From this day forward, she’s my property.”

“Burn, you can’t let him do this,” Tyson said, finally getting up off the ground. “Tash is my wife.”

“Not anymore,” Solo announced before turning to me. “Let’s go.”

What did he mean by I belonged to him? I hoped he didn’t think he was going to have me walking around like one of his branded hos I’d seen inside. I’d just left one man

for putting his hands on me, and now, I was attached to another who thought he owned me. What did it mean to be his property? If I wasn't scared before, I was terrified now.

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“Ladies and gentlemen, the man you see before you today is Solomon Godfrey.” The district attorney stood casually in front of the jury as she began her closing argument. “He wears fine suits and high-end glasses. His shoes are worth more than my yearly salary. He’s the epitome of esteem as he sits before you today, but you know that is a lie. The man you see at that table is wearing the best mask, and the name Solomon Godfrey is merely an alias.

“That man over there is ‘Solo the god.’ That is what they call him in the streets. He believes he has the power and right to take any life he wants without repercussion. That is the message he sends every time he kills one of our citizens and gets away with it.

“You have heard testimony throughout this trial detailing all the vile, manipulative, and disgusting acts Mr. Godfrey has committed. The facts of this case are clear. Solo the god murdered Mr. Baxter in cold blood then burned his house to the ground to get rid of the evidence. It is your duty to find him guilty of that crime.”

She paused, giving the whole courtroom time to let the things she’d said about me sit in.

“Take a good look at him, because the next person he kills could be you.”

The district attorney shot daggers at me with her eyes as she returned to her seat. I could feel all the eyes in the courtroom burning holes in the side of my face, but I wasn’t moved. In fact, I had completely tuned everyone else in the courtroom out and focused all of my attention on her.

Natasha Reigns sat on the second row of jurors in the third chair. Only half of her face could be seen from where I sat, but I already had every inch of that face committed to memory. When I closed my eyes, I could still see every wrinkle and crease in her big, pink lips. If I focused hard enough, I could taste them.

“The DA wants you to believe my client is nothing more than a gang banger.”

I hadn't even noticed Tone, my lawyer, get up to deliver his closing argument. Much of the day had gone by in a blur since my thoughts were occupied with the moment Natasha stepped foot in my clubhouse.

“She talks about his clothes and shoes to distract you from the fact that her case is made up of complete lies. Solomon Godfrey is a war hero who fought in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He knows the true value of human life because he lost so many of his friends down range to the same violence he is being accused of.

“Ask yourself why would my client take the same lives he traveled thousands of miles and spent years away from his own family to fight for? You won't be able to answer that question because it just doesn't make any sense. Do the right thing and find my client not guilty of all charges. He deserves to be at home with the people who care about him.”

The not guilty verdict came faster than I thought it would, and when the DA polled the jury, the decision was unanimous. How pissed she was leaving the courtroom made all the shit she'd put me through over the last year worth it. That bitch had made her career off trying to take me down, and I was happy she was failing.

I stood and hugged my brother tight before I thanked him. Tone had been my best friend since the sandbox, and there was no one I trusted with my freedom more. The streets were my playground, but he owned every courtroom he'd ever stepped foot in. When I decided to join the army, he went to law school, and we both excelled—he at

defending his clients and me at eliminating my enemies. We were two sides of the same coin.

After fighting to get through the mob of reporters swarming like the vultures they were, we slid in the back seat of the black SUV parked outside of the courthouse waiting to pick us up.

“How did it feel to hear that verdict?”

“Like freedom, bro.” I dapped Tone up again as the driver merged into traffic. “Where we headed?”

I had no idea where we were going, but I was hungry as fuck. I needed to put something on my stomach.

“The bros have put something together for you at the clubhouse,” Tone said before instructing the driver to take us there.

The cloud of smoke in the clubhouse was thick, and bitches were everywhere. Blunts were being passed left and right as soon as we walked in. I’d hugged and dapped up almost every person on the way to the section I normally occupied when I wasn’t upstairs in my office. Tonight, I wanted to be out on the floor. I was at home and surrounded by the family I’d created.

“What you drinking tonight, Solo?” one of the bottle girls asked as soon as we sat down.

“Bring us three bottles of Mansion House,” Tone declared since he knew I didn’t drink, and he would have them all to himself.

I never liked what alcohol did to men. My mind needed to be clear at all times. I’d

only picked up smoking weed because I wasn't allowed to do it in the military. Now, I dabbled but never went overboard. Being high would never be a good enough excuse for making bad business decisions.

"I told you to stop drinking that shit."

"Telling me to put down the brandy is like telling you to sell all those guns you got hanging around your house. Sounds dumb as shit, don't it?"

"If you say so, nigga. Where's that prospect? The one whose sister was on the jury."

"I saw him at the bar when we walked in. Want me to go get him?"

"Yeah, send him over here. I want to rap to him alone ." I emphasized alone because I knew Tone would come right back with him. With Tone being my lawyer, I needed to keep him on the right side of the law. That meant some things just couldn't be discussed in front of him.

It didn't take long for Tone to do as I asked. In less than ten minutes, Rebel was walking into my section.

"What's up, Solo? Tone said you were looking for me."

"Yeah, sit down." I pointed to the seat across from me and he did as he was told. "I need you to do something for me."

"Anything. I appreciate you helping me and my sister. Is she still with you? I haven't heard from or seen her since the other night."

"You worried about too many things at one time. Pay attention."

“You right. What is it you need me to do?”

“I want you to join the army.”

“What? I can’t join the army. I’m a prospect. I got duties here at the club. I thought I was doing good.”

“You are, but you would be a better prospect if you had more discipline. It takes intelligence and discipline to be a god. That fight you started the other night threw us into a war. You realize that, don’t you?”

“I do, and I want to stay and help you fight it. The Burners are some pussies. It wouldn’t take nothing to get rid of them niggas.”

“The only way you can help me is by disappearing. Join the army first thing in the morning, or you’ll be dead by noon.” I ignored the confused look on Rebel’s face as I got up and left.

I saw so much of myself in Rebel. He was smart but explosive, and it didn’t take much to set him off. I sealed the peace between the Steel Gods and the Southside Burners when I became president ten years ago, and in one night, he’d shattered that peace. If I didn’t kill him, someone else would, so sending him away was an act of kindness. Joining the army at eighteen years old saved my life. I just hoped it could do the same for him.

I didn’t like the hour-long drive from the city to my house as much as I liked living in the middle of nowhere away from everything and everybody. The time it took me to make it home gave me time to plan. I knew the Burners would strike eventually, and I wanted to be ready.

“You had someone kidnap me from a courthouse? You really have no respect for the

law, do you?”

The way she stood in front of me with her hand on her hip put Natasha’s curves on full display.

“Are you in chains?”

“No.”

“Was someone holding you at gunpoint?”

“Of course not, but you know what I mean.” Her face was scrunched but still cute as hell.

I strained myself for hours in that courtroom this morning trying to remember every detail of her face, so I was thankful to be seeing it up close and personal. She was easily the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen.

“Then you weren’t kidnapped.” I pushed Natasha in the direction of the couch. “Sit over there.”

If her face remained that close to mine for a second longer, I wouldn’t be responsible for what happened next.

“Don’t put your hands on me, and I am not sitting down. I’m leaving.”

“No, you’re not.” I chuckled at the thought of her thinking she could just leave. “You owe me for saving you and your brother’s life. I collect on all debts.”

“I appreciate your help, but that not guilty verdict says we are even. I don’t owe you anything.”

She tried to storm past me to get to the door, but I snatched her up in my arms.

“The face that launched a thousand bikes.” I traced Natasha’s face with my finger as I put my own twist on the age-old quote. “I’m sure wars have been fought for less.”

I released her, and she backed away, straightening the dress she’d worn to court.

I let my eyes travel down the length of her frame and stopped at her ankles. Her brown skin was as smooth as butter. I imagined those ankles locked firmly behind my head. She was short as hell and thick in all the right places. Her curves only heightened the desirability of her petite body. They pointed to the fact that no matter how small she was, she was a fully grown woman.

“Look, I’m sorry about what happened at your clubhouse, but this whole thing about me being your property is not going to work. You do not own me.”

She pushed past me again, and this time, I let her. It didn’t take her long to make it to the front door, and I watched without moving to stop her. When she swung the door open, she was met by one of my guards.

“Excuse me, sir.”

Instead of stepping to the side for her, he looked at me.

“You can close the door.”

He did so without even acknowledging her. “Follow me. I will take you to your room.”

“My room? I am not staying in this house.”

“Can you walk, or do I need to carry you?”

She stood with her hand on her hip in defiance.

“Cool.”

I picked Natasha up and threw her over my shoulder. She kicked and screamed, which did nothing but blow my high. This girl had been a problem since the day I met her, and I couldn't wait to get rid of her. I didn't need more complications, so the faster I could bury this whole situation the better. I just needed to figure out the right way to do it.

Having a member of the jury who'd just acquitted me turn up dead would lead the police back to my front door. The war that I'd just created with the Burners was already going to throw a wrench in a lot of the business moves we were trying to make. I didn't have time to be fighting on all sides. Handling her had to be done right.

Her ass brushed against my cheek as I carried her up the stairs. I felt a sudden urge to bite it which only pissed me off more. I shouldn't be thinking about how smooth her skin was or how soft her ass felt against my face. Her lips shouldn't have been so heavy on my mind, but they were.

“You cannot keep me here. I need to get back to the city and find my brother.”

“Listen, you can try to leave if you want to, but you won't make it far. How comfortable you are here is going to be up to you. If I catch you trying to escape, I'm either going to tie your ass up or put a bullet between those pretty eyes of yours. It depends on how I'm feeling at the moment. If you act like you got some sense, you can make yourself at home here. The fridge is always stocked, and I have every streaming service you can think of. Just sit tight until I figure out what to do with you.”

“Until you figure out what to do with me? What does that even mean? Are you going to kill me? Did you already kill Rebel?”

She shot off one question after another, and I didn’t plan on answering any of them. I honestly didn’t even know the answers myself.

I needed to kill her. It should have been done and made to look like an accident as soon as she left the courthouse. A car accidentally hitting her as she crossed the street to her car would have sufficed. I could have stopped a war and resumed business as usual, but I instructed Brian to bring her here. Now that she was standing in front of me looking so small and afraid, I couldn’t fathom how such a beautiful face could bring the ruin of my whole organization.

“The remote is on the TV stand,” was all I could say before exiting the room and putting as much space between us as I could.

The way that woman made me feel was dangerous, and the only type of danger I liked was the kind I created. Natasha had to go.

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I was so stupid to think my life would get better if I left Tyson. I'd known he was cheating on me for years, so I shouldn't have been surprised when he came home on our anniversary wearing another woman's scent and lipstick on his shirt. That night wasn't even the first time he'd hit me, so I didn't know why it was the final straw.

I should have let him kill me. At least then I would have died at the hands of a man I knew, one who at least cared about me at one point in his life. Maybe he would have made it quick and easy. Now, I was at the mercy of a stranger. I'd heard all about how Solomon Godfrey made people and things disappear, and just like the DA said, I was his next victim.

My whole life had been a waste, and now it was going to end. I had a degree that I'd never used because my husband wanted me to stay home. How pathetic was that? I'd always thought my mother was pathetic for staying with my father way too long, but I followed in her footsteps. I guess that was my way of keeping her legacy alive since I was the reason she died.

If I would have never told my mother about my father cheating, she would have never asked for a divorce, and he would have never killed her. The murder-suicide carried out by an army veteran who was loved by so many was all my fault, and my oldest brother Navi knew it. That was why he left the first chance he got.

I had run one brother off and got the other one killed just like I did my mother. I wish Rebel had washed his hands with me and left with Navi, but he was always my shadow. If no one else wanted me around, I knew Rebel did. Now, he was gone, and that was my fault too.

I wondered what happened to my older brother once he left us behind. While Rebel did his best to keep up with Navi, I never cared. Now that he was possibly the only family I had left, knowing wouldn't be so bad.

I could make peace with my own death, but I could never let Solo get away with killing my little brother. Rebel was the only person I had in this world, and I would never let him get away with taking that from me. If Solo was going to kill me, I wouldn't make it easy for him. He would work to take my life and pay for taking my brothers'.

I needed to come up with a plan to get out of here. I didn't know exactly where I was, but I knew we'd drove over an hour to get here. My phone had been confiscated the moment Brian stuffed me in the back of that SUV, so I had no way of calling for help. The only people I'd seen since I'd been here were Brian and Solo. I had to find a way to convince one of them to let me go.

I got up from the bed in the room I'd been told was mine and picked up the shopping bag Solo had set by the door this morning. Just as I assumed, it had personal hygiene items, clothes, and a pair of shoes. That was the least he could do since he kidnapped me with nothing more than the clothes I had on my back.

It didn't take me long to shower and throw on the clothes I found in the bag. Once I was dressed, I crept down the stairs to see who else was in the house. Solo's house was massive. I counted at least five bedrooms upstairs, and once I made it to the bottom of the staircase, I took in the huge foyer that separated the living room and kitchen. I hadn't paid much attention to any of this the night before.

Curiosity made me want to see the rest of the house, but I didn't have time for that. I needed to get out of here and back to the city. I was starting to feel like I was in more danger here than I ever was with Tyson, and I needed to know if Rebel was alive. Someone had to know what happened to my brother.

I heard noises coming from the TV and someone laughing as I moved from the foyer to the living room. It was Brian watching something that had him laughing a little too hard. I would have been annoyed at his happiness while I was in distress, but maybe I could use it to my advantage. Maybe whatever he was watching had lightened his mood enough to let me go.

“What you watching?” I asked walking over to the couch he occupied. He was sitting so he could see anything that moved, including me.

“Martin.” He stopped laughing but his smile never disappeared. I could tell this was one of his favorite shows.

“I don’t know what kind of magic Martin put in that show, but I could watch it over and over.”

“Me too. Don’t matter how many times I’ve heard them; the jokes never get old.” He pointed to the sofa on the other side of the room. “Sit down, and watch it with me. Ain’t no sense in you staying cooped up in that room all day.”

“How does Solo feel about me being out here?”

“Oh, the boss man doesn’t mind as long as you don’t try to escape.”

“Do you know what he plans to do with me?”

“I know better than to ask those kinds of questions. I can tell you this, though. He doesn’t usually keep hostages this long, and he never brings anyone to this house. Maybe if he was going to kill you, you would already be dead.”

“Then what the hell does he want with me?”

I threw my hands in the air, and Brian shrugged his shoulders. It was obvious that he didn't know any more than I did. Still, I asked another question.

“Do you know what happened to my brother? Have you seen him?”

“No one has. Not since the night I brought you here.”

“Do you think Solo killed Rebel?”

“Rebel is a prospect of Gods' House. Solo wouldn't kill one of his own without just cause.”

“And if he has just cause? He believes me and my brother are responsible for starting some kind of biker gang war.”

“I don't know. The only advice I can give you is do exactly what he says. Solo believes in complete obedience. Anything outside of that will get you killed.”

“You have to let me out of here. I can't stay here. It's only a matter of time before he decides to kill me.”

I was starting to panic. The more I heard about Solo, the more I knew I was not safe. It didn't matter how much I tried to obey or appease him. Eventually, he would decide to rid himself of my presence. I needed to be gone before that happened.

“Ms. Reigns, I would be a dead man the moment I let you walk out that door. I like you, but I also like breathing.”

Brian was right. Trying to help me would be his own death sentence. Enough people had lost their lives because of me. I couldn't stand to have one more person's blood on my hands. It was my responsibility to save myself this time. No one else could do

it for me.

“I understand.”

I dropped my head in defeat and grabbed the pillow that sat on the couch next to me. At least I could enjoy a few hours of freedom from my room until Solo returned.

“You hungry? I can order some takeout.”

“Starving.”

I offered a half smile. I wanted to be mad at him for even bringing me here, but I needed an ally. He was the closest I was going to get to one.

“Can you order Chinese food?”

Chinese food was both me and Rebel’s favorite. I remembered the Chinese spot on the corner from me and Tyson’s first apartment being the only thing we could afford to eat sometimes. While Tyson hated it, me and my brother never complained. Losing your parents at a young age makes you adaptable, and that was exactly what we did.

As much as I wanted to adapt to my new situation, I wouldn’t. The time when Solo decided he no longer wanted me around could come at any moment. I didn’t have the luxury of waiting around to see how the situation turned out. I knew how this ended. My only option was to find a way out, and I knew just how.

I knew trying to seduce Brian would be pointless. Just hearing him talk about Solo told me how afraid he was. It had to be him. I would seduce Solo, and as soon as he let his guard down, it would be the perfect time to get out of here. All I had to do was play my cards right, and the time would present itself. I was done waiting around until the moment came when he decided to shoot me between the eyes like he

promised. I needed to get out while I still could.

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“How the fuck did this happen?” I paced back and forth in front of the bar of my night club Elevate.

Elevate was the first thing I ever owned. It was where I invested all the money I’d saved while I was away fighting for my country. It was my home before I became a Steel God and Gods’ House became my sanctuary. Now, it had not only been vandalized but robbed too.

“I don’t know, man. I heard it was the Southside Burners.”

I already knew who it was, which was why I asked how it happened instead of who done it.

“That’s not what I asked. I said how the fuck did it happen. It’s fifty of you niggas in here at any minute of the day. How the fuck is it possible for somebody to run up in here and not only rob us but fuck up my whole club? This is thousands of dollars worth of damage. You got the bread to fix it?”

“They came before the club opened, Solo. Me and Kayce was the only two here.”

Jalen and Kayce were the brothers that ran Elevate in my absence. Sometimes it would be months before I got around to checking on the place, and I never had to worry about the money coming up short or the police having to run up in here—until today.

“Y’all must be off y’all game if I got to worry about niggas taking my money out of your hands like some little ass kids.”

“We were going over the books when they came in, Solo. They caught us off guard. When I did get the upper hand, one of them had a gun to Jalen’s head. You know I couldn’t let him shoot my little brother. That’s my fault.”

I didn’t expect Kayce to sacrifice his brother for some money, and I wouldn’t ask him to.

“Don’t trip. I can always make more money.”

“I promise, Solo, we will do whatever it takes to get this place back up and running. Me and Kayce gon’ ride on them niggas to get your money back too.” Jalen’s young ass chimed in like he was really ready to lay something down.

I couldn’t even respond to him before a call came through on my phone.

“Retta was arrested today. They caught her with some blank birth certificates. I’m on my way to the precinct to get her out now,” Tone spoke.

“Fuck!” I yelled.

Retta was one of the only girls I had who was completely legit. I had her working down at city hall stealing blank birth certificates. They came in handy whenever someone needed a new identity and a fresh start.

“Just go get her. She knows to keep her mouth shut until you get there.”

I hung up the phone with Tone and turned my attention back to Kayce. I was holding him solely responsible for getting my money back and burying whoever thought it was a good idea to run in my club.

“Kayce, put together a crew, and go get my money back. Lay down anybody in your

path. They did me a favor when they left you and Jalen alive. Go show them why that was a mistake.”

“No doubt. I will handle this shit for you.”

Kayce was a dog when I let him off the leash, but that wasn’t the life I wanted for him. He was the first kid I ever decided to mentor, and I wanted to keep his head in the business instead of on the streets. He was the only person Jalen had looking out for him, and I never wanted to be the reason his brother was out here alone.

“Me too, Solo. I got your back too.”

“I know, Jalen, but I need you here. I don’t trust nobody outside of you and Kayce to look after my club. Your job is to start cleaning this shit up. I’m going to send some people over here to help you. I want business to resume as soon as possible. Understand me?”

“I understand, but I got to watch my brother’s back. Who’s going to go with Kayce?”

“Don’t worry about me, lil nigga. Nothing would ever stop me from coming back to you.”

I watched Kayce touch heads with his little brother before leaving. I could see how worried Jalen was, but I wasn’t. Kayce was ruthless, and like he said, nothing would stop him from coming back to his brother.

This shit with the Burners was getting out of hand, and it had just started. I couldn’t deal with them getting my people arrested and trying to blow up my spots. I’d just beat one murder case and was already about to be facing more. A war was the last thing I wanted, which was why I couldn’t figure out why I had stepped in whatever mess Rebel and his sister had going on with Tyson.

Maybe it was the fact that I never liked him. Burner was a solid dude. I respected him, which was more than I could say for the man Tash decided to marry. Tyson was a slimy ass nigga who wanted to be more important than he was. I was sure he would snake Burner when it best suited him, which was why I couldn't understand why he was going to war for him.

The reasons either of us decided on war were no longer relevant because we were in the middle of it. He'd robbed me and gotten one of my best girls arrested. Somebody had to answer for the shit they'd done to hurt my business today. All I could do next was set up a meeting with Burner to see if we could come to some kind of agreement before shit turned from bad to worse.

I hated the Southside. It was filled with condemned apartment buildings and houses that looked like they should have been condemned too. The streets were littered with trash, and bums held up every corner. The air smelled like piss and weed, and nobody seemed to mind.

It was more than the ghetto. I was born and raised in the hood, and that was nothing compared to the Southside. The Southside was infested with people who didn't give a damn about nothing or nobody, and the Burners clubhouse was smack dab in the middle of it. It was the only building that looked livable, so I guess they had that going for them.

We hopped out as soon as Tone parked the car. When Burner agreed on the meeting, he made it mandatory that we do it at his clubhouse and only bring our second. I was bringing Tone no matter what, so it wasn't nothing to agree to his terms.

"I'll take that." The guard standing at the door pointed to the gun on Tone's hip, and Tone looked at me. I nodded to let him know it was cool. I wasn't scared of a soul walking this Earth, especially not one who was dumb enough to still be living on the Southside. Me and Tone both handed in our weapons and walked inside.

“Solo the god.”

Burner stood from his seat at the head of the table that was in the middle of their clubhouse. He stretched his arms out to his sides to welcome us in. Their den was set up like a throne room you would see in one of those movies from the medieval times. There was a long table that stretched from one end to the other with chairs on both sides. At the head of the table was a throne.

“Burner.” I nodded.

“Take a seat anywhere you like.”

Tyson sat to the left of him so naturally Tone and I went to the right. Like I said, Tyson was a slimy ass dude, so I wanted my eyes on him at all times.

“We need to come to some kind of agreement.” I didn’t want to be on this side of town any longer than I had to so I got straight down to business. “I can’t have you getting my people arrested and robbing my clubs.”

“You started this, remember, Solo? For over ten years, we enjoyed peace. I embraced you like my own little brother, but I think over that time, you have got things misconstrued. The Southside Burners will not be disrespected in the streets. I will never let motherfuckers think they can take shit from us and get away with it.”

“It wasn’t my intention to disrespect you, and I wasn’t trying to take shit from you. One of my prospects came to me asking for help. It’s my duty to be there for my people. You would have done the same.”

“But I wouldn’t have taken another man’s wife to do that, Solo. Taking Natasha was how you started this war.”

“And I’m here to finish it. We both got too much heat on us right now to fight a war in the streets. What do you want?”

“I want my fucking wife back.”

Instead of acknowledging Tyson, I kept my eyes on Burner. Tyson was a nobody, and I only wanted to speak to the man in charge.

“Shut your bitch ass up, nigga,” Tone answered him for me, and Tyson jumped up from his seat with a gun pointed at Tone’s head.

Tone and I stood at the same time because if he was going to shoot us we would at least be standing when he did.

“Let me end this right now, Burner.” His bitch ass was begging another man’s permission to do something he wanted to.

“Do it then, nigga. What you asking permission for?” Tone encouraged him, but I didn’t say a word.

Tyson was all bark and no bite. Even if Burner gave him permission, he wouldn’t pull the trigger.

“Put the gun away, Tyson. You don’t pull a gun on an unarmed man.” Burner schooled him, but that was just the type of man he was—scary and slimy.

“What do you want?” I asked Burner again without ever saying a word to Tyson. He didn’t even deserve my attention let alone my words.

“Return the girl in forty-eight hours, or we will continue this war until only one of us is standing.”

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The door slamming woke me up out of the deep sleep the softness of the couch had allowed me to fall into. When I opened my eyes, Solo was standing over me. The corners of his eyes were tight as he looked in between me and Brian who was on the other couch still knocked out.

It was something so sexy about the way he stood with his bowed legs shoulder width apart. He was dressed in all black, and I could still see his print through the jeans he wore. The hood of his hoodie was pulled so low I could barely see his eyes, but I did, and they were peering into me like it was the last time they would ever rest on my face. Was this the moment I'd been so afraid of? Was he finally ready to kill me?

I sat up slowly with my back still pressed firmly against the couch. I knew now was the time to choose my words carefully, so I kept my mouth shut as we continued our stare down. He finally took his eyes off of me to walk over to where Brian was just now starting to stir in his sleep.

“Do I pay you to sleep, nigga?”

Solo kicked the side of the couch to wake Brian up. He jumped up like someone had just doused him with a bucket of cold water. Brian had at least one hundred pounds and a couple inches on Solo, yet I could tell he was just as afraid of him as I was.

“My bad, boss man. We were just sitting here watching Martin .” Brian tried to straighten his clothes and wipe the sleep out of his eyes, but it didn't do any good. “Shit must've put us to sleep.”

“I don't pay your ass to watch TV either. Get the fuck out. Stand outside in the cold

since you can't keep your fucking eyes open." Solo's dark eyebrows slanted in a frown, and the creases in his forehead looked like they would get stuck.

How mad he was let me know my plan of seducing him was out the window. The way he stood staring at us let me know he didn't have a problem shooting either of us right here in the middle of his living room. His eyes remained locked on Brian until he gathered all his stuff and walked outside. Once he was on the other side of the door, I was the only person left to feel his wrath.

"Go upstairs," he commanded.

His voice held a staid calmness that was much different from the way he spoke to Brian. I couldn't tell if he was mad at me or he just wanted me out of sight. Either way, his tone gave me hope.

An even tone meant his anger may not have been directed toward me, and if he wasn't mad at me, my plan could still work. All I needed was an opportunity to get to him. If he gave me even a sliver of time, I could work my charm and escape before he even realized I was gone.

"Can I have some more food?"

I stood in front of him with my fingers laced and dangling in front of me. The way he looked down at me made me feel so small. Solo may not have been as big as Brian, but he still towered over my 145 pound, five-foot-four frame. There was no way I could go toe to toe with a man like that, so my only option was to outsmart him.

The time I'd spent with Brian gave me a chance to find the holes in Solo's security that would allow me to escape. Brian made the mistake of telling me only he and Solo knew I was here, which meant he was the only person watching over me and the house when Solo was gone.

While Solo was out getting the food I'd requested, I would sneak out to the garage and steal one of the other cars. Since Brian was guarding the front door, there was no way he would be able to get to me before I was safely in the car with the doors locked and headed back to the city. My plan was solid.

"All this food y'all got on my coffee table, and you still hungry?"

"I want some fries from McDonalds. Is there one close?"

He hesitated before he answered.

"Yeah. It's right down the street. I'll run get you something. Do you want anything else besides fries?"

"No. Just a large fry will do. Can I go with you?"

I batted my eyelashes, trying to see if that would gain me a little bit of favor. I knew he would say no, but I wanted to make him believe I would be here when he got back.

"Hell nah. Go upstairs and wait until I come back."

Solo was a hard one to crack, but I didn't care how much effort it took. I was going to get out of this house.

"I guess I'll be upstairs."

"I guess you will."

I watched his lips move as he said each word. It was almost painful how fine he was, even when he was being an asshole. He must have felt my eyes on his mouth because he let his thick tongue swipe over his bottom lip. I blinked before dropping my gaze

to the floor.

“I’ll be right back.”

I went upstairs to the room I’d been confined to like I was told. Now wasn’t the time to rebel against anything Solo said. I needed him to trust me... like me even. If I had any chance of getting him to let his guard down, I had to gain his trust. Doing as I was told was a step in the right direction.

Being back in the stillness of the room reminded me of how much I wanted to go home. I knew I would have to answer to Tyson for leaving, but at least I wouldn’t be so afraid of losing my life. Solo was a ticking time bomb, and if I didn’t hurry up and get out of his house, it was only a matter of time before he exploded on me.

I grabbed the remote from the side of the TV and turned it on. It was the only thing I’d been able to do since he brought me here. I had never been much of a TV person before, but when it was all you had, you adapted. I searched the channels until I caught a glimpse of Olivia Benson’s face on the screen. Law and Order: SVU would provide the perfect background noise while I plotted my escape.

I wanted to wait, but the time was now. Solo lived in the middle of nowhere, so the nearest McDonalds had to be at least fifteen minutes away. That would give me ten minutes to get out of this house.

I watched from the window as Solo’s car exited the driveway. My time was limited so I slipped my shoes back on and headed downstairs. Once I made it to the door, I searched to make sure there were no kind of triggers that would sound the alarm. I opened the door once I was satisfied it was safe.

The five cars Solo had parked in his garage would soon be down to four. I grabbed a set of keys from the hook that hung by the door and pressed the lock button to make

the car the keys belonged to chime. As soon as the beeping noise accompanied with flashing lights sounded, I made my way to the unlocked car. Before I could even step foot inside, the garage door was opening.

I watched Solo's car come into full view as the door continued to rise. I could have tried to run back inside, but I knew he'd already seen me. I was caught red handed, and there was nothing I could do to change the position I'd put myself in. Instead of trying to run, I froze like a deer who had been blinded by Solo's headlights.

There was complete silence once he shut his engine off. I watched as Solo took his time to get out of the car. Those beautiful lips held a cynical smile as he finally raised his eyes to meet mine. He was enjoying this.

"So you just gon' leave without even eating the food you asked for?"

"No. I just came out here to get some fresh air."

"In the garage?"

"Yeah, I didn't want to bother Brian since I'd already got him in trouble earlier."

My lies didn't even make sense to me, so I knew he wasn't buying anything I'd just said. Solo slowly closed the space between us without taking his eyes off me. The smile widened the closer he got. His eyes roamed my body before settling on the keys in my hand.

"You need keys to catch fresh air?"

He used his body to push me up against the car I was just trying to steal. To keep our foreheads from touching, I swallowed hard and turned my head. He yanked it back so that our eyes were locked in on one another.

“Answer my question, baby girl.”

“No.”

“No, what?” He took a piece of my hair and pushed it behind my ear.

“No, I don’t need keys to catch fresh air.”

I dropped my eyes from his face to his broad chest. His bright white tee was a light in the darkness of the garage, and it clung to him. I needed to put space between us before my body responded in the exact opposite way of what I was feeling. I was scared for my life, but my pussy was throbbing as if she had no idea. I tried to step back, but there was nowhere to go. I was stuck between Solo and a cold car.

There was only one way to get out of this. I needed to apologize and hope like hell he forgave me. Letting my eyes travel up from his broad chest and settle on his, I held his gaze without looking away.

“I’m sorry.”

“What you sorry for, baby?” Solo undressed me with his eyes as he spoke. His gaze raking over my body caused my nipples to harden. He smiled when he saw them poking through my top.

“Trying to escape. I just don’t feel safe here.” I dropped my head to avoid making eye contact.

“Did you feel safe at home?” He placed his finger under my chin and forced my eyes back to his.

“Not all the time.”

“I think you would feel safe here if you relaxed. Do you want me to help you relax?”

The suggestion made my heart race. My heart was beating so hard and fast I was sure it would jump out of my chest at any given moment. Maybe Solo was right. Maybe I did need to relax.

“Yes,” I almost whispered.

Solo reached behind me and opened the door to the car. Once it was opened, he nodded toward the seat, urging me to get inside. There was nothing between us but air, and no one was around to change my mind about what we were about to do.

“Open your legs,” he demanded as soon as my butt was planted on the seat. The tenor of his voice lowered as he spoke. His eyes were laced with arousal as he stood in front of me.

I did as I was told and gave Solo the access he’d asked for. Solo took one of his legs and spread mine wider than I’d been able to do myself. Once he was satisfied, he let his hand roam from my cheek to my stomach.

Solo traced my belly button with his fingertips before tugging at the waistband of my joggers. He dipped his hand further down and into my pants. He ran one finger across my panty line before allowing his skin to touch mine.

His hand was warm and welcoming as it slid down and covered my middle. His touch caused chills to travel throughout my body. The way his eyes never left mine rendered me still. His gaze demanded that I stay in place as his thumb drew small circles against my clit.

Something about the way he touched me compelled my eyes to close. There was no way I could stand him looking at me and touching me the way he was. It would be

impossible to remember the reason I was in the garage in the first place. I needed to get away from him. Solo was a dangerous man, but he was also handsome, and the way his fingers slid between my folds was making me forget every sense of danger I had.

A moan escaped my mouth, and I heard him chuckle before I even looked to confirm the smile that tugged at the corners of his mouth. When he slipped two fingers inside of me, he watched the pleasure play out on my face. I couldn't hide my enjoyment if I wanted to. His hands were gifted. He knew exactly what to do with them, where to place them, and how to make me lose every part of my mind.

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I stuck my finger in my mouth again to get another taste of Tash. Her natural scent was still on my hand, reminding me of every moan that had escaped her mouth in the garage. The way my taste buds were still dancing let me know I had to have her again. I needed to feast on and fuck her properly. A finger fuck in the garage would never be enough to satisfy me. I wanted her legs spread from one end of my bed to the next while I buried myself deep in between them.

“You coming downstairs, or you gon’ stay in this office all night?” Tone’s question brought me back to the present moment.

After catching Tash trying to escape, I’d locked her in the room and came to the clubhouse. All the money that had been taken from Elevate had been returned, Tone got Retta out of jail, and for the first time since I declared war on the Southside Burners, everything was chill.

I should have been eager to go downstairs and party with my crew. The naked women that filled every inch of Gods’ House should have excited me, but they didn’t. There was only one woman on my mind, and there was nothing I could do to shake the thoughts of her.

“Yeah, I’m on my way down,” I said, letting my tongue swipe in between my lips for one last taste.

Tone exited my office, and I followed him down. The cloud of smoke smacked me in the face before I even reached the bottom step. The smell had me wanting to grab the nearest blunt. Maybe getting high would ease my mind or at least take it off Natasha Reigns for a moment. No matter how brief it may have been.

In less than forty-eight hours, I was supposed to turn her over, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to. Would she be safe if she returned to Tyson? There had to be a reason she was running in the first place. For all I knew I could have been sending her home to her death. Why did I even care? Hell, I was supposed to kill her myself.

Tone and I moved further in the crowd before I spotted Kayce and Jalen sitting right in front of the stage with their eyes locked on the strippers. Both of them were so zoned in they didn't even see us walk up. Kayce was barely twenty-one, and Jalen hadn't even turned sixteen.

“Who let y'all young asses in here?”

“I told them it was cool. After the way they handled that get back, they deserve to spend tonight with the big dogs.”

“What I tell you, Solo? Didn't I tell you we would ride on them bitch ass Burners and get your money back?”

Jalen dapped me up as I walked over and took the blunt out of his hand.

“Kayce, what is your little brother doing in here? Who watching Elevate if both of you niggas here?”

Jalen dropped his head before stepping behind his big brother. I wasn't going to do shit to him, but I loved the way he knew his brother always had his back.

“He good, Solo. Elevate still being renovated. We haven't even opened back up yet. I been wanting to make a few updates. I feel like now was as good of a time as any since we already had to fix the damage from the other night.”

I nodded my head before taking the blunt into my mouth.

“What you think?”

“You in charge of Elevate. If you think it needs to be renovated, then it needs to be renovated.”

“I appreciate you still trusting us with it after what happened.”

“I trust you with Elevate because you handle business better than some old men I know, and Jalen is a math genius. Half of being a leader is having the right people in the right place. If you remember that, you can’t go wrong.” I took another pull on the blunt. “Jalen, you not supposed to be looking at all of this.”

“I ain’t gon’ even lie to you, big dog. It’s too late to try to hide it from me now.” He unfolded the ones in his hand before throwing them on the stage.

“You can’t do nothing with this little nigga, can you?” I asked Kayce while pointing at Jalen.

“We were worse than that,” Tone chimed in.

“Yeah, but times have changed. Plus, we were never that smart. Jalen need to keep his mind on positive shit.”

“My grades are A1. Trust me.” His eyes were still on the girl in front of us sliding down the pole while he talked. “You babysitting that blunt too, unc.”

“Here, take your shit.” I passed it back to him before taking a seat next to where him and Kayce sat. Tone sat down too.

“Solo, I was thinking... maybe one of these girls can be my ol’ lady.”

“What?”

“I feel like it’s time for me to get an ol’ lady. I want that one.” He pointed to the one with the biggest titties.

“Yeah, I bet you do, but nah. Go back there in the kitchen and find you a house mouse. That’s more your speed.”

“They too young for me, unc. I want something with experience.”

Tone and Kayce busted out laughing, but I couldn’t even believe we were having this conversation. The more I tried to keep Jalen in school, the more he wanted to be a part of the streets. I didn’t know what I was going to do with him.

“Tone, watch out for these two. I got to get back to the house.”

Not even Jalen’s shenanigans could take my mind off Tash, and as much as I would have loved to finish our conversation, I had better shit to do with my time.

I unlocked the door to my house and stillness filled it just the way I liked it. Most people couldn’t fathom coming home to an empty house but I preferred it. Sitting alone with my thoughts gave me the opportunity to analyze each one. That’s why whenever I made a decision, I never had to doubt if it was the right one.

My gut had always served me right until I met Tash. Now, she had me questioning everything I knew to be true. For example, I knew I needed to turn her over in the forty-eight-hour window to keep the peace I’d fought long and hard for, but still, I didn’t want to.

Brian was posted on the porch where his sleepy ass should have been. He dapped me up when I approached the front door, telling me Tash was in the house. I skipped up

the stairs so I could see her face. She was laying across the bed sleep when I unlocked the room door.

She was beautiful. Her thick eyebrows were perfectly arched, and her lashes cupped her closed lids. It was the little things about her that I enjoyed looking at most like the way her chest rose and fell as she slept or how her thick thighs laid on top of one another. Her toes were painted white and pretty enough to suck. There wasn't a single thing that I didn't like about this woman. Giving her up was going to be the hardest thing I ever had to do. Watching her had quickly become my favorite pastime.

"Wake up." I shook her lightly until her eyes opened.

"What is it?"

"You hungry?"

"Not really. I'm tired." She repositioned herself, trying to find the comfortable spot I had shaken her out of.

"You haven't ate since earlier. Here."

I handed her the McDonald's fries I was supposed to be getting for her earlier. She sat up in crisscrossed style and grabbed the bag from my hand. Maybe she actually wanted them now since I'd made it clear her ass wasn't getting away.

"That shit you pulled wasn't cool. Don't try it again."

"I won't. I'm sorry."

The way she stuck a fry between her lips after she spoke made my dick jump. I imagined those lips wrapped around my dick the same way mine latched on to her

pussy.

“Good. Remember, you’re the one who decides how comfortable you are here. I’m simply matching your energy, mama. You don’t want me to be on bullshit, because once I start, I’m usually the only person pleased. Do you want to be pleased, Tash?”

She shifted in her spot on the couch, and I could tell her mind went in a different direction than I intended, but I meant what I said. I was matching Tasha’s energy, which meant whatever she was on, I was on times two. I would eat that pussy every night if she wanted me to. She tasted so fucking good. Getting her out of my mind had been the hardest thing I’d ever attempted.

“I owe you an apology too. I get an urge to put my mouth on you every time you’re near me, but I won’t if that’s not what you want. I’m a grown man, and although I lost control last time you were this close to me, I know how to keep my hands to myself.”

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My hands gripped the sheets as Solo mercilessly pounded before switching to soft, gentle circles. Each stroke brought me not only closer to my climax but also my demise. I had surrendered to Solo and the weapon he held between his legs.

He knew exactly what he was doing by writing his name on every last one of my walls. He was claiming what was his, and I no longer minded being called someone's property. If this was how he treated his possessions, sign me up to be the most prized one.

I was playing a dangerous game by giving into my need for him. I should have been keeping my distance, but the more he sucked, caressed, and licked my body, the closer I wanted to get. I had no idea which shaky breath would be my last, and I didn't care as long as he didn't stop.

Do you want to be pleased, Tash?

"Yes, please don't stop!" I yelled, waking me from what I'd just realized was a dream.

Solomon Godfrey had taken over my every thought and was now invading my dreams. Stirring for what felt like the millionth time, I finally surrendered to the light that shined through the thin curtains with the sole purpose of assaulting my eyelids.

Do you want to be pleased, Tash?

Solo's words replayed in my mind as I laid across the bed that had refused me a good night's sleep. The tingle between my thighs had also refused to let up since those

words left his lips the night prior. In fact, it had been hard to calm my mind since his hands left my body.

You have got to be fucking kidding me, Natasha Reigns. Is this really who you are ? The wetness between my legs was evident by my soaked panties, and I couldn't help but feel like shit. There I was fantasizing about another man who wanted to hurt me.

Solo was the last person that should have been in my mind. I should have been focused on my plan to get out of his house before it was too late. Just because he was being nice right now did not mean my life wasn't still in jeopardy. I still had no idea what happened to my brother, and I was dreaming of having sex with the man responsible for his disappearance.

Needing a shower, I pulled myself from between the two-hundred thread count sheets and treaded toward the bathroom. I turned the water as hot as it could go. I needed the steam to bring me back to my senses.

I let my body fall against the back wall of the shower as the hot water spilled out. I couldn't keep being this pathetic person that let men lead her whole life. I'd done that for years with Tyson... being a little church mouse and allowing him to make every big decision in my life.

Now, I was letting Solo and a body that betrayed me at every turn make my decisions. I knew exactly what Solo meant when he asked if I wanted him to help me relax. I could have said no but the only thing that escaped my mouth was moans of pleasure. My brother's body was probably cold and alone on Gods' Alley, and I was letting this man wash away his memories with the stroke of his fingers. Just like all the times Tyson had beat my ass into submission, I allowed Solo to finger fuck me into submission, and the worst part about it all was that I wanted more.

I dried my body and tried to calm myself. I could either wallow in my self-pity, or I

could do something about it. There wasn't much I could do to beat Solo at this game, but I could at least not make it easy for him.

I would refuse to be the same agreeable person I'd been since I got here. I was no longer agreeing to shit that didn't suit me. As a matter of fact, I would refuse to leave this room if it didn't mean I was going home.

As I laid between the sheets wearing only a pair of panties and what I assumed was one of Solo's t-shirts, I tried to stop my mind from racing. I didn't know what he would do when I challenged his authority. He'd already warned against me doing anything else, but I couldn't take this shit laying down. I had to start standing up for myself.

I didn't move when I heard the door open. Instead, I turned on the opposite side so that who ever was entering would only get my back. I knew it was him before he even said a word. His scent was permanently imprinted on my mind. No matter how long of a time had passed, I would always know that smell.

"Come eat."

Solo had an obsession with me eating. If it wasn't for the obvious fact that he'd kidnapped me, it may have been cute.

"No."

I pulled the covers over my head, ignoring his presence.

"You got five minutes to make it downstairs. If I have to come back up here to get you, I promise you ain't gon' like it."

Instead of waiting on my response, he left the room and closed the door behind him.

Five minutes had come and gone, and I still hadn't moved. I had to put myself first for once. Maybe my refusal would finally make him see I didn't belong here. Admittedly, I didn't belong with Tyson either, but that was for me to figure out.

I should have known he wouldn't simply give up because I didn't come downstairs. It wasn't long before I heard the door open yet again. Still, I didn't turn to see who it was. Did it really matter since I had very little control over what was going to happen to me? I had no desire to see what was coming.

"Here. At least eat the food in here since you don't want to come down."

"I said I don't want the damn food. What don't you understand about that? I don't want your food. I don't want to be locked in this room. I don't want to spend another night at your house. I just want to go home."

"Eat the food."

He'd made it in front of me in less than two seconds. The look on his face told me he was growing tired of my defiance. He shoved the food toward me again. I sat up only to slap it out of his hand. The food littered the floor, and I didn't feel bad about it.

"Fuck it. Don't eat then."

He snatched the cover off, exposing my nearly naked body. The lace black panties I wore seemed to creep further up my cheeks as I squirmed to hide myself. Chill bumps formed on my legs as I pulled them to my chest.

"You may as well freeze since you plan on starving yourself to death anyway."

He was being vindictive, but I wouldn't fold. I didn't have the luxury of conceding to him. I had to take a stand if I wanted to get out of this house. Life with Tyson hadn't

been the best, but at least I wasn't a prisoner. At least not physically anyway. I could come and go as I pleased most days.

The cold wrapped around my body faster than I thought it would. I didn't know what the temperature was outside but it was freezing in this room since Solo had also turned the heat off and replaced it with cool air. Crawling up in a ball, I tried my hardest to focus on warm thoughts. If I acknowledged how cold I was, I knew I wouldn't make it. Solo wouldn't have to kill me with his bare hands because I would surely freeze to death.

My hands trembled as I rubbed them up and down my legs in a failed attempt to keep them warm. No matter how hard I tried, there was nothing I could do to help the situation. I had bitten off more than I could chew, because this man truly didn't give a damn if I died of frost bite. As a matter of fact, it wouldn't surprise me if he celebrated it.

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I'd spent more than thirty minutes cooking breakfast, and this woman had the nerve to not eat it. I'd cooked shrimp and grits with salmon and eggs. I wasn't a chef or no shit like that, but I at least knew how to keep myself from going hungry. I was trying to do something simple for her but she clearly didn't give a fuck about my effort.

Sadly, her stubbornness was what turned me on the most about her. I'd known her for less than a week, and she had already tested my patience more than anyone else I knew. I wanted to snatch her ass out of bed and drag her down the stairs, but that's what she was expecting.

She expected me to be upset and take that anger out on her. I was convinced she wanted me to fuck her up. If it was anyone else, I wouldn't have hesitated to oblige, but something about Tash made me think before I acted.

The way she challenged everything I said showed me she wasn't as afraid for her life as she made out the other night. If she was willing to challenge me as much as she had she still had a little fight left in her. It was time I showed her why that wasn't a good idea.

I knew I should walk away from this thing I felt for her. Burner had made his offer, and I'd accepted it. In less than forty-eight hours, I was supposed to turn her over if I wanted to salvage the world I'd carefully curated for my people, but my heart was telling me doing that would be a mistake. Watching her bend to my will and then do a complete 180 made me want her even more than I already did.

As I laid in the bed with both hands tucked behind my head staring at the ceiling, my lack of sleep made it painfully clear that I was too far gone. I couldn't have her acting

out, at the same time I was trying to decide what the fuck I was going to do. On one hand, it would be easy to snuff the life out of Natasha before eradicating the whole Southside Burners gang, but on the other hand, peace had been long fought for.

I knew they didn't stand a chance against me in a long war, but the small battles still mattered. I would take losses trying to erase Burner and his crew and that was the only thing keeping my hand steady. I didn't want to sacrifice a single soul if there was a better way to get things done. Too much shit was going on when I stepped foot outside my house to let Tash rob me of my peace at home.

Pulling my phone from the nightstand, I navigated to the app that controlled everything in my house, including the temperature. I turned it down as far as it could go. Luckily, I preferred the cold. The only reason I'd turned the heater on at all was to make sure she was comfortable. Now, her comfort was something I no longer gave a fuck about.

In less than an hour, I heard her yelling my name from the other room. That tiny ass voice did nothing to move me. If she wanted to speak to me, she would have to get up and come to me. My catering to her had given her the impression that she was in charge.

I tried to close my eyes, but even still, thoughts of her consumed me. Behind closed eyelids, I could see the chill bumps that covered her supple breasts earlier. Her thick thighs that my t-shirt did nothing to hide still lived rent free in my head. No matter what I did, I couldn't escape her.

It wasn't long before I heard loud knocks on my bedroom door. She gotta be out of her damn mind to be knocking on my door this time of morning. Did she know what happened in the bedroom of a nigga like me during these hours? Was she truly ready for what would happen if I opened that door?

Since I knew she was probably still wearing only the t-shirt and panties I'd left her in, I hesitated to get out of the bed. The thought of her filling out that damn shirt made my dick harden under the sheets. I imagined her cheeks hanging out the bottom of it.

When the third round of knocks sounded off, I reluctantly threw the sheets back. The distance between my bed and the door seemed to shorten to only two steps because I was tired of her tap dancing on the grace I'd given her. Swinging the door open, I was fully prepared to unleash my wrath, but the sight I was faced with had me rethinking it all. Turning Tash over to the Southside Burners was not only going to be hard, but that shit was looking more impossible by the day. It was only so much a nigga could take before he eventually surrendered to what the fuck it was he wanted.

"Can you please turn the fucking heater back on?" She sassed with her hand on her hip.

Her filthy mouth made me wonder if she could get as nasty as her words. Instead of answering her, I crashed my lips into hers, and to my surprise, she welcomed me. Her body easily melted into mine. I wrapped my arm around her waist to pull her closer as she moaned into my mouth. No more words were exchanged as I picked Tash's little ass up off her feet and carried her over to my California king.

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Twenty-Four Hours After the Meeting with Burner...

Natasha was still asleep in my bed as I watched her fight with her sleep. Every time she found a spot she was comfortable in, she would wrestle with herself until she lost it. Something about the way she struggled told me this wasn't something new, and I was happy to know it wasn't my bed that was keeping her up.

She probably never had a good night's rest at the home she shared with Tyson. The thought of her tossing and turning like that for as long as they'd been together made me feel uneasy. Since she came barging into my clubhouse and forcing her way into my life, I'd found out as much as I could about her.

She was twenty-seven years old and had spent her whole adult life with a bitch ass nigga. She was running from him, which told me he took joy in putting his hands on her. Since she'd been in my home, she'd asked about her brother multiple times, but not once had she asked about the man she married. That alone told me everything I needed to know.

The longer I stared at her, the more my curiosity got the best of me. Hearing Tash's life story shouldn't have been on my mind, but it was. I wanted to know everything from her childhood to how she ended up with somebody like Tyson.

I wanted to look away when her eyes opened to mine looking directly back at her, but as if they had their own mind, they stayed right where they were. The expression on my face must have scared the shit out of her because she immediately sat up with her back against the headboard. I could feel my face balling up even more as she stared back at me.

“Why were you running from your husband?” I asked the question I wanted answered more than any other.

Chasing your woman into the arms of another man was every man’s worst nightmare whether it was metaphorically or physically. It was the latter for Tyson, and I needed to know why. What did he do to cause such a beautiful woman to risk her life trying to escape from him?

“Because he hit me.” The way she shifted in the bed let me know it was difficult for her to say the words out loud.

“Was that the first time?”

I knew it wasn’t, but her confirming it would make me want to kill that nigga more than I already did. I knew Tyson was a bitch since the first day I met him, but finding out he was beating his wife only made that hate build more.

“No, but it was the last time I was going to let a man put his hands on me without consequences.”

She held her head in the air, letting me know that statement applied to me as well, but I didn’t fight women.

“You didn’t ask if he was alive or not.”

“What?”

“You asked if your brother was still alive but not your husband. I guess marriage is not that big of a deal to you, huh?”

I wasn’t trying to be too far off in her business, but I did want to know. Honestly, the

longer I was around her, the more I wanted to know everything about her. Random questions like her favorite color, food, and other corny shit like that were on my mind, but the bigger topics seemed easier to ask since I wasn't supposed to be asking anything about her at all.

“Marriage is not always what it's supposed to be.”

“Nothing is ever what it's supposed to be. Why should marriage be any different?”

Tash wasn't too young to understand the way the world worked, and she didn't look like the type that had been sheltered her whole life. She should have known nothing was ever as it seemed or how it was supposed to be. You have to play cards with the hand you were dealt.

“Because when you promise to love someone until their last breath, you're not supposed to be the one who takes that breath from them.”

“Is that what you felt like would happen if I didn't step in at the clubhouse?”

The look of hopelessness in her eyes that night still haunted me. Baby girl was afraid for her life. Any nigga who had her feeling like that didn't deserve to even speak her name let alone be in her presence. But that was something she had to realize. I'd witnessed a lot of women let men beat them half to death then they'd be right back with them the next day. It was never my business to step in, but I would never let that shit happen in my face.

“If not that night... eventually. Most women end up getting killed by the men that claim to love them.”

“I can't argue with you on that. Statistics don't lie.”

“Yeah, but I knew that before even reading the statistics. The fact that men murder women was something I learned far earlier than any girl should have to.”

If curiosity hadn't completely overtook me, I definitely wanted to know what she meant by that statement. It was too personal to be random.

“How did you learn that?” My eyebrows raised with interest. Tash seemed so sure of everything she said that it was hard not to ask the reasons behind it.

“My father killed my mother when we were kids. I practically had to raise Rebel myself, so yes, I'm a lot more worried about him than I am Tyson. Just tell me if you killed my brother. If you're going to kill me, at least do me the courtesy of not letting my mind wander.”

“Who said I was going to kill you?”

“Solo, you kidnapped me from a courthouse and have held me captive in your house for days. I've seen your face and now know very intimate details of your body. In what world would you just let me walk out of here alive?”

“So, what happened between your parents is what soured you on love.”

I changed the subject back to her love life because I didn't want to think about anything else. Trying to decide if I was going to end Tash or not was becoming a test in itself. I knew it was what I needed to do, but that didn't mean I wanted to.

“I don't know if I ever truly believed love was real. If it was, I wouldn't have ended up with Tyson, but why does it even matter at this point?”

She was getting irritated by my questions, but I was enjoying the innocent beauty of her face when she was uncomfortable. Love was a touchy subject for her.

“I guess it doesn’t matter.” The room grew quiet for a second before she decided to start the conversation right back up.

“What about you? What soured you on love?”

“I didn’t have to be soured on something I never believed in. I never had a good depiction of romantic love. I never saw it done so correctly that I said to myself, ‘Damn, I want that.’ It was just never something I aspired to have.”

“That’s cold.”

Her lips leveled out and mouth sank into a sad smile like what I’d said had effected her more than it should have. I was being honest.

“No. That’s real. If love, romance, and all that shit was something worth having, you wouldn’t be here with me instead of the man you promised to love and cherish for the rest of your life.” I could tell that statement made her even more uncomfortable than the last, but instead of replying right away, she stayed quiet for a minute.

“How old are you?”

“Thirty-three.”

“Thirty-three years on this Earth, and you’ve never been in love?”

The question didn’t necessarily catch me off guard, but it did cause me to be the one shifting in my seat. I’d lived more than one life at this point, and I had never been in love.

“What does my age have to do with anything?”

“Nothing.” She shrugged. “It’s just most men have their first love in their teens, and you’re telling me you’ve lived through your teens and twenties and never been in love. I don’t know... It just sounds a little sad to me.”

Her words shouldn’t have had me racking my brain so hard, but they did. I tried to search my rolodex of memories for even a small occasion where I felt anything that even resembled love, and I came up with nothing. That didn’t make me sad, though. It made me a realist. I knew that shit was flawed without even having to experience it.

Tash was clearly trying to get in my head, but I didn’t have to experience love to know it was flawed. I’d blurred the lines by having sex with Tash. She thought getting in my head would save her life, but it wouldn’t when the time came. I would do what I had to.

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My eyes didn't have to connect with his to know he was watching me. The heat coming from his gaze burned the side of my face. It was the same heat that raked over my body the night prior as he fixated on my every move. Solo's stare was all encompassing, and there was no way you could escape it.

When curiosity forced me to look in his direction, I wished I hadn't. His bare chest was highlighted by the light shining from the room window. His muscles flexed naturally, reminding me of how soft but strong his touch was. His pants were unbuckled as he slouched with his legs spread far apart. My eyes instantly fell between his legs where I wanted my mouth to be.

Running should have been my first thought when I woke up to my kidnapper sitting in a dark room staring at me, but my legs didn't move. I wasn't sure if they could. Solo had folded me into more pretzels than I'd ever seen. I was sure even walking would be a challenge. I wouldn't be able to run even if I had the will to.

"You going to try to run away again if I leave for a couple days?"

"Yes," I lied, but the way my body still craved him told the truth. I would be right here waiting for him to return.

"I don't believe you." He chuckled before a confident smile tugged at the sides of his lips.

He knew he had me. He could tell my need to leave was slowly dissipating. After last night, every inch of my body yearned for his presence.

I pulled my body to an upright position and sat with my back against his headboard. The room was dark with only the light from the window flickering small sparks. The sheets on his bed were still sweaty and tangled, reminding me that I'd lost my last shred of self-respect.

I could still smell his cologne throughout the room, especially on me. The smoky musk mixed with the natural scent of my essence was not only on the sheets but also every inch of my body. I was wrapped in him, and I didn't hate it.

Bringing my knees to my chest, I winced at the pain my body was still in. My limbs ached from being stretched as far as they could go. My middle throbbed from being pounded until Solo finally reached his peak. There was even a soreness in my jaws, and still, I had no shame when my eyes kept landing in the same spot.

The regret I felt for wanting to have Solo in my mouth again was very little. His taste was as addicting as how good he felt inside of me. How well our bodies entangled didn't feel wrong. I had rarely known anything else that felt more right. How was that possible?

"I have something important to take care of today, so try to be a good girl for me. Don't get Brian fired." Solo stood and walked over to his closet. While he shuffled to find something to wear, I tried to gather myself.

Instead of responding, I ran my tongue in between my lips. I could still taste his kiss. I pressed them together as if I could get rid of that taste or at least take back the screams that had escaped my mouth while he was deep inside of me.

I ran my hand down my legs as flashbacks of how easily they wrapped around him flooded my mind. My body responded to him like everything he said was true, and I really was his property now. If someone had witnessed us last night, they would have sworn I wanted to be owned by Solo.

“Do you hear me, Tash?”

“Yes.” I finally spoke with thoughts of him stroking my body still running rampant in my head. I couldn’t even focus on the present moment because I was still very much reliving every second of the night prior. There was so much to unpack.

Solo was already on my mind heavily after what happened in the garage, but now, he had completely taken over my every thought. After the things he did to my body last night, I would never be able to erase the memories I had of him. I still felt every position I’d been twisted into. I still felt his tongue roaming my body. How his hand felt against my skin would forever be marked.

The fact that Solomon Godfrey was the only thing I could think about was disgusting. I should have been focused on getting out of here. Not only had I been kidnapped from a courthouse, but I’d also been locked away and completely kept from the life I once knew.

There were a thousand reasons as to why I needed to get my head back on the right track with my initial goal—make it out of this house alive. Maybe Solo had kept me alive so far, but there was always tomorrow, and with a man like that, there was no telling what would come with the new day.

Why was I still sitting here instead of running downstairs and out of the house as fast as I could? Why did I welcome Solo into me without a fight or even a protest? Why did I crave him so much when he hadn’t done anything to deserve my attention?

History had made it clear that just because a man sleeps with you doesn’t mean he won’t kill you. In fact, it makes it more likely. The only thing I had working in my favor was the fact that Solo didn’t love me. He didn’t love anyone. I was convinced he was incapable of loving anyone, which told me I was even more disposable to him. A man who loved no one had very little to lose.

I was the one with everything to lose. I'd let Solo have a piece of me that I could never get back. Giving my body to him so freely may have been the very thing that signed my death warrant. Now that he had no incentive for keeping me, finding a way home should have been at the top of my to-do list, but it wasn't. Thoughts of Tyson and the home I once knew was becoming more distant.

Not wanting to go home wouldn't stop me from escaping, though. I still needed to be free of this place. The only problem was that I'd already tried to escape and failed. No matter how many times the thought crossed my mind, it was proven that I couldn't get out of here no matter how hard I tried. Solo had Brian standing guard day and night, and there was nothing I could do to persuade him to help me. Not only that, but Solo could always tell whenever I had something up my sleeve. It didn't matter how slick I thought I was... he always caught me. Just like in the garage.

Aside from that, I hated to admit to myself that my desire to leave wasn't as strong as it was before. If you would have told me I would be having a conversation about love and marriage with a man like Solo just a few days ago, I never would have believed it. I could look at Solo and tell he wasn't the type to wife anybody up. And if his looks didn't tell you everything you needed to know, his lifestyle for sure painted the picture.

Solo was undeniably fine, but he was also a murderer. He had used the same hands he pleased me so well with last night to take so many lives. While I sat in court listening to the district attorney try to make her case, I never imagined staying under the same roof as a man so ruthless. Yet, here I was, sleeping more peacefully than I had in years.

I didn't need twelve members of a jury to tell me Solo was guilty of everything he'd been accused of. I could feel it every time we were in the same place. His energy told me he would murder a man and then burn his house down to cover it up. Still, none of that made me any less attracted to him.

I hated how easy it was to be in sync with every move he made last night. The way I willingly gave myself to him repeatedly should have been a crime in itself, but I didn't care. The sex we had was far more superior than anything I'd ever had with Tyson. Him being my first and only before Solo was easily replaced in my mind by one single interaction.

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The Steel gods were all lined up in perfect rows and columns as we got ready to leave Gods' Alley and head to the set. It was race day, and all the crews would be there waiting to see how much they could cash out. The Southside Burners would be present along with Wicked and the Pavement Boyz.

These were all crews I knew very well and had raced against them multiple times. Although there were times another crew came out on top, it wasn't often. The Steel gods ran the streets, and no matter what other crews stepped to us, they could never hold up. When we hit the pavement, nothing burned but rubber.

"How y'all feeling, gods?"

"Steel good," they all replied in unison.

"Well in that case, let's ride."

I had less than twenty-four hours left on the timeline I agreed on with Burner. In less than twenty-four hours, I was supposed to hand Tash over, and I was headed to the set consumed by thoughts of being in between her legs. We had five races lined up tonight, and I was sure we would win all five, but racing was the last thing I wanted to be doing right now.

Not only was I not interested in racing myself, but I also didn't feel like watching anybody else do it. I simply wanted to be at home where I could catch a glimpse of Tash's fine ass. I didn't want to hand her over, even before I felt the inside of her. Now, I knew for a fact I was keeping her locked away forever.

Tyson didn't deserve a woman like that, and the way her body molded to mine last night told me he didn't even know how to handle her. Something that hot and wet shouldn't have been wasted on the kind of man who thought putting their hands on women was cool. What type of man would I be handing her over to not only a man who couldn't keep his hands to himself but one who also didn't know how to please a woman the way she should have been pleased?

Barely beating my last murder case had me agreeing to shit I never would have thought about had it not been for the circumstances. When I decided Tash was mine, that should have been the end of it, but past decisions put me in a place where I had to move carefully and extend grace to mothafuckas I would rather wipe from this earth.

War wasn't the right move for me now, but when compared to giving up something I wasn't ready to let go of, it sounded better. War was my favorite sport, and if it was only me I had to think about, it would have been an easy option, but it wasn't just me. I was worried about my people being collateral damage.

Race after race went by in a blur, and if it wasn't for the argument happening in my face, my mind would have still been on the waves Tash's ass made when I hit it from the back. As always, it was Tyson trying to start shit with somebody in my crew. He stayed on our dicks so hard I wouldn't have been surprised if somebody told me he wanted to be a god.

"This matchup is bogus. What I look like racing this chump? How many races have you won? I'm sure it's not even half of mine."

Tyson was walking back and forth showing the notches on the sleeve of his jacket, but it didn't matter. Matches were agreed upon by bosses, and he was far from a boss.

"If you know you gon' smoke me, why the fuck you scared to race?"

“Because you don’t deserve to even clean my bike, nigga. What don’t you understand?”

Tyson tried to step in Rell’s face, but Tone stepped in between them. He was always ready to knock Tyson’s ass out. He hated him almost as much as I did.

“And what your black ass gon’ do, Tone? Go see if Solo needs his boots cleaned.”

Tone chuckled. “Nah, I heard he got your wife to do that for him now.”

“Suck my dick, nigga.”

“And why would I do that if your own bitch don’t want to? You got bigger fish to fry, man. Get on your bike, and try to make some money. Maybe then your girl won’t be running ass-naked down Gods’ Alley.”

“Get me a better race, and I’ll be happy to take your money.”

“Race me.” I stepped from the back of the crowd. “Let’s race for Tash.” I finally let out what I’d been wanting to say since we pulled up. I’d already made up in my mind that I wasn’t giving Tash back, so convincing Tyson to race me would be the easiest way to solidify it.

“What do you mean race you for her? I’m not racing you for my wife. She already belongs to me.”

“That’s debatable.” I chuckled because the screams escaping her mouth last night told me different. “But let’s settle it tonight. If I win, she’s mine. If you win, I’ll go pick Natasha up and bring her back to you tonight. You won’t have to spend another night away from the woman you claim to love, and the war between us is over.”

“I’m not even considering this.”

“But I think we should consider it.” Burner finally stopped entertaining young hos long enough to chime in.

“Why would you consider something like this? Natasha is my wife, not some bargaining chip.”

“I understand it’s your wife, but why would we turn down the chance to race? That’s what we do right? In fact, I think we should up the ante.”

“What you got in mind?” I asked already knowing what Burner wanted.

He wanted my bike more than anything in the world, so I knew he wouldn’t pass up the opportunity to win it if he thought he could.

“If you lose, not only do you turn Natasha over tonight, but you also lose your ride.”

So fucking predictable.

“Deal.” Burner and I shook hands to agree.

“I can’t believe this shit.” Tyson started to storm off, but Burner held up his hand to stop him.

“Tyson, bring me my bike. I’ll handle this one myself.”

“It’s been a minute, old man. You think you got what it takes to beat the god?”

“I’m confident I can, and whichever club wins tonight runs this city without any interference from the other,” Burner said before turning and walking away.

I had no doubt I would wipe the pavement with Tyson, but Burner was a different story. He was old school and hadn't lost many races. He'd all but retired from racing by the time I was even old enough to be on the set, but he was legendary, and I respected greatness.

Still, my name was solidified in the streets for a reason. Nobody could touch me when it came to this shit, and there was no bike in the city more powerful than mine. That was why Burner was willing to risk the wife of his right hand man to win it. I knew I was in the best shape to win this race, and once I was done, Tyson would no longer have a claim to Natasha. She was mine.

Hours passed and the sun set as the last race came to an end. It was finally time for us to take our places at the starting line. Burner had his whole crew behind him just as I did, and the salty look on Tyson's face gave me all the fuel I needed.

"Ooh you done fucked up now," Tone said, walking over to the starting line and dapping me up while looking at Burner. We were both locked in on the road. Neither one of us was the type to back down from a challenge.

"Yeah, we're about to see who fucked up!" Tyson chimed in always needing to say something. Any time a man was that thirsty for attention, he'd do anything to get it.

"Put your money where your mouth is then," Tone rebutted.

"The bet has already been made. After this race, I'm going to get everything I want and need."

"Alright, alright, alright." The announcer stood in between my bike and Burner's. "When I drop this flag, you already know what that means. Everybody ready?"

We both nodded our heads, and I pulled the face mask of my helmet over my eyes.

The flag was dropped before I even realized it, and we both took off.

Not even halfway down the street, I noticed smoke coming from Burner's bike. We were neck and neck, so I could see the confusion on his face as he tried to figure out what was going on. I watched as he tried to press the breaks, but his bike didn't slow down. I tried to think of what I could do to help. Before I could even formulate a full thought, we came up on a sharp turn and Burner crashed headfirst into a wall.

As the bike went up in flames with him not far from it, I knew only one person could have been responsible. Tyson was the last person with Burner's bike, and I could always see the envy he had for him in his eyes. He was just waiting on the perfect opportunity to get rid of Burner, and I'd given it to him tonight.

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“I got pizza.”

Solo walked into the living room carrying food dressed in his signature all black. I didn't know how one color could make a man look so regal, but that's what black did for Solomon Godfrey. How well he looked in anything coupled with his presence made him irresistible.

“What kind of pizza?”

“Well, I didn't know if you liked pepperoni, cheese, or sausage, so I got a little bit of everything.”

“And the two of us are supposed to eat all of this?”

Solo stood in front of me with at least six boxes of pizza for just the two of us. I didn't know how much he could put into his stomach, but I knew for sure I couldn't even eat one let alone six.

“I mean, yeah, but if not, Brian's outside. You know his big ass wanna eat.” He shrugged like he didn't say anything wrong while insulting his friend.

“You came in late last night. What did you do yesterday?”

“You clocking my movements now?”

“Um, no. I just didn't see you at all yesterday. I figured you were busy.”

“I went to a race.”

“Did you win?”

“What kind of question is that? Of course, I won.”

“And what was the prize?”

“Something very valuable.” He took a bite of his pizza and smiled before continuing.

“More valuable than money.”

“Well, congratulations. I’m happy you won.”

“Let me guess, you watching Martin again?”

“Yes. I was already a Martin fan, but Brian has me hooked. After spending that one night sitting in here watching it, it made me not want to watch anything else. If it’s not Martin on the TV then it’s definitely Law and Order: SVU. ”

“That’s too much TV for one person.”

“I mean, it’s not much to do when you’re locked in a house that’s in the middle of nowhere. I don’t even know what it looks like outside of the door around here.”

I was hoping my words and the pitiful look on my face worked to convince Solo to at least let me go outside. Even if it was just to sit on the porch. I needed sunlight on my face. The little bit that shined through the window in my room was no longer doing it for me.

I wanted to smell nature and feel the wind in my hair. I’d been a homebody my whole life, so the immense craving I had for the outdoors had to be due to not knowing if I

would ever be outside again. I could very well spend my last days on Earth locked away in Solo's mansion.

Silence had overtaken the space I'd created with my last statement, and I noticed that was something Solo did often. When he didn't want to speak on something, he would just get quiet until I moved on to something else. Since I had something else to ask him anyway, I had no problem moving on.

"Is this your girlfriend?" I asked pulling out the picture I'd gotten from Solo's top drawer. I wanted to know more about him, and since he rarely told me anything, I tried to learn from what I saw around his house.

"Who told you to touch my shit?"

He snatched the picture from my hand and sat up straight on the couch. I could feel the shift in his energy, and just like that, the fear he usually filled me with returned.

"I'm sorry. I just thought maybe..."

I didn't know what I thought, so I didn't even bother finishing my statement. The wrinkles that creased his forehead, the way his chest heaved up and down, even the way his breathing changed told me I'd crossed a boundary, and I had no idea how to make it back on the other side.

"Her name was Brittany."

"Was?"

"Yeah. She died in Afghanistan. We were deployed there, and one day, while we were out on a patrol, she stepped on a bomb. Died right in front of me."

“I’m so sorry I asked about your girlfriend, Solo. I didn’t mean to bring up old memories. We don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

“She wasn’t my girlfriend. She was my foster sister.” He chuckled, but I could see the mist forming in his eyes. “Born one day apart, we met when we were six years old. Her parents adopted me and treated me like their own.”

“Do you still keep in contact with them?”

“I’d lost contact with the whole family after I turned eighteen and left for the army. I got in some trouble, so joining was my only option. I thought they wouldn’t want anything to do with me after how much trouble I’d caused the family, so I left and never looked back. Brittany and I just happened to bump into each other in Afghanistan. I was so happy to reconnect with my best friend only for us to be separated forever four months later.

“That’s crazy, right? I mean, I don’t talk to my best friend in years. I finally get her back only for her to be blown to pieces right in front of my face. I mean literal pieces of her hit me in the face as the explosion went off. What am I supposed to do about that? How do you come back from something like that? How was I the one who survived when there was somebody that was more deserving?

“My whole life has felt like a mistake since that moment. How could I still be alive and Brittany be gone? She had people that loved her. She had a family that cared about her and worshipped the ground she walked on. The last care package they’d shipped us was still on her cot. The last phone call hadn’t been more than a week prior and just like that she was gone, but I was there to stay... alone.”

The way words spilled from Solo told me he’d been holding everything he’d just told me in for a long time. I hated that I was the one who brought up such raw emotions, but I was happy he was able to release it. He clearly needed to.

When I planned to search Solo's house for anything that would tell me more about who he was, I didn't plan to stumble onto something that would make me sympathize with my kidnapper. If I was being honest, I wanted to find something that would do the opposite. I'd already slept with him, which meant I felt a slight surge of danger and a strong one of desire whenever his body and my own was even remotely close to one another. I needed to find something that would break the spell he had over me.

I was caught in Solo's web as I was sure so many women had been before me, so many women he had no intention to love. So many that he'd probably harmed in one way or another. If I didn't find something incriminating or even humiliating that would send the right signals from my brain to my pussy, I would be next.

When I'd found the picture of Brittany, I thought I'd stumbled upon something I could hold against him. My plan was to present it to him, learn whatever he'd done to her, and have a reason to hurry along my next escape plan. Hearing the story of him losing his best friend to a senseless war shattered my heart into a million pieces.

The more I learned about Solo, the more I realized how little I actually knew. The world had painted a different picture of the man sitting in front of me on the verge of tears. The pain he felt as a result of such a loss was evident.

Solo's pain reminded me that we weren't much different. Although we may not have been the cause of someone we loved dying, we had failed to save them. I failed to save my mom and he failed to save Brittany. The remorse we felt for being the one who survived was something we both had to deal with. I'd dug up memories I was sure he wanted to keep buried and left this conversation feeling even more drawn to him.

Scooting closer to him on the couch, I used my hand to wipe away the single tear that fell from his eyes. I'd hit a nerve and brought about unnecessary pain. I felt responsible for making him feel better in the moment.

“Solo, I am so sorry for your loss,” I whispered before kissing his lips. I let my chest fall into his, and he gripped my waist.

“It’s cool. I—” He struggled to finish the story, but he didn’t have to. I’d heard enough.

“We don’t have to talk about it.” I kissed him again then straddled his lap. “We don’t have to talk at all.”

Solo gripped my ass and pressed my middle closer to his. I felt his hardness through our clothes that was the only buffer between me and what I wanted. I could feel the wetness building between my legs as I grinded on him, wanting him to be inside of me.

“Take these off.”

Solo’s voice was low and laced with arousal. The raspiness of his tone made me drip even more. I stood and slipped out of my joggers while Solo released himself from his jeans. Dropping to my knees in front of him, I took him into my mouth.

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I didn't mean to say as much as I did, but it was too late to take the shit back now. I don't know what it was about Natasha that made her so easy to talk to, but I didn't feel the same regret I felt after talking to anybody else about Brittany.

Anytime I tried to talk about my best friend in the past, the words would get stuck in the back of my throat. Even the mandatory therapy the army had forced on me didn't help because I never felt comfortable with any of the doctors they assigned to my case. I didn't know why I felt comfortable enough to tell Tash something that I had been holding in for years.

Maybe it was the fact that her voice was so soft that whenever she spoke I felt safe, or maybe it was how her eyes told me she cared before her mouth said a word. Not even Tone, who also grew up with Brittany, knew how much her death had affected me. I was sure he knew it hurt, but we'd never talked about it.

I didn't even make it to her funeral because I was still in the hospital recovering from my own wounds. I was so close to the explosion that shrapnel littered my body. I wish we would have died together on that battlefield, but I had no such luck. Knowing a funeral had been held for my best friend and I didn't get to attend it fucked me up even more.

Taking every emotion I felt out on Tash's pussy was the only option I had. I'd been holding in so much since the day I lost Brittany that releasing it was what I needed more than anything. I'd never known a love that felt romantic, but maybe what I had with Brittany was that. Maybe it was more than that.

I didn't have a lot of memories of my childhood that didn't involve Britt. She wasn't

one of the boys, but you couldn't tell her that. She ran just as fast and held her own on the basketball court. She was harder than most of the niggas that went to our high school, which was probably why I never looked at her that way.

I would be lying if I said I only saw Brittany as a sister. It was hard to do that because she was beautiful. Her face was perfect, and even though her slim-thick frame was mostly hidden behind the baggy clothes she wore, you couldn't hide an ass like hers. I stayed beating ass behind her, but she never cared for the attention she got naturally. Tone was the only nigga I saw her talking to outside of me, and it was never on that type of time.

I didn't plan to reconnect with Brittany overseas, but I was happy we did. Seeing her again rocked my world. Not only had we grown up, but the feelings between us had also matured. We didn't even get to explore the strong connection we felt before she was taken from me. After she was gone, I wished I wouldn't have wasted so much time.

Pulling myself from my thoughts of Britt, I finished getting dressed and searched the house for Tash. I was going to take her outside today. I owed her a debt for letting me get that shit off my chest. I planned to pay it by taking her outside for a while. It had been a minute since the last time she tried to escape, and since she mentioned being inside all the time was a problem, I wanted to fix it.

When I found her, she was sitting in the window seat in her room looking out the window. Tash was naturally gorgeous, but the way the sun was shined over her whole body made her look godly.

"Fuck," I let out against my will.

Finally noticing me standing in the doorway, she turned her head my way, and I didn't miss the sad look on her face. She had been crying, but she tried to wipe the

tears before I could see them. Seeing that gave me an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach. I wasn't trying to be something else Natasha had to heal from, but I'd already put myself in that category.

"Take a walk with me."

"We're going outside?"

She beamed as the sun peeping through the window shined on her face. I could tell by the sweet scent that filled her room and the robe she was still wrapped in that Tash was fresh out of the shower. Looking at her, I wanted to give her a reason to hop right back in there.

"Yeah. I heard somebody was tired of being locked in the house."

"Okay. Let me finish getting dressed." She giggled, getting up from the window seat and walking over to the dresser. "I won't be long."

Between the time I had Tash picked up from the courthouse and now, I'd filled every drawer with things I knew she would need. She now had a whole wardrobe at my house, and if there was anything else she needed, all she had to do was say the word. Still, I knew that didn't make being locked up here any easier.

"Take all the time you need, but wear something you don't mind getting dirty."

"Why does it sound like you trying to put me to work?"

I laughed at the genuinely confused look on her face.

"Nah. I want to take you mud riding."

“Oh, I always wanted to do that but never knew anyone with a four wheeler.”

“Well, I have two ATVs. You can ride by yourself if you want to.”

“I’ll just get on with you.”

“Scary ass.” I smiled at how innocent she looked as she stood there with her bottom lip pulled between her teeth. “I’ll meet you downstairs.”

She stopped me before I could leave.

“Solo, can I ask you something?”

“Yeah.” I didn’t know what she would ask but I did owe her.

“Is my brother dead? Please, tell me if he is. Not knowing is killing me.”

I realized I never told her what happened to Rebel. Originally, I was using it as something to keep her in line. Then I honestly just forgot. I had so much going on that Rebel had become the least of my problems. I knew he would be alright.

“Nah. He’s alive. I didn’t hurt your brother.”

“Oh my God. Thank you so much.”

The tears formed in her eyes again.

“Is that why you were crying?”

“Rebel is all I have. I can’t lose him because I chose the wrong man. My little brother deserves better than that.”

“Okay. Well, I made sure you won’t lose him. I’ll wait for you downstairs.”

Tash had been getting me to open up in ways I never had before. After what happened in Afghanistan, there was little motivation for me to get close to anybody else. I spent so much time getting to know Brittany and everything about her that when I lost her, I didn't know how to feel or what to do. Losing her the way I did was unbearable. It made me feel like there was something I could have done to save her.

My house was on four and a half acres, and Tash wanted to see every inch of it. She was in awe when I showed her the greenhouse, but I think her favorite section was where I were planned to build the entertainment for my family compound.

I’d never had a biological family, but whenever I did, I planned to keep them close for as long as I could. The compound I wanted to build would consist of four houses with a basketball court, movie theater, and event hall. I even wanted us to grow all of our own food.

When Tash was tired of walking, we made the rest of the tour on the ATV. It didn’t take me long to show her everything I thought was worth seeing. She was torn between seeing more and hitting the trails. I planned to take her on every one of them before we ended the ride with a trip to the store in case she wanted to grab something.

I loved being the only house for miles, but that also meant going to a store was a trip. Tash and I had been riding for a solid hour before we came to the road that would lead us into town. I regretted having her unravel her arms from my waist as we came to a stop in front. Just my luck a deputy car pulled up right beside us.

I felt Tash getting off the back and watched as she tried to clean some of the mud from her hair and clothes. My first reaction was to lock eyes with her. Finally looking up and connecting the dots, she looked from me to the officer. The ball was in her court. She could easily walk up to the cop and tell him everything. She’d be free, and

I would be on my way back to jail.

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My eyes traveled from Solo's beautiful face covered in mud to the officer in the car next to us. It took me a minute to fully understand that this was my chance. I could finally escape Solo and get back to the life he'd snatched away from me.

The power I held was evident as Solo searched my eyes for my decision. His gaze was almost pleading. I know he knew the officer was there, but he never looked his way. He kept his eyes on me as if everything else had disappeared in the moment.

"Looks like you two just had some fun." The officer got out of the car and stopped to talk to us on his way inside the store. "I tell you I miss the days my buddies and I hit those trails."

A nostalgic smile took over his face. He was speaking more to Solo than me, but Solo's eyes never left me. He didn't say a word, which almost made the conversation awkward. He was giving me the opportunity to decide. His silence told me to make up my mind quickly.

"Yeah. We love it." I smiled, getting into character.

Right now, I was cosplaying as a girl in love exploring nature with her man. Selling the part, I picked mud out of Solo's face before rubbing the back of his head.

"Right, babe?"

"Right," he said finally tearing his gaze from me and giving his attention to the officer. "Nothing like mud riding, man."

“Well, you two enjoy. Make sure you don’t get on the roads with that ATV. I’m a country boy, so I won’t bother, but you never know what kind of assholes you’ll run into out here.”

“Thanks, deputy. We appreciate it.”

Solo stuck his hand out and shook the officer’s hand before he walked into the store, leaving the two of us alone.

I could tell he was stunned by what I’d done because the officer had been gone for a few minutes and neither of us had moved. Solo wasn’t the only one in shock. Hell, I’d shocked myself. I’d been wanting to get away from him since he’d kidnapped and held me hostage, and when I finally got the chance, I didn’t take it.

What was wrong with me? Who would choose to be held captive instead of grabbing freedom when it was dangled in their face? So many questions ran through my mind, and I was sure his brain was just as scrambled by what I’d done. Instead of getting off the bike, Solo handed me his wallet.

“Get whatever you want out of there.”

“Okay. Do you want anything?”

“Nah, I’m good. I’ll wait for you out here.”

There it was again. He was giving me the opportunity to change my mind. Solo not going in the store with me would allow me to talk to the officer without him present. I would be able to tell him everything.

So why was telling the last thing on my mind as I searched the aisle for snacks? I picked up chips, candy, and a bottle of water before making my way to the counter to

check out. The deputy stood in front of me in line, and still, I said nothing.

Instead, I tapped my feet against the floor as I waited for my turn. Moments passed before he'd paid for his stuff and was out the door. I could have chased him down, got in the back seat of his patrol car, and been transported back to my life, but I didn't. I paid for my things and went back outside to face my captor.

He licked his lips as I got closer, and I felt a pulse between my legs. This was why I couldn't escape. The constant yearning I felt for him had kept me in place. Solo was no longer demanding I stay with him. He didn't have to.

I'd lost count of the amount of days I spent at Solo's house. Being here no longer felt like something I was being forced to do. After he assured me he didn't harm my brother in any kind of way, leaving hadn't crossed my mind. I was still worried about Rebel, but as long as I knew he was safe, that was enough to want to stay put.

Not only had Solo assured me Rebel was alive and well, he was also taking me out on regular nightly rides on his bike. It had quickly become the thing I looked forward to. Since Solo rarely left the house, it was rare to see Brian posted outside the door these days.

Just like every night since the incident at the store, I was on the back of Solo's Harley, and we were headed to find something to get into. We had driven the highway for what felt like hours, and I wasn't the least bit restless. Sitting on the back of his bike with my arms wrapped around his body gave me all the energy I needed. Just being in his presence was energizing.

By the time we stopped, the temperature had dropped, and the coat I had on was no longer doing its job. I shivered as we came to a stop, and I was sure he could feel me trembling against his back. I'd always been cold natured, so I had no idea why I didn't bundle up more.

“Here. Take my jacket.”

Solo took off his jacket and wrapped it around my body. I was grateful, because even after putting the hood of my jacket on, it still wasn't doing anything to warm me up.

“Thank you.” I smiled at the beautiful man sitting beside me before turning my attention to the view in front of us.

We'd pulled over on the side of the road to watch the sunrise. We'd left the house around 3:00 AM after neither of us had been able to fall asleep. Taking a ride was Solo's remedy for everything, so I didn't protest when he made the suggestion.

We weren't planted for long before the sun was peeking over the hills in the distance. The way the golden rays stretched across the grass made me smile. The skies lit up in my favorite color of pink with hints of orange, reminding me that this was my favorite time of the day.

“This is beautiful,” I said as I sat with my back to Solo's chest, watching the hills come more into view as the sun created sharp silhouettes. I used to love watching the sunrise, but I hadn't seen it in so long I almost felt indifferent to it.

“You're beautiful.”

I looked up to meet his gaze before Solo crashed his lips into mine. I was unsure of every single thing in my life right now, but it was clear I was falling for the same man who'd kidnapped me from a courthouse. I wanted to be with Solo, but considering how we started, I didn't even know if being together was possible.

I tried my best not to think about what the situation actually was between us, but the facts were staring me in my face. No matter how hard I tried to ignore them, I couldn't. I was his captive, and my life was in his hands. He could decide he was

tired of me at any given moment, and that would be it. I would be done.

“Solo, what is this?”

I stood and took his jacket off, handing it to him. I heard him groan as if I’d asked something that wasn’t in his power to answer.

“How the fuck am I supposed to know, Tash?”

He jumped up from where he’d been peacefully sitting moments before kissing me so dangerously.

“I can’t keep doing this. Being around you, feeling your skin against mine, giving you the most valuable parts of me like—” I paused before continuing because I had to convince myself to say what came from my mouth next. “Like my mind and body are safe with you.”

“Your mind is.”

“And what about my heart, Solo? Is that safe too?”

“Tash, I shouldn’t have all these feelings for you, but I do. You should hate my ass for kidnapping you and sending your brother away, but you don’t. You could have chosen to leave the other day when we bumped into that deputy at the store, but you didn’t. You stayed here with me. It’s clear neither of us know what the fuck is going on, but I ain’t letting you go. I can’t.”

“And why not? Because you own me?”

“Because I don’t want to, and you don’t want me to.”

He was right. I didn't want him to let me go. What would happen after he did? Would I try to pick up the pieces of my life and forget he ever existed? I knew that would be impossible. Forgetting a man like Solo wouldn't be easy even if I was willing, and I was 100 percent unwilling.

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The knocks on the clubhouse door were so loud they could be heard throughout the whole building. Tash was the only one here helping me prep for the meeting tonight. We'd been joined at the hip, and I still didn't want her out of my eyesight for long. I didn't need to watch her. I knew she wasn't going anywhere now, but still, I wanted to.

No one in the crew ever came here this early on meeting nights so I had no idea who was about to tear the door off the hinges with their hard ass knocks. Since Tash was already inside, and the person knocking couldn't have been one of my boys, I was pissed at how loud it was. Knowing it was no one I welcomed at the door, I grabbed my pistol as I headed that way.

Not much had been heard from the Southside Burners since Burner's accident, but my head would always be on a swivel. I knew as long as I had Tash in my possession, this thing between me and Tyson wouldn't end until one of us was in the ground. I planned to make sure he was the one spitting up dirt at the end of the day.

When I swung the door open and was met with Burner's wife, I was instantly pissed about how bad her face looked. Somebody had beat the shit out of her, and she was crying. Burner may have messed around with younger girls, but he loved his wife. I didn't know much about her, but I know he treated her like a queen.

"I'm so sorry to come here, Solo, but I had no other choice."

"It's cool," I said, stepping out the way to let her come in. "What happened to you? Who the fuck did this?"

There was a code in these streets, and putting your hands on another man's wife was definitely against everything we stood for. Anything was fair game in war, but I would never stoop that low. If a Steel god was responsible for the way this woman's face looked, they would pay with their life.

Burner wasn't here to stand up for the woman he loved, but I was. I wouldn't stand for nothing like this, and I was sure he would do the same if the roles were reversed. There was a level of respect that had to remain unbreakable no matter the circumstance.

"It was Tyson," she said, limping over to the nearest seat. She even held her side as she walked.

I don't know why I was surprised to hear her say her husband's right hand man had done her in so badly, but I was truly shocked. I should have known it was him. He already killed the man who practically raised him, so beating his wife shouldn't have been hard to fathom. Some people would go to the ends of the Earth to not only destroy you but also your legacy.

Tyson knew he would never be able to erase the legacy Burner built while he was on this Earth, so he was working hard to dismantle it. Everyone attached to the Southside Burners would feel it soon enough, but he had another thing coming if he thought he was going to bring that shit to my doorstep.

"Tash, can you come here for a minute?"

She was restocking the bar, but I wanted her to see her husband's handiwork. The fact that he'd probably beat her just as bad let me know I was going to kill this nigga sooner rather than later.

"Oh my God, Sophia. Who did this to you?" She jumped into action as soon as her

eyes landed on Burner's wife.

"Tyson."

She was still crying hard as shit.

"He just flew into a rage. We were planning Burner's funeral and had a small disagreement. I told him I was the wife and had the final say. I thought that would be the end of it, but he punched me in the face." She said the last words like she was still in disbelief herself.

"What? He hit you because you wanted to plan your own husband's funeral?"

"Yes. I'd never seen him as angry as he's been since the accident. I thought it was just grief, you know? We're all hurting."

"No. This is who he is. He's just good at hiding this side of him from the world. Trust me. No one has experienced this more than I have. Stay here. I'm going to tend to those wounds for you."

"Thank you, Natasha."

"Solo, do you have a first aid kit?"

"Yeah. It's one in the office. I'll show you where it's at."

After answering Tash, I turned my attention back to Sophia.

"I'm going to handle this for you. All of it. Let's bury your husband first, then I promise you'll never have to worry about that nigga again."

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Seeing how Tash had been so attentive to Sophia showed me how nurturing she was. I always wanted a nurturing woman. My foster mother, Brittany's mother, was a nurturing woman. She showed me what a woman was by the way she took care of us and gave us everything we needed at the exact moment we needed it. I never had to worry about not being taken care of when she was around.

My foster mother was the type of mother that fixed your sandwiches and cut the edges off of them or folded your clothes before you even got in the room. She never got mad at me or got mad at herself as far as I could remember.

Brittany's pops was another story. He was a hard man that I didn't appreciate until I was a man myself. He stayed on my ass, but what I didn't know back then was that it was for my own good.

I always wondered if my own mother had been nurturing, but she'd left me at the hospital the day I was born. I had never met her to this day. I didn't even know her name, so I guess she couldn't have been too nurturing. She didn't have the time to raise me or at the very least come around and make sure I was all right. Because of her, I searched for a mother's love in every woman I met, including Brittany.

Now, there was Tash, and she came in and filled spaces of my life that I didn't even know were empty. How naturally loving she was made me gravitate to her. Sometimes, the real simple things she did showed me how much she cared. I never needed her to say the words.

Walking from my room, I walked to the laundry room to put my clothes in the washer. I'd planned on doing it the night before but forgot. Still, it had to be done

before I left the house today, and since I was getting ready to go, I headed that way before I forgot again.

I couldn't find the clothes when I made it to the laundry room. I knew I'd left them there in the same basket that was sitting on top of the dryer empty. Leaving the laundry room, I searched for Tash to ask her if she'd seen them. I hated people moving my shit. Tash and Sophia were sitting on the couch watching Law and Order.

"Hey, have you seen my clothes? I know I had them by the washer. I was gonna wash today."

"Yeah. I already washed and folded them for you."

"You didn't have to do that." I was instantly annoyed, but I didn't want to be. It was my feelings for her that had me on edge. What I was feeling for Tasha wasn't normal, and every little thing she did to bring us closer scared the shit out of me.

"I know, but I wanted to."

That should have sounded sweet to my ears, but instead, it sounded dangerous. Almost like a threat. I knew I had to make a decision, but which would it be? I could either try to understand what I was feeling for her or push the feelings to the side.

Tash wasn't with me because we had some kind of love connection. I forced her to be here. She came to me seeking help from an abusive husband. Who's to say once Tyson was out of the picture she wouldn't choose to leave?

Maybe she was scared to leave my house because she knew Tyson was out there somewhere. His ass still hadn't stopped looking for her, but he knew as long as she was with me, there wasn't a damn thing he could do to get her back. Once I eliminated him, what would keep her tethered to me?

Her leaving would serve me right. It would be a clear sign that I didn't deserve her. I had terrorized the world both in the states and abroad. I didn't expect to be loved or to live a happy life. I especially didn't deserve to be loved by a woman I'd kidnapped and separated from her brother.

I needed to break the hold Tash had on me, but with her doing shit like washing my clothes for the hell of it, it wouldn't be easy. I needed to rid myself of Tash immediately before my feelings got too out of hand.

"I don't need you washing my clothes or cooking my fucking food. We ain't some happy family living in a house on a hill with a white picket fence and a barking ass dog." I snapped before heading back upstairs.

I regretted the words as soon as they left my mouth, but that didn't change the fact that they needed to be said. I had to be the one to put an end to whatever the fuck this was because it was obvious Tash wasn't going to do it. I gave her the opportunity to leave with the deputy. I was sure it caught her off guard at first, but with us pulling right up beside him at the store, I felt like it was fate.

She was destined to go home, and I was destined to go to jail. I'd beat one case. Maybe kidnapping her would be the thing that took me down. When I told her to go in the store by herself, I was sure she would fold. The fact that she didn't and was still here had me confused.

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I watched a few more episodes with Sophia before she had fallen asleep on the other end of the couch. I tried to let Solo's words settle and not bother me so much, but they did. Him feeling the need to talk to me like that when all I did was wash some fucking clothes and cooked so that everybody in the house could eat wasn't right.

He wasn't the only person in this house. Me and Sophia were here too, so we all needed to eat. It wasn't my intentions to overstep a boundary or make it seem like we were a family. I simply wanted to make sure everybody was okay. He saved both Sophia and I and even opened up his home to us. I wanted to repay his kindness, but obviously, that was something that Mr. Solomon Godfrey wasn't too keen on.

Walking up the stairs, I went straight to his room and let myself in. I didn't bother knocking because I knew he would hear me coming in even if he was in the bathroom. I also didn't care about respecting his privacy since he didn't care about respecting me enough to not talk to me any kind of way. I'd let Tyson do the same thing Solo had just done for years, and the only thing that taught me was that if you let a man slide he would eventually start skating. I had done enough bowing down. It was time for me to stand up for myself.

"You don't get to talk to me like that!" Our eyes connected as soon as I barged in. "I was in a relationship with a man for nine years who spent half that time talking to me the same way you just did, and I'm not having it anymore. If something is wrong all you have to do is tell me. I will work overtime to fix whatever the problem is so we can move past it. All you got to do is tell me, and I will fix things."

"That's the problem right there. I don't need you to fix shit, especially not me. I'm not your project, and I'm not your man. This thing between the two of us is not a

relationship. If you want to be in love, go back to your husband, but do it fast because that nigga won't be around much longer.” He finished putting on his shoes, got up from the bed, and walked into the bathroom visibly upset by the mention of Tyson.

“Okay, Solo, whatever this is, I’m going to let you have it. All that anger you have built up don't have anything to do with me. I haven’t done anything to you, and I’m not out to get you. All I did was fold some clothes and cook a meal so that everyone in this house could eat, not just you. I’m sorry if that bothered you. I’m sorry if I stepped on your toes or overstayed my welcome. My sincere apologies.”

Solo took a deep breath before he responded to me.

“It’s not you,” he said, coming back out of the bathroom and sitting down in the chair. “It’s me. I’m too fucked up for this. I’ve seen too much. Hell, I’ve caused too much. I’m the damaged one. I’m too damaged to fall in love, and you’re crazy as hell to even be considering it. You sat on the jury for my trial where you watched me get away with killing a man and setting his house on fire. Is that the type of man you want to end up with?”

When I didn't answer fast enough, he continued. “I didn't think so.”

Solo walked out of the room and out of the house altogether, leaving me standing in his room alone. I looked around the space where we’d spent most of our time and couldn’t believe the shit he’d just said to me. I didn’t know what was wrong with Solo, but the hot and cold act had me wanting to try my luck at getting out of here again.

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Two Days Later

“I’ma gone get up out of here,” I said, dapping Tone up and gathering my stuff to leave.

“Aye, before you go, I got that information you asked for.” Tone handed me an envelope that held the key to severing the ties between Tash and I once and for all. “That nigga’s been avoiding his home, but he not as slick as he thought. It didn’t take long to catch up with him.”

“I appreciate it, man. It’s time I dead this whole situation.”

“I feel that. I also got word that Burner’s funeral went according to Sophia’s plan.”

Burner’s funeral was today, and although neither me nor Tash attended, I paid for everything and made sure Sophia got everything she wanted. I told her it would be best if she stayed with her sister out of town for a while because I still had things I needed to settle with Tyson. It would be done soon enough so she wouldn’t be away from home long.

“Cool. I got to go, but I’ll hit you later.”

I left before Tone could pull me into another conversation. I had something more important to take care of.

Tash and I had been doing everything we could to avoid each other since our last conversation. Brian was back standing guard outside the house since I had rarely been

home, but even when I was there, she didn't come out of the room. Brian was making sure she ate, though, so I wasn't too worried about that.

I wanted to say my feelings for her made no sense, but they did. I knew what it was. I was in love with her, but saying the words out loud meant being prepared for her to not feel the same way. I was used to being in control, but the love I had for Tash took that control completely out of my hands. I was at her mercy.

I didn't know what I would say when I saw her, but I was over the silent treatment. I never realized how far some women would take that shit, but it was clear Tash was taking it to the ends of the earth. She made it her business to never be in the same room with me, and even if she was, she acted like I wasn't even there.

I wasn't a big nigga, but I was solid and hard to miss. Her deliberately looking past me as if I was see through bruised my ego a little bit. I knew how every inch of her body tasted, and yet she could be in the same house with me and act like that meant nothing.

I left Gods' Alley and made my way to the car to start the hour drive back home. The drive felt like it took longer than it normally did, but I knew it was anticipation kicking my ass. I was trying to get to Tash as fast as I could. I needed to lay eyes on the beautiful woman that had not only taken over my house but also my heart.

I hadn't seen her for more than a second over the last two days, and that was fucking with me. I was tired of trying to steal quick glances or catch sight of her while she walked down the hallway, into the kitchen, or up the stairs. Quick glances would never be enough for me.

I wanted to see her clearly. I wanted to look in her eyes and have her look in mine. More than anything I wanted to touch her.

Parking the car in the round driveway out front, I dapped Brian up and told him he could go home. After Brian left, I made my way through the house in search of who I wanted to see. It was late, so I figured I would find her somewhere in the bed. If she wasn't already sleep, she would be soon.

Just as I thought, Tash was already curled up in the fetal position sleeping. When I went in her room, I shook her awake.

“Let me talk to you for a minute,” I said barely letting her wake all the way up.

I wanted to get all this over with, so hopefully, I could find my way back inside of her.

“What makes you think I wanna talk to you? I see Brian's back outside. I guess I'm your prisoner again, huh? Maybe I always was. I was just too blind to see it,” she said, turning back over and giving me her back.

“You're not a damn prisoner.”

“Well, what am I then?” She turned back over and sat up with her back against the headboard. “If I'm not a prisoner or a girlfriend with a white picket fence and a barking ass dog, then what am I?”

“You mi—” I wanted to tell her she was mine and that I loved her, but the words wouldn't come out.

I could tell my refusal to say it pissed her off even more. She tried to push me from where I sat on the bed, but her soft shoves didn't do nothing to move me. When she realized she wasn't getting her way, she started hitting me, which should have pissed me off, but it had my dick bricking in my pants instead.

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With one blow after another, I used my fists to take my frustrations out on Solo. I hated how he made me feel when he acted like I meant nothing to him. I hated how hopeless I felt in his home, but more than anything, I hated how much he meant to me. In the short time I'd known this man, he had taken both my body and heart captive, but that meant nothing to him.

Solo had me messed up, and even if I couldn't beat his ass, I would at least try. I rained one punch after another against his back until he eventually turned around and grabbed my arms. I couldn't tell if the look in his eyes meant he wanted to kill or fuck me, but it was too late to be scared. I was fed up with every man who'd ever mistreated me, and Solo was the only one around to take my frustrations out on.

"I see you don't know how to keep your hands to yourself, but it's okay. I'll teach you."

Solo had an evil grin on his face as he snatched the covers off me and threw them on the floor. He snatched me up and pinned me down with little effort. He held my wrists together above my head with one hand while he snatched my panties off with the other.

He was out of his own clothes just as fast as he had ripped me out of my panties. I didn't have time to prepare for the pain that ripped through my body when Solo shoved himself inside of me. He thought sex would fix something between us, but it wouldn't. He thought dominating me in this moment would make me obey him, but it wouldn't. There was nothing he could do to erase what he'd said or the way he had been acting.

I tried to stifle the first moan that escaped against my wishes. I wished the pleasure I got from Solo invading my walls wasn't evident on my face, but it was. Every stroke made me gasp harder than the last, and every swirl of his hips came with a silent prayer to God above. I needed to keep my composure, but the way he pleased my body made it impossible.

Solo thought he could control me with his dick, but my pussy was just as powerful. He'd dominated me in every way, but it was my turn. Solo increased his speed as he continued to pound my middle. The increase told me he was close to his peak, but right before he could reach it, I wrapped my legs around his then thrust my hips to flip us over so that I was on top.

The shift caught him by surprise, and he had no choice but to let my hands go. Now that they were free to do what I needed them to do, I put one hand around Solo's neck, and I squeezed tight as I bounced up and down on him.

His face held a hint of surprise and arousal as I worked my hips in a circular motion. He tucked his bottom lip between his teeth as I worked to drain him of his seeds. Just as he reached his end, I climbed off and took him into my mouth.

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The taste of Tash was still heavy on my tongue, but I wanted more. How she took control last night was so sexy it was still on my mind. Watching her bounce on my dick as she choked the shit out of me was such a turn on that I didn't even give a fuck if I took my last breath while I was in her. That was the perfect way to go.

Moving down to the end of the bed, I spread Tash's legs apart and ducked in between them. She deserved to wake up to head and breakfast in bed every morning, noon, and night. She stirred in her sleep as soon as I began to let my tongue roam her folds, and when I latched on to her clit, I got the moan I loved to hear. Tash's moans were so sexy I could bust off that shit alone. She tasted like heaven and felt like a dream.

"Good morning to you too." She giggled.

I didn't reply because I needed to remain focused on the task at hand. The mission was to make her cum and leave her with a smile on her face. It wasn't long before Tash was gripping the back of my head, letting me know it wouldn't be long before my mission was complete.

Slipping two fingers inside of her, I applied pressure to her g-spot as I sucked her clit methodically. Tash took in deep breaths as she prepared to let her orgasm take over. Her body shivered underneath me as I hooked her legs in my arms to hold her in place. There was to be no running. Tash creamed on my face as her body continued to shake violently.

"It's not morning, baby," I finally let out as I came up to meet Tash's lips with mine. "You hungry?"

We hadn't left the bed since I climbed in it last night, and it was about to be night again. We hadn't even eaten but were still going at it. We fucked, slept then woke up, and fucked some more, so it was no surprise that Tash had completely lost her sense of time. I was putting her to sleep and waking her right back up.

Everything about her was addicting, and I couldn't stop myself from going in her over and over again. After two more rounds, I had to pull myself from between Tash's legs. Not only did we both need to eat and replenish the nutrients we'd expelled, but I also had business to take care of. Tyson was still breathing the same air as her, and I was done tolerating that.

"I gotta go." I kissed Tash's forehead before I got up from her bed.

"Why can't we just stay here forever?"

"Because Tyson's time is up, and you got a life to get back to."

"What if I don't want that life anymore?"

"You haven't had time outside of this house to know that yet. I owe you that."

"Solo, sometimes we don't need to hurt the people who hurt us. We also don't need an explanation for how things turn out. It's okay to love life the way it is and that be enough. Sometimes, we don't need all the facts or revenge."

"So, you good with staying in a house day in and day out with a man who kidnapped you? Is that really how you feel, or you just trying to save that nigga's life? If that's the case, you can save your argument because it's really nothing you can say to change my mind."

Instead of waiting on Tash to answer any of my questions, I left the room and walked

into the bathroom. She came right behind me still talking.

I felt like she was trying to talk me into sparing Tyson, but I wouldn't. He'd done too much to come back from, and I'd let it slide way too long. If I wasn't still dealing with the heat from my last arrest, he would have been eliminated. Since I was, he had plenty of extra time to breathe. I hoped he was thankful because that time had expired. There was nothing Tash could say to change my mind about that.

"Solo, I know you think this is about me not wanting you to get rid of Tyson. It's about you not believing someone could actually love you back. I know where I want to be. You are the only one confused.

"I don't know why you think Tyson's death would be the ultimate act of kindness, but it's not. I don't need Tyson dead to know I'm never going back to him. Whether he's living or not doesn't matter to me."

"Good. Then you won't mind if he's not."

I brushed my teeth and washed my face as I avoided eye contact with the woman I loved. For a moment, she was quiet before wrapping her arms around me from behind.

"I know you've experienced a loss that's unexplainable, and if you don't let the fact that you couldn't save Brittany go, you're never going to feel like you deserve to be loved."

She laid her head on my back as she spoke.

"That's true, and I hear you, but that has nothing to do with this. I made you a promise, and I'm going to keep it. You deserve a life where you're not looking over your shoulders. I don't want you here because you feel like you need to be in order to

be safe. You deserve better than that.

“I want you to promise me something. When I let you out of this house tomorrow, choose someone that’s good for you. That’s not me, baby girl. This shit between us was never meant to happen. Tash, you need to deal with your own demons the same way you want me to deal with mine. Acknowledge that your mother’s death wasn’t your fault, and just be happy. That’s all I want for you.”

“So, that’s it?” Tash unwrapped her arms from my body and stepped back far enough to see my face in the mirror. I watched her eyes tear up, but I refused to turn around to face her. If I turned around, I would want to hold her in my arms, and if I held her, I knew I would never let her go.

“You kill Tyson, and we live happily ever after... just not together. Is that what you’re saying?”

“That’s it.” I shrugged as if it was nothing, but it was the hardest decision I ever had to make. “You can’t build a relationship on a kidnapping, Tash. That’s not how this shit work.”

“I guess not.” Tash dropped her head before turning and left the bathroom. I felt like she took my heart with her, but what else was I supposed to do? Nothing about us made sense. She deserved better than Tyson, and she damn sure deserved better than me. The best thing I could do for her was let her go. I only prayed that in time she would understand.

I hated the Southside, but if I had to come all the way over here to catch up with Tyson, then so be it. The Burners clubhouse looked dead since the funeral, but Tyson had been spotted going in and out around the same time every night. Tonight was about to be his last. That was how I knew he wasn’t about this life. Keeping the same routine was a rookie move that would cost him his life, and I was thankful I could be

the one to collect on it.

I'd been laying low in the bushes for about twenty minutes, and I knew he would be coming out at any moment. If tonight was like every other night, he'd be alone. I heard he didn't even show up for Burner's funeral. I knew he was trying to gather a crew that would go up against us, but he had pretty much lost his crew with Burner's death. Tyson wasn't a threat to shit I had going on, but I still wanted him dead.

As soon as I saw him walk out, I crept up from behind the bushes and shot him in both legs. I wanted him alive but unable to move until I made it all the way over to him. I wanted to look him in the eyes when I took his life. That was a courtesy he didn't give Burner.

"I've been wanting to do this since the day Tash walked into Gods' House." I chuckled as I stood over him. "Hearing you were the husband she was running from made this shit that much sweeter."

"Tash will never love you, nigga. I was the first and only nigga to hit that."

"Not anymore. I'm sure that pussy don't even remember you, nigga."

I didn't let him talk too much before I put a bullet between his eyes.

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Six Months Later...

“How you doing today, my girl?” my coworker who had basically become my only friend asked as I walked in and put my bags down. We weren’t friends in the traditional sense, but we made sure we checked in with each other often.

I’d started a new job at the hospital working as a labor and delivery nurse. I was starting to enjoy the freedom making my own money gave me. It felt good to come and go as I pleased. I’d never had that kind of independence.

After having Tyson tell me how hard it would be to get into the field after never using my license, I started to believe him. It took me being completely on my own to realize I could do anything I wanted to do.

“I’m good, girl. Every time I come back from a session with Dr. Rich, I feel a little bit closer to finding myself again.”

“I meant to ask you how therapy was going, but I’m glad to hear it’s working out for you.”

“It really is. You know, I never thought I’d be one of those girls who advocated for therapy, but it has truly changed my life. I knew I had some things to work through, but sooo much has come up.”

“That’s how it is. You go for one thing and find out it’s something completely different that you need to work on before you work on the thing you went for.”

“Exactly, but it’s worth every penny.” I smiled before getting settled at my station for the day.

I’d been seeing a therapist since a little after Brian took me from Solo’s house and dropped me off at my own. I struggled with the fact that I didn’t even get to tell him goodbye. It hurt more because I didn’t know if that was the way he wanted it, or it was just how things worked out.

When I got back, the house I shared with Tyson no longer felt like home. Every room reminded me of some kind of trauma. The room reminded me of where he last hit me and the kitchen held memories of the anniversary dinner he came home to after spending the night with another woman. There was no amount of redecorating I could do to erase the years of pain I experienced there.

Tyson was all over the news for weeks after his death. Hearing about his murder being unsolved didn’t move me at all. I felt nothing about him being gone. The days after his death and up until his funeral was a blur. I felt like I was simply going through the motions of being the grieving wife because I wasn’t grieving, and I had long stopped seeing myself as his wife.

I allowed Tyson’s mother to take over the arrangements because although I wasn’t as hurt, she had lost a son. She deserved to say goodbye to him and mourn in whatever way she saw fit. Besides, I was only there physically because my mind had never left Solo.

Our last night together plagued me, because I couldn’t for the life of me understand why Solo had made the decision to separate from me. I understood what we had wasn’t conventional, but that didn’t make it any less real. Those were the things going through my mind as I laid my husband to rest.

After the funeral was done and paid for, I paid off the house and gave the rest of the insurance money to his mother. Despite raising a man like Tyson, she had never done

anything to me, and I could tell the money was life changing for her. She couldn't even believe someone would do something like that for her, which told me I'd done the right thing. I didn't want anything from Tyson, and she deserved everything.

I was proud to hear she used the money to get away from her own husband. I never knew we'd been going through the same thing until she left. She had put up with Tyson's father beating on her for forty years, but because she didn't have an education or no money of her own, she put up with it to survive.

Although life alone hadn't been great, I would be lying if I said it was all bad. I was gaining my independence and learning I could do hard things. I should have been happy with the life I created, but most days, it just reminded me of the one thing I didn't have—the one person.

I was free both mentally and physically, but there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think of what I'd lost. Rebel was off fighting for his country, and I had no idea what Solo was doing these days. All I knew was that he wasn't checking for me.

“Paging Natasha Reigns to the emergency room. Please get here as fast as you can. Paging Natasha Reigns to the emergency room.”

Hearing my name over the intercom pulled me out of my thoughts.

“Oh my God. I wonder what's happening down in emergency.” No matter how many times I got paged, I would never get used to the nervous feeling that filled my stomach. Getting a page meant someone's child was in danger and that was something that always made my heart drop from my chest to my stomach.

“I don't know, girl, but hurry. Go now. I'll take care of your patient up here.”

“Thanks, girl. Make sure you pay extra attention to this one.” I handed her the chart for my special patient before rounding the nurse's station.

“I will. Don’t worry, just go.”

I was all the way on the fourth floor monitoring one of my infants, so I had to take two elevators and run down countless hallways to get to the emergency room. I was happy I’d worn good running shoes because I refused to be the reason some family lost their newborn.

I hadn’t lost a patient since I’d been there, but I’d witnessed others lose them, and it was always the saddest thing. We were taught not to get too close to patients, but that was almost impossible when it came to babies. It was hard to watch a newborn in pain.

When I made it to the emergency room, the sight shocked me. Solo was standing in front of the receptionist desk looking as fine as ever, holding roses in one hand while the other was in his pocket. Tone was standing to his left while Rebel was on the right. My brother was dressed in his military uniform, and Tone was carrying rose petals that he’d clearly sprinkled from the door to where they were standing. There were even some sprinkled around Solo’s feet. The idea that men had thought of something so simple but perfect was cute.

I couldn’t help but smile as tears formed behind my lids. With all the time that had passed since the last time I laid eyes on Solo, I thought he’d forgotten about me. The fact that he was standing in front of me now proved he hadn’t.

Solo stepped closer to me before he spoke. “I know it’s been a while since we spoke, but I wanted to drop by and ask if you would marry me.” He said it so casually, his question almost didn’t register until he got down on one knee.

“Natasha Reigns, trying to be without you these last few months has been hell on earth. I don’t know how I lived all those years before I laid eyes on you, but I don’t want to figure it out. I’m tired of trying to.

“I wanted to give you time to come back to me, but you taking a little too long, baby. I want to wake up with you next to me every morning. I don’t want to ever fall asleep at night without getting some of that pussy.”

“Pause,” Rebel said from behind him, causing me to laugh.

“My bad,” Solo apologized before turning back to me. “But like I was saying, I want to wake up to you every day. I know you’ve been figuring your life out, but I want to help with that. Please say yes.”

“Of course, I’ll marry you.”