



Stranger Gifts (Gray Wolf Security #19)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: With the new team members settling in, and the old team members getting used to their gifts, things are getting stranger and stranger. For one new face he finds himself looking at an old friend that is experiencing more trouble than she deserves. With the boys in the bike shop taking a keen interest in this one, there are more than enough able-bodied men and women to handle this issue.

Of course, it never hurts to have the animals on your side, as well as Mama Irene and Matthew. How could anything possibly go wrong?

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Something was different for them. Something had changed. They'd been safely hidden in the mountains and valleys of Wyoming for almost twenty years now and yet they no longer felt safe.

Encroachers on the property were happening more frequently in spite of their attempts to keep them away. Their gifts were extraordinary but those same gifts had forced them to remain reclusive, not keeping up with the outside world in many circumstances. They would make short trips into the local small town now and then, occasionally venturing further out if they needed to but beyond that, they didn't move from their mountain.

"They're still coming, Kane. What do we do?" asked Garrett. "I've tried creating the wind tunnels and nothing is working."

"We can't stay," he said shaking his head, looking at everyone. "I'm sorry. I know I promised that this would be our forever but they're coming for us and we have to move. There are too many of them for us to risk any more lives."

"Take what you can carry and we're going to walk out of here. We know the trails, the mountains better than anyone. We have to leave. I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, Kane. We knew this was coming," said Hawke. In the distance they could see the dust being kicked up by the convoy of trucks. Kane turned to his friends.

"Garrett once we're a safe distance away, destroy the homes. Scatter them as far as the winds will carry them." Garrett nodded, knowing there was no other option.

“Pack what you can carry. No more, no less.”

As the small group scrambled, they could hear Gable in their heads.

“You have to run now,” he said breathlessly. “I’ve tried to hold them off with the animals but they have a g-grizzly. A trained grizzly that’s already killed one of the wolves.”

“Gable!” yelled his brother Griffin.

“ You have to go. I’ll hold them off as long as I can. I love you guys. I love you all.”

They knew they had no choice. If Gable couldn’t get the bear to listen to him, it had been trained or altered in some way.

An hour later, standing on the ridge of the mountain, they looked back at their precious community, now being swirled by hurricane forces winds. The debris was scattered hundreds of miles away, leaving nothing except storm damaged land. There were no signs of life.

Days of walking backroads, trails, and off-grid maps had them all exhausted and hungry. Stopping for the night, they sent a few of the men to gather food with what cash they carried with them.

“Kane, it’s going to be alright. You’ve done everything you possibly could,” said his wife, Aislinn. He shook his head.

“We’ve lost Ben and Mary, Yuri and Melanie, now we’ve lost Gable. How many more have to die?”

“Babe you’re doing all you can,” she said hugging him.

“It’s not enough Aislinn. I thought I could do it alone. I thought I could protect everyone and ensure our safety but I don’t think I can any longer. The world has changed and we didn’t keep up with it.”

“We couldn’t keep up with it, Kane. You did what you believed was the right thing to do.”

“I may know of someone we can go to for help. It’s a risk. He may not even remember me but I’m hoping that he’ll trust a brother.”

“Ask the others how they feel. It’s always been a group decision and that doesn’t change now,” she said kissing him sweetly. “Speak to them in the morning, honey. Let’s eat and get some rest.”

Waking in the campground in southern Arkansas, the rag-tag group of people were in surprisingly good spirits considering what they’d been through in the last few months. Several people were moving around, preparing meals, others were shaking out the sleeping bags.

Leaving their homes was the hardest thing they’d ever had to do. They’d been settled, each with their own home, and living a life away from prying eyes and onlookers. When they saw the groups of people moving through the valley toward them, they knew they had to run. There was no time to take anything personal or to pack cars or vans with items. Besides, cars and vans could be easily identified and chased.

Thank goodness they were always prepared. Tents, sleeping bags, utility bins filled with supplies and food, it was ready on make-shift sleds to haul on the trails. As they escaped on the route that had been planned for years, they took one last look back at the only place that had ever been home for them. And watched it burn before moving eastward. That was seventeen days ago.

“Good morning,” said their leader. “Everyone okay?”

“All good,” nodded several of them. “Any word?”

“No. A few strange vibes, but nothing concrete that we can use. I think we need to try and find my old friends.”

“They’re not going to want to take all of us in,” said the other man.

“I don’t think you understand. It’s kind of what they do. If we’re in trouble, they’ll help us. We probably should have gone to them in the first place. We can’t keep running from campground to campground. Sooner or later, someone is going to find us, and we’re going to be out of luck.

“We’ve got people that will need medications, we can’t keep running. Besides, that’s no way for the kids to live. They deserve to be able to play outside when they want to without fear.”

“I know,” nodded his friend. “I’m just terrified for all of us. We’ve known that there were more like us somewhere out there but to believe that we could find them was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Plus, who’s going to believe us?”

“These people will. I promise you. They will.”

They spent the morning discussing their options and talking about the possibility of heading back to their homes. Except it was no longer an option. They’d lost a few during the exit and skirmish. Had it not been for the quick thinking of their team, they would have lost more.

The problem was he wasn’t really sure how to get in touch with his old friend. Hell, he wasn’t even really a friend. Just someone who’d saved his ass once. But he knew

of what he was doing and what he was accomplishing. It was something they all wanted to be a part of.

For three days and three nights, they camped out in Arkansas. The weather was sunny, cool, and blissfully perfect. But when one of the team suspected their stalkers were coming their way again, they knew they had to move on.

“This needs to be a decision for everyone,” he said. “Do we stay and fight? Do we move somewhere new? Or do we try and find my friend in Louisiana?”

“Louisiana,” said the crowd.

“We’ve always trusted you,” said a woman. “You’ve never steered us wrong, and if you think this person can help us, then I believe you. I don’t think we have a choice at this point. Someone desperately wants us and whatever we have.”

He knew that hiking through the woods and making their way on foot was going to be a long process, but it was better than being tracked in vehicles, and it would require at least a dozen vehicles for all of them. They didn’t have a choice. They’d left everything behind.

“Then, Louisiana it is. We leave at dawn.”

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“Kade? I can feel someone connected to us. Maybe more than one person.”

“More like us?” he asked his friend, Spook.

“I’m not sure. I can’t quite get a handle on it yet. I don’t think it’s trouble but it feels strange the closer we get. It’s familiar but not familiar.”

“Just keep a handle on it.”

It wasn’t hard for Spook to keep a handle on it. With Hawke connected to his friend above them watching from the sky and the others all alert as always, they had a feeling that one of their own was in trouble. They didn’t know who or how, they just knew whoever it was, they were like them.

It wasn’t normal. Something was happening and it wasn’t normal.

The rush of wind, dirt, and water swirled around the man with the rocket launcher, lifting his body and tossing it into the swamp. Clearly unable to swim, he sank below the dark waters, lost to all.

Flashes of light caused them all to stare at the men, wondering what the hell was happening. Gaspar turned to Gabe, his brother shrugging his shoulders. When the man tightened his grip on Marilisa and the knife at her neck, he tapped comms.

“Kill that motherfucker!”

Before the bullet could be fired, the rush of wind and flash of color flew by them,

Marilisa disappearing in a whirl of strange sounds and wind.

“What the hell was that?” asked Ghost.

“I don’t know,” whispered Nine, staring at the last Samaan cousin standing. The man was in shock, wondering if the men were witches.

“Put your weapon down,” said Gaspar.

“N-no. You are evil,” he said. He held up the knife in one hand and his handgun in the other.

“I don’t want to shoot you,” said Gaspar.

The man shook his head, raising the weapon higher. Just as Gaspar was about to say something, the metal in the man’s hand began turning red hot. He stared at it a moment, then slowly screamed as the metal melted in his hand, burning his limbs. It was a painful way to die but he’d chosen his path.

With the Samaans all dead, their men dead or knocked out in the van, the Gray Wolf men stared at one another as they slowly walked out of their hiding spots.

“I didn’t get to hurt anyone,” said Tailor with a frown. He turned to see Marilisa being carried by a strange man and smiled. “Boy, you better put that little girl down, or I will hurt you.”

The man smiled, shaking his head.

“A thank you might be nice,” he said, setting the girl on her feet. Tailor frowned at him, then looked at the others.

“Ghost? Master Chief Stanton? Is that you, sir?” said a man, walking toward them. There were almost two dozen people behind him looking tired, dirty, and afraid. Ghost stared at the man.

He was big, easily six-three or -four. His shoulders were wide, and his face showed signs of scars from something. Ghost tilted his head, looking at the man.

“Ghost? Do you know this man?” asked Gaspar.

“I do. I think. I saved you in the sandbox a lifetime ago,” said Ghost. The man smiled, nodding.

“Yes, sir. You did. I’m forever grateful for that. I never got to thank you properly, so I hope you’ll take all of this as my thank you to you. Our thank you.”

“Kane. Kane Jackson,” said Ghost.

“Yes, sir. That’s it.”

“Son, you need to explain this to us,” said Nine. “Men flying through the air into the water, metal melting in a man’s hands, and what the hell was that man flying in to save Marilisa.”

“You’re one of us,” whispered Marilisa. The group all turned, staring at the girl. “They’re like us. Different but like us.”

“I think we need to meet about this. With Mama and Pops,” said Gaspar. Gabriel walked toward the group and smiled, reaching out to shake their hands.

“They mean no harm, Gaspar. Marilisa is right. They are like our little geniuses only different in some ways. There are a lot of you.”

“There are,” nodded Kane. “This is my wife Aislinn. That’s Flip and his wife, Nat. Dr. Adam Thorn and his wife, Fiona.”

“Him,” said Marilisa, pointing to a man. The man smiled at her, nodding. “He was the one sending the message. How?”

“Why don’t I tell you everything later,” said Kane. “I’m just asking for a safe place to lay our heads and maybe some food, Ghost. We’ve been on the run for a while now, and there are men chasing us. If what the girl says is right, and she’s like us, they’ll be after her as well.”

“Let’s go,” nodded Ghost. “I’m sure we can round up some food for everyone, showers, and places to live.” Gaspar looked at Gabe, who was smiling ear to ear.

“The thirty extra cabins on the island. Know anything about that, Gabe?”

“Maybe,” he laughed. “It’s always fun getting the best of you, mon frère.”

“Asshole. Let’s go, people. We need some answers to what we just witnessed. On a property where the unusual happens all the time, you just blew my fucking mind.”

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“Pink dust?” repeated Nine. “I don’t even know where to go with that.”

“Neither did we,” smirked Kane. “You have to understand that it wasn’t until about twenty years ago that we all found one another and discovered what was happening with us. We thought we killed the woman responsible but it turns out we didn’t get to all of them.”

“Who do you think is chasing you?” asked Gaspar.

“I wish I knew. CIA. Some lab that wants to experiment on us. I’m just not sure any longer.”

“You were always different, Kane. We knew that. We saw it,” said Ghost. “How did you and Aislinn meet?”

“It’s a story. A long one,” he grinned.

“We got nothing but time,” said Gaspar.

About twenty years earlier...

Aislinn heard the familiar beeping of the heart monitor attached to her body. Her head was heavy and thick with a drug-induced fog. Her limbs were weak, tingling from the awakening and something inexplicable in the room.

This wasn’t her first rodeo. And no doubt, it wouldn’t be her last. She tried to remember the events of the past few hours. The coffee. The coffee that had ruined her

sweater, a sweater she loved. Then she saw Willy, and he let her through. Then, then it was the elevator. She remembered being at work and setting her things down. Then Mr. Lewis walked up to her cubicle.

Oh God! I cursed him out! I'm going to be unemployed.

"You won't lose your job," said the rich, velvety voice. Aislinn wondered if it was her imagination or real. She tried to open her eyes, but the heaviness prohibited even one eyelash from moving. "Don't even try. The doctor said it would be a while before you could probably open your eyes."

"I- who are you?" she asked in a cracking voice.

"We don't really know each other. Although, I did lie and tell them I was your boyfriend," he said, grinning. He knew it was stupid. She couldn't see his grin, see the face that might make her turn away and scream in horror or laugh.

"Y-you told them. Why?" she asked again, her lashes fluttering with another attempt at opening them.

"They wouldn't have let me in otherwise." He said it so matter-of-factly she almost didn't question him.

"But, I don't know you," she said quietly.

"How do you know? You haven't opened your eyes yet," he said, smiling down at her.

"I-I know. I know I would recognize your voice."

He couldn't argue with that logic. She most likely would have recognized his voice. It

was definitely distinguishable from others. The raspy velvet undertones hadn't always been there. His new voice was courtesy of a Taliban leader.

"I don't mean to scare you," he said apologetically. "I'm Kane Jackson. I was passing by your office building when they were taking you out. I'm not sure why I followed, but something told me I should. I promise I'm not a psycho or a stalker."

"So, you just decided to come along for the ride?" she asked.

"Something like that," he said quietly.

Aislinn felt the last of the pain slip away and knew it would be okay for her to open her eyes now.

"Is the light out?" she asked.

"Yes, I thought it might be easier for you," he said quietly. His face was something most women needed to get used to gradually. He stepped back a few steps from the bed and watched as she carefully let her eyes flutter open. He knew that she was trying to focus, trying to see his image.

"Hello," she said quietly in the sweetest voice he'd ever heard. His breath caught in his chest, and his stomach flipped.

"Hello."

"Can you step closer for me?" she asked.

He was hesitant, wary, and she wanted to know why. He took a small step forward, and she saw his size more clearly. He was dressed in dark jeans and a sweatshirt. His hair was shoulder-length, rich shades of wavy brown tresses kissing the broad

muscles tight beneath the sweatshirt.

“Closer.”

He took another tentative step closer. She looked directly at him, directly into his face, and he held his breath. Waiting with bated breath, he prepared himself for the inevitable gasp.

“Thank you. You said your name is Kane? Do we know one another?” she asked calmly. His eyes went wide with shock. She showed no reaction at all, no signs of disgust or fear.

“Y-yes, my name is Kane. No, we don’t know each another. As I said, I saw you coming out of that building and just felt like maybe you could use someone by your side.”

“I see. And you’re used to rescuing damsels in distress?” she said with a small grin.

“Not hardly.” His lips were tight, and he watched her face. She was joking with him, actually joking with him.

“Well, I do appreciate you being here,” she said, trying to sit up. She pushed the button on the bed and raised the head, her body now upright and woozy. She waited to gain her equilibrium. “I need to leave now.”

“You can’t leave,” he said calmly.

“Why not?”

“The doctors are doing a bunch of tests on you. They said you would most likely be here at least twenty-four hours, if not more.”

“I don’t need a bunch of tests. I know what it was. It was a headache. A bad one.”

“Lady...”

“Aislinn,” she countered.

“Aislinn, that’s beautiful. Aislinn, I’ve seen my fair share of headaches, had a few of my own,” he said, rubbing the side of his face, “but I’ve never seen a headache that caused so much pain.”

“Mine are, unusual. But I’ve had them since I was a little girl. Believe me. There is nothing that anyone can do for them.”

Aislinn pushed up and swung her legs over the side of the bed. The glass partitions that separated her from the other emergency room patients were slightly ajar. She looked out at the nurses’ station. The back of a tall doctor leaned over the desk made her suddenly sit up straight. As he turned, she could see his profile clearly and knew that her vision was real.

“What’s wrong? Are you in pain? Should I call the doctor?” asked Kane.

“I need you to get me out of here. It’s a matter of life and death.”

“Life and-look, Aislinn, I think you need help,” he said, shaking his head.

“No, you look, Kane. I don’t know you, and you don’t know me, but I promise you this is a matter of life and death. I need to get out of here.”

“Okay, okay,” he said, raising his hands in self-defense. “But I need more context.”

“More context? You don’t need more context. You can’t help me. I just need to get

out of here. Can you help me do that? Can you help me get home?"

"I can do that, but you need to give me an explanation, and then I can help you," he said firmly.

Kane recognized fear when he saw it, and something had spooked Aislinn. He wasn't sure what, but he knew that something put fear in her eyes, and he desperately wanted to be the man to remove it.

Aislinn eyed the tall, dark man. At five-foot-five, she was average. Her curves were athletic and firm but still curves. Some men liked them. Some didn't. It didn't matter to her. A relationship would never be in the cards for Aislinn. Her eyes traveled up his body. He was well over six feet, his defined muscles etched beneath the tight-fitting sweatshirt. His brown hair was shaggy and still wet from the rain, touched his shoulders, the green of his eyes stared into her soul.

Aislinn let her eyes follow the scars along his face. Ugly, raised scars that appeared to be burns from his cheekbone to his neckline and below the sweatshirt.

"Tell me something honest and real about yourself. And don't lie," she said, "I'll know."

"I never lie." He crossed his arms, flexing purposefully. "I was in the Army for almost twenty years." He stared at her, his arms folded, waiting for her response. He watched her eyeing his scars and knew she was curious.

"Thank you for that." She started to stand and reach for her clothes, but he grabbed the stack of damp garments and held them out of reach.

"Not so fast. Something honest about you." Aislinn eyed the man again, her rich brown eyes penetrating his own.

“Fine, but remember you asked,” she said, taking a deep breath. She wasn’t sure why she was willing to risk everything to tell this man, but she knew in her heart it was the right thing to do. Her only prayer was that he wouldn’t judge her, or worse, he wouldn’t call for the doctors. “My headaches aren’t just headaches. They’re visions. Visions of murder, and that doctor out there is going to murder someone tonight.”

CHAPTER FOUR

“Jesus, are you serious?” frowned Wilson.

“I’m afraid so. It’s just been us the last few years so it doesn’t happen as often for her. She has to physically touch the person, or they touch her.”

“And your gift?” asked Cruz.

“I can tell whether a man is good or evil by simply shaking his hand.”

“That’s how you knew that chieftain was going to set a trap for all of us,” nodded Ghost.

“Yes, sir. But I couldn’t tell you that. You’d think I was a lunatic,” smirked Kane.

“Probably,” he smiled. “What about you and your wife?” He nodded toward the doctor, Adam and he grinned at him.

“Another story,” said Adam.

About eighteen years ago...

“Are you alright? Can I give you a hand?” he asked. Fiona craned her neck looking up at the rain-soaked stranger. His black hair plastered to his head, his blue eyes

glowing in the streetlight. She looked down at his hand and back up at him.

Gingerly, she took the masculine hand and he easily lifted her to her feet. Her backside was soaked through, her hands stinging and burning from the concrete. She wiggled her ankle and felt the twinge of pain, but knew it wasn't severe.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"I saw everything if you'd like to make a police report," he said smoothly.

"You're American." She said the words as a statement, not a question and he nodded ever so slightly.

"Guilty," he smiled.

"Sorry, no guilt intended."

He was still holding her hand and she looked up into his face, his eyes almost appeared as though they were calculating something. Fiona thought she should be nervous, but all she felt was warmth and security.

"It doesn't seem that you have any serious injuries. Is your ankle painful?" he said.

"So, you're a doctor then, are you?" she smiled jokingly.

"Actually, I am," he replied. "I'm here on vacation for a friend's wedding, but yes, I'm a doctor. A surgeon actually."

"Impressive. Yes, I mean no. No serious injuries. The ankle will most likely be bruised and sore, but nothing I can't live with."

“I’m Adam, Adam Thorn,” he said still holding her hand.

“Hello Adam Thorn, and thank you, again. I’m Fiona Graham and I suppose I should probably take a taxi back home. That is, if you’ll give me back my hand.” Fiona smiled at the giant of a man.

“Why don’t I buy you dinner first so you can warm up and dry off? By that time, most of the evening traffic will have died down and you can catch a taxi home.”

“Alright, O’Neill’s is pretty good. Good Irish pub food, if you’re okay with that,” she said.

“I’m more than okay with that.” He held her elbow as they crossed the street and the warmth of his hand travelled up Fiona’s arm at an alarming rate. It was as if his hand was on fire and her body instantly warmed.

“You’re quite tall aren’t you?” she asked looking up at him. His eyes grew wide and a small grin escaped his beautiful lips.

“I suppose I am. I’m six foot two, but you’re pretty tall as well. Most women don’t reach my shoulders.”

“Aye, I am. Five feet nine in my bare feet. My parents were both tall. Da was six feet three and mam was five feet eight. I suppose it’s a curse and a blessing.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s a curse. It’s a nice change for me.”

“Well, thank you. It’s harder for a tall woman though, most men don’t want to have a woman as tall or taller than him. I have to be careful with my shoes.”

Present day...

“Anyway, we discovered that we were meant to be together both through our gifts and romantic match. It didn’t matter. We already knew that.”

“So, you can see inside the body and assess damage?” asked Cruz with a perplexed expression.

“Yes. I can see just about everything and usually diagnose it without x-rays or scans. What I can’t see, Fiona usually can feel and she can heal it. She takes on the injury, the cancer, whatever it is and within minutes it’s gone from their body and into her body.”

“Holy shit, that has to be scary,” said Cruz.

“I didn’t want her to do it at first but we all know how that turned out for me,” he smirked.

“What about you, Flip?” asked Gaspar.

“My gift is simpler. I see something and I can move it. Just about anything. Boulders, weapons, vehicles, anything.” They all stared at him and he chuckled. “Watch.”

Standing he walked toward the edge of the grove, looking at the beautiful stone fountain. It easily weighed a ton or more. Lifting it, he moved it toward another path and set it back down.

“Phillip Cho! You best put my fountain back where it belongs right now!” yelled Mama Irene.

“Oh shoot. Sorry, ma’am. I’ll put it back.” He did exactly that and she smiled at him, nodding.

“Good man. I’ll get you an extra piece of cake for that.”

“I love cake,” smirked Flip.

“You’re gonna love it here,” laughed Tailor.

“Were you in service as well?” asked Ghost. Flip nodded. “I heard about you. They were afraid of you because of the things you could do. Flipping vehicles, even tanks, pulling weapons toward dying men, removing weapons from the reach of the enemy. They thought you were some sort of voodoo or witchdoctor magic.”

“People didn’t understand and were afraid of me. I tried to help that’s all,” he said.

“We understand those feelings,” said Nine. “We don’t have your gifts but it doesn’t change that sometimes trying to do something good doesn’t win you any friends.”

“Nat is a fire starter. If you anger her, watch out or you’ll get burned for sure,” he chuckled. They all frowned at him and he shook his head. “I’m kidding. She has great control now but she can definitely do some damage. We try to keep her and Nash somewhat close because he can bring the rains or water from any source.”

“Spook? What about you?” asked Ian.

“Unfortunately, my brain hears every wireless communication, airline call, trains, cell phones, e-mails, anything. If it’s digital data, wireless data, it passes through my head. Where we were in Wyoming, it was somewhat limited but as we were traveling, it was horrible.”

“Fucking hell,” muttered Nine. “I hate hearing the ping of a message on my cell phone. That has to be miserable.”

“It’s not bad here. I think because of the shields you have on the property it’s preventing some of it. I’ve felt much better. My wife, Valentina, she can turn hate into love, or love into hate. She feels it with people and is able to manipulate that but it can also make her sick if it’s too much. Especially the hate.”

“It’s just insane that we’re even talking about this,” said Ghost. “If I hadn’t seen it all for myself, I’d say you were crazy. What about the others?”

“Well,” said Kane with a long sigh. “Ivy can make plants grow. Anything that once inhabited the ground, she can bring to life again. It’s how we’ve been able to feed ourselves when things are lean. Kelly can blend in with any surrounding, camouflage herself and she’s literally unseen. Her husband, Juan can transport from one location to another just by visualizing where he’s going, but he’s naked when he does it. Not very convenient.”

“No, I don’t suppose it is,” laughed Ian.

“You saw some of what Garrett is capable of, the winds and Griffin and David, speed. Ashley & Akin can block sound, creating absolute silence.”

“I need them around Mama when she’s yelling at me,” smirked Gaspar.

“We’ve lost a few along the way. Some were with us for a while, others only briefly,” said Kane. He shook his head looking out over the grove.

“You did what you could, Kane,” said Adam.

“It wasn’t enough. I should have reached out for help sooner,” he said.

“Why didn’t you?” asked Ghost. “A brother never turns a brother away. Not in our house anyway.”

“We’ve not experienced that much in our history, Ghost. I could only hope that you would remember us, remember me and not turn us away. Honestly? I’m not sure what I would have done if you had. We’re about at the end of our rope and our energy.”

“I remembered you, brother, and this all explains a helluva lot.”

“Is there somewhere we can rest. We’re all pretty damn tired.”

“Of course,” said Gaspar. “Mama has cabins ready for you on an island where we live. Most of our children and grandchildren live here on the main property. The older team members moved to another island quite a while back. Something we’ll explain later. For now, let’s get you all to your new homes.”

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"Actually, I am," he replied. "I'm here on vacation for a friend's wedding, but yes, I'm a doctor. A surgeon actually."

"Impressive. Yes, I mean no. No serious injuries. The ankle will most likely be bruised and sore, but nothing I can't live with."

"I'm Adam, Adam Thorn," he said still holding her hand.

"Hello Adam Thorn, and thank you, again. I'm Fiona Graham and I suppose I should probably take a taxi back home. That is, if you'll give me back my hand." Fiona

smiled at the giant of a man.

“Why don’t I buy you dinner first so you can warm up and dry off? By that time, most of the evening traffic will have died down and you can catch a taxi home.”

“Alright, O’Neill’s is pretty good. Good Irish pub food, if you’re okay with that,” she said.

“I’m more than okay with that.” He held her elbow as they crossed the street and the warmth of his hand travelled up Fiona’s arm at an alarming rate. It was as if his hand was on fire and her body instantly warmed.

“You’re quite tall aren’t you?” she asked looking up at him. His eyes grew wide and a small grin escaped his beautiful lips.

“I suppose I am. I’m six foot two, but you’re pretty tall as well. Most women don’t reach my shoulders.”

“Aye, I am. Five feet nine in my bare feet. My parents were both tall. Da was six feet three and mam was five feet eight. I suppose it’s a curse and a blessing.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s a curse. It’s a nice change for me.”

“Well, thank you. It’s harder for a tall woman though, most men don’t want to have a woman as tall or taller than him. I have to be careful with my shoes.”

Present day...

“Anyway, we discovered that we were meant to be together both through our gifts and romantic match. It didn’t matter. We already knew that.”

“So, you can see inside the body and assess damage?” asked Cruz with a perplexed expression.

“Yes. I can see just about everything and usually diagnose it without x-rays or scans. What I can’t see, Fiona usually can feel and she can heal it. She takes on the injury, the cancer, whatever it is and within minutes it’s gone from their body and into her body.”

“Holy shit, that has to be scary,” said Cruz.

“I didn’t want her to do it at first but we all know how that turned out for me,” he smirked.

“What about you, Flip?” asked Gaspar.

“My gift is simpler. I see something and I can move it. Just about anything. Boulders, weapons, vehicles, anything.” They all stared at him and he chuckled. “Watch.”

Standing he walked toward the edge of the grove, looking at the beautiful stone fountain. It easily weighed a ton or more. Lifting it, he moved it toward another path and set it back down.

“Phillip Cho! You best put my fountain back where it belongs right now!” yelled Mama Irene.

“Oh shoot. Sorry, ma’am. I’ll put it back.” He did exactly that and she smiled at him, nodding.

“Good man. I’ll get you an extra piece of cake for that.”

“I love cake,” smirked Flip.

“You’re gonna love it here,” laughed Tailor.

“Were you in service as well?” asked Ghost. Flip nodded. “I heard about you. They were afraid of you because of the things you could do. Flipping vehicles, even tanks, pulling weapons toward dying men, removing weapons from the reach of the enemy. They thought you were some sort of voodoo or witchdoctor magic.”

“People didn’t understand and were afraid of me. I tried to help that’s all,” he said.

“We understand those feelings,” said Nine. “We don’t have your gifts but it doesn’t change that sometimes trying to do something good doesn’t win you any friends.”

“Nat is a fire starter. If you anger her, watch out or you’ll get burned for sure,” he chuckled. They all frowned at him and he shook his head. “I’m kidding. She has great control now but she can definitely do some damage. We try to keep her and Nash somewhat close because he can bring the rains or water from any source.”

“Spook? What about you?” asked Ian.

“Unfortunately, my brain hears every wireless communication, airline call, trains, cell phones, e-mails, anything. If it’s digital data, wireless data, it passes through my head. Where we were in Wyoming, it was somewhat limited but as we were traveling, it was horrible.”

“Fucking hell,” muttered Nine. “I hate hearing the ping of a message on my cell phone. That has to be miserable.”

“It’s not bad here. I think because of the shields you have on the property it’s preventing some of it. I’ve felt much better. My wife, Valentina, she can turn hate into love, or love into hate. She feels it with people and is able to manipulate that but it can also make her sick if it’s too much. Especially the hate.”

“It’s just insane that we’re even talking about this,” said Ghost. “If I hadn’t seen it all for myself, I’d say you were crazy. What about the others?”

“Well,” said Kane with a long sigh. “Ivy can make plants grow. Anything that once inhabited the ground, she can bring to life again. It’s how we’ve been able to feed ourselves when things are lean. Kelly can blend in with any surrounding, camouflage herself and she’s literally unseen. Her husband, Juan can transport from one location to another just by visualizing where he’s going, but he’s naked when he does it. Not very convenient.”

“No, I don’t suppose it is,” laughed Ian.

“You saw some of what Garrett is capable of, the winds and Griffin and David, speed. Ashley & Akin can block sound, creating absolute silence.”

“I need them around Mama when she’s yelling at me,” smirked Gaspar.

“We’ve lost a few along the way. Some were with us for a while, others only briefly,” said Kane. He shook his head looking out over the grove.

“You did what you could, Kane,” said Adam.

“It wasn’t enough. I should have reached out for help sooner,” he said.

“Why didn’t you?” asked Ghost. “A brother never turns a brother away. Not in our house anyway.”

“We’ve not experienced that much in our history, Ghost. I could only hope that you would remember us, remember me and not turn us away. Honestly? I’m not sure what I would have done if you had. We’re about at the end of our rope and our energy.”

“I remembered you, brother, and this all explains a helluva lot.”

“Is there somewhere we can rest. We’re all pretty damn tired.”

“Of course,” said Gaspar. “Mama has cabins ready for you on an island where we live. Most of our children and grandchildren live here on the main property. The older team members moved to another island quite a while back. Something we’ll explain later. For now, let’s get you all to your new homes.”

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“What do you think Ghost?” asked Gaspar.

“I don’t know man. We’ve seen some strange shit but all of that takes the cake. I think we obviously have to figure out who is after them and how it’s all connected to Marilisa and the others.”

“That’s a lot of power in a handful of people,” said Miller. “Do you trust him?”

“I do,” nodded Ghost. “They could have just as easily destroyed us out there but they didn’t. It’s not who they are. Besides, Matthew said they’re all good people and I trust him more than anyone.”

“Agreed,” nodded Nine. “Whoever wants them, has to be stopped.”

As it turned out, they did stop the person who was after them because her primary target turned out to be Stephanie and Marilisa. With that issue gone, it allowed the team to truly settle in and find their place between the VG team and Gray Wolf.

A few days later, the Gray Wolf team met to discuss upcoming projects. With their new members in tow, their team was growing leaps and bounds.

“Officially welcome to all of you,” smiled Ian. “We hope you’re comfortable in the cabins, but if you feel that you want to be on the main property, we can definitely make room for you there as well.”

“I think we’re all good,” said Kane. “But I am curious why you’re spread out.”

“A few years ago we exposed ourselves to the world on national television to stop a different kind of maniac,” smirked Gaspar. “We felt as though we didn’t want to leave but maybe we needed to not be so prominent.”

Adam laughed at them shaking his head and looking around the massive office space.

“How’s that working out for you?” The men all chuckled, nodding.

“You’ll find that mon frère is unable to sit still,” said Baptiste.

“It’s really remarkable how much you all look alike,” said Adam. “If I were a geneticist I’d want to test all of you and your children.”

“My kids were all adopted,” smirked Gaspar. “If they look like me I’d say it’s something other than genetics. Probably my mother.” The entire room laughed and Flip smiled at them.

“She is something I’m curious about. I’ve met a lot of people with beautiful, strange gifts but your mother is on an entirely different plane. I just can’t put my finger on her gifts, yet Kane said she feels like fairy dust and chocolate when he touches her.”

“Fairy dust and chocolate,” smirked Tailor. “That describes her pretty well.”

“To be honest,” said Miller, “we’re not sure about Mama. We know Pops is special in a very unique way.”

“He’s an angel,” said Kane. They all stared at him, unsure of what to say. “Oh. I thought you knew.”

“We did. Those of us in this room,” said Antoine. “We haven’t told the kids and grandkids. Pops said it wasn’t time.”

“I promise we won’t be saying anything,” said Kane. “He’s the purest, most honest, kindest man I’ve ever had the pleasure of shaking his hand. I feel that with all of you as well, with hints of all our pasts. Except him. He’s different as well. And him.”

Kane pointed to Gabe and Trak who looked at one another and shrugged.

“Gabe is our middle brother,” said Gaspar. “We’re not sure what’s happening with him, but Pops is working with him to prepare for the future. I guess a future without him here. We don’t like to think about that even though we know that our parents are well over one-hundred now.”

“The pond,” said Adam. They all nodded. “Gabi and Riley were trying to explain it to me. It’s fascinating. We’ve all had a chance to take a dip and it’s done remarkable things for us. Especially for Spook.” They turned to smile at the quiet man.

“I’m glad it could help you, Spook. What’s your real name?” asked Ghost.

“Van Rogers, sir.” Spook stared at the older man, then looked around the room. They knew his name.

“Rogers. You were Navy intelligence.” Spook just nodded. “When we couldn’t get Ace to help our team, you were there.”

“I wasn’t supposed to be, sir.”

“No sirs here, Spook. You risked your career to help us and the others. That says a lot about a man.”

“It nearly drove me mad,” he said shaking his head. “The sounds of communications passing through my brain was overwhelming. Planes, cell phones, ships, computers, if it was data, especially digital or telecommunications, I could see it and hear it.”

“Fuck that would make me want to shoot myself,” said Alec. Spook gave a shy grin, nodding. “Sorry, man.”

“Don’t be. I did think about it. I learned techniques over the years to calm down the noise. Being in remote locations helps me, like this place. Plus your stealth netting is definitely helping. I’m going to be working with Code and Sly later to see what you guys have and how I can help. I feel like I have a new lease on life.”

“Well, I’m not sure we’ll ever understand all of your gifts but they’re welcome here,” said Gaspar.

“I don’t understand him,” smirked Kane pointing to Trak. “I suspect very few people understand him. He speaks to animals. He appears out of nowhere. He’s quieter than any human I’ve ever met. Not to mention his daughter-in-law, Wilson’s daughter, who speaks to ghosts.”

“We all speak to ghosts technically,” chuckled Nine. “It’s another gift given to us here on the property. Our resident ghosts are part of our team and have helped us tremendously. Even Griffin is still part of the team today. Without him, we may not have found and disposed of Michelle.”

“I used to say that I would never understand any of what happened to us but I’m not sure I’ll understand any of this either,” said Kane. “I’m grateful for it. I know that for damn sure. Thank you all for allowing us to be a part of this team.”

“Brother, my Mama would say that it was meant to be,” smiled Rafe. Baptiste laughed, nodding at them.

“And we all know two things. Don’t argue with Mama and know that she’s always right.”

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“We have all the trackers and comms devices in the new members,” said Wilson standing beside Sly. “Some of them technically don’t need the comms because of the way they communicate with one another but they need it to speak with all of us.”

“We don’t mind,” said Hawke.

“Your name might be an issue,” smirked Gaspar. “We have one Hawk. How will we know the difference?”

“Well, I’m Hawke with an ‘e’, you could identify me as that. Or you could simply ask for Hawk the sharp-shooter or Hawke the bird man,” he laughed.

“I’m sure we’ll figure it all out,” laughed Gaspar. Skull and Razor walked into the offices staring at the group.

“Hi, what’s up?”

“I’m glad you’re all here. We’re going to need some help. Remember the motorcycle gang that wanted to buy our bikes?” Gaspar nodded. “We told them we didn’t have the time to produce that many bikes right now. They didn’t like that answer and have shown up at the shop.”

“Let’s go fellas. Time to get your feet wet.”

They took the back route to the shop, entering through the design and mechanical part of the shop. They had more than twenty-five mechanics, designers, fabricators, and artists working for the shop now, along with their regulars. Whiskey turned and gave

them a nod from the doorway.

“What’s going on?” asked Ghost.

“They’re just looking around for now. Blade is out there, along with Callan. They pulled him into the store asking him to create a drawing of their logo that they want on the tanks.”

“Ballsy,” frowned Ghost. “How many?”

“Fifteen,” said Whiskey. Ghost looked behind him to see more than fifteen men. Plus it was fifteen men with extraordinary skills.

“Well, let’s see how we can help them on their way.”

Ghost walked through the doorway, the others following and the motorcycle gang members looked up, smirking at the men.

“Can I help you boys?” asked Ghost.

“Just trying to convince your man that we’re going to buy at least a dozen bikes from you but apparently our money isn’t green enough.”

“It’s not that, as I’m sure he explained. We’re backlogged on builds. There’s a two-year wait for bikes.”

“Sounds like a production problem,” said the man looking around at the bikes in the showroom. “We’ll buy a dozen of these and have the paint redone.”

“Mister, all of these are ear-marked for other customers. We can’t take your orders right now. I can recommend some other shops that build great custom bikes.”

“We don’t want other bikes. We want Patriot bikes,” ground out the man. The dozen men with him were all dirty and road tired. They weren’t neat, clean bikers like your see riding their bikes to work. These guys were on the road all the time, probably wreaking havoc on whatever town they passed through.

Alec was standing behind three of the men who were looking at one of the bikes. Their kuts, or leather vests were emblazoned with the image of their club and their road names. The image was one that Alec had seen before.

“Flaming Skulls,” said Alec. The men turned and looked up at the goliath.

“That’s right,” nodded one of the men. “Best club around and nobody tells us no. Nobody.”

“Well, we are,” said Trak staring at the men. “Our bikes are already sold. We can’t sell what’s here. Move on.”

Ghost watched as Flip opened and closed his fists, the floor gently shaking between them. Ghost gave a slight nod to the big man and he let out a long slow breath.

“We won’t ask again,” said Nine. “At least not nicely.”

“I don’t think you boys know what you’re doing,” said the obvious leader. His road name said Killer on the patch on his chest. It seemed a bit obvious but they didn’t appear to be the smartest men in the room by a long shot.

“Oh, we’re well aware of what we’re doing,” said Ghost. “Move on. Don’t come back here.”

“Is that a threat?” grinned Killer.

“Damn right it is,” said Miller. He was smart enough to glance around the room and do a mental count of the men facing him.

“Well, you outnumber us right now, so I guess we’re forced to leave. But hear me loud and clear. You will do this for us or everything and everyone you love will suffer. Your pretty little wives and daughters will be treated to our special welcome for new bitches in the club.” He gasped, sucking in a breath as a knife sailed through the air and straight into his abdomen. His men started to reach for their own weapons but were met with the weapons of the GW men.

“That was a warning,” said Trak. “I never miss. Next time it will hit your heart.”

“Okay, okay,” nodded Killer holding the bloody abdomen firmly beneath his hand. “We’ll leave but be sure, we’ll be back.”

The men watched as they got on their bikes and drove away. Ghost turned to stare at the other men.

“What do we have for this week?” he asked Whiskey.

“Nothing that can’t wait. We’re in the middle of a dozen builds, but that takes place in the back.”

“See if the boys can expand the mirage netting to include the shops. Let Callan and the others know that they’ll be closed until we can be sure those assholes are gone.”

“And what if they don’t leave?” asked David. Tailor laughed, gripping his shoulders.

“That’s when the fun begins, brother. We help them leave.”

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“The Flaming Skulls,” said Ace standing at the front of the conference room. “More than two-hundred members spreading across six states. They’re being closely watched by the FBI and the DEA. They’ve been investigated numerous times for drug running, trafficking, and murder. The only conviction, or pending conviction, so far has been for sexual assault and attempted murder by Weaver Crup, a.k.a., Banger. He raped, brutally beat, and left for dead, Sister Agatha Brooks.”

“A nun?” frowned Kane.

“A nun. A fifty-three-year-old nun who was attempting to save young women who had run away from the club,” said Ace.

“Don’t we have enough men to just go out and destroy them?” asked Flip.

“We do but let us get some intel on them first. It says they have two-hundred or so members, but we don’t know if they have any affiliate clubs or gang affiliations,” said Skull.

“Right. Sorry,” frowned Flip.

“Don’t be sorry, brother,” said Miller. “Everybody’s ideas are heard here. Sometimes you’ll have expertise that we do not. Believe me, we’re smart enough to listen to what you have to say.” Flip nodded.

“Do you guys ride?” asked Ghost.

“We have in the past,” nodded Kane. “Hawke and David are usually able to find what

we need on foot or in the air.”

“So, how does that work?” asked Alec. “Do you become the bird?”

“Sort of,” smirked Hawke. “I find a bird and it allows me into its brain. I can guide it with suggestion but I see what the bird sees. I’ve gone hundreds of miles in a duck and a goose. Hawks work best for seeing though. Although eagles are pretty damn amazing.”

“Do you think you could find a bird and find our gang?” asked Nine.

“Yeah, definitely. It helps if David is on the ground on foot. I can guide him to different locations to double check things for me.”

“Can you do that without being seen?” asked Ghost.

“From what I understand you have a stealth suit that could help me,” smiled David. “Plus, remember that Griffin can leave the property. He isn’t seen by anyone unless he chooses to allow them to see him.”

“Let’s go with that one first,” said Kane. “Hawke and Griffin can see if they can track where they’re hanging their hat at night. I can’t see them in a hotel.”

“It’s doubtful. I’m not doubting they would have the money, but they don’t want to be seen by everyone and they damn sure don’t want to draw attention to themselves. They might be camping or staying in a motel on the backroads. I want to know why they’re here.”

“They want the bikes,” said Juan. “Isn’t that what they said?”

“It’s what they said, son. But I don’t believe them for a minute. They could have just

as easily ordered a bike online, given their request and specs, paid for it, and we would have delivered it. There was no need to come all the way down here and make a scene.”

“I think we should speak to Sister Agatha. She’s going to be terrified of us, most likely but we have to find out what happened with her,” said Ian. “This is a delicate situation and we can’t just have people running up to her interrogating her. The question is, who should we send?”

“Mama,” said the Robicheaux boys in unison. They smirked at one another and they all nodded.

“I will go with her,” said Trak.

“Me too,” said Angel.

More often than not Trak and Angel or Trak and Miller were paired together. Their styles were similar, yet different in so many ways.

“Alright, the two of you and Mama.”

“Mama what?” asked Irene standing in the door. She had on a pair of navy capri pants with a light-weight, white cotton blouse and a white cardigan. Her purse was draped over her arm and she looked ready to go wherever they were sending her.

“We’ll tell you on the way,” laughed Angel. “Ace? Send us the address through comms.”

“I will. She’s not far. She was part of the Carmelite Monastery west of Baton Rouge.” They nodded, leaving the others but Irene stood in the door staring at the men.

“You okay, Mama?” asked Miller. She gave a sad smile and nodded.

“Yes. Just looking at all my boys, thinking about how lucky I am.”

“Irene, we can send someone else if this is too much for you,” said Nine. “I could send Erin or someone.”

“No. No, this one needs to be me,” she said. “We’ll be back soon.” They watched as she, Angel, and Trak left and then turned to look at one another.

“You think she’s okay?” asked Luc looking at all the men, but mostly his siblings. Gabe nodded.

“I think she’s mama and knows more than we do.”

“That seems obvious,” smirked Kane.

“Oh, big man is funny,” laughed Ghost. “Let’s go. We need to find these assholes before they hurt someone else.”

“She doesn’t live at the convent any longer,” said Angel. “The address is an apartment about a mile from them.”

“I can’t imagine it would have been easy for her to go back to the order after what happened to her,” said Irene.

“They would have allowed her to return, right? I mean, they wouldn’t have held it against her would they?”

“No. No, I can’t believe they would. But she would have felt different. Ace says he contacted Father Hebert and he reached out to her to let her know we were coming.

He wasn't sure how helpful she could be."

"I can't blame her if she's terrified," said Trak. "I don't want to push or cause fear in a nun."

A little while later, they pulled into the parking lot of a small row of apartments with six on the bottom floor and six on the top. They weren't luxury by any means, but they appeared clean and well-maintained.

Stepping out of the vehicle, Trak turned his head, lifting his chin as if he were sniffing the air. Knowing him, he probably was. Angel looked at him and nodded.

"You go in," he said. "I want to check something out."

Angel knew exactly what he would be checking out. He could see the old motorcycle parked beside the gas station across the street but didn't see the owner. He would lay odds that a member of the Flaming Skulls was nearby.

Irene gently knocked on the door and Angel stayed back a few steps, trying not look intimidating. Usually women thought his face was beautiful, even with the long scar. But this woman had been traumatized so there was no telling how she could react.

"May I help you?" she whispered opening the door just a crack, the chain still holding it in place. Angel knew that if someone wanted in, that chain wouldn't hold them back.

"Sister Agatha, I'm Irene Robicheaux and this is my son, Angel."

"Oh, yes. Father Hebert said you wanted to speak with me. One moment." She closed the door and they could hear her letting the chain off and then the door re-opened. "Please come in."

The room was simple with a small sofa and one side chair. There was a gently used coffee table with a bible and several other books on it. A small television was on the wall and in the open space they could see a small kitchenette. There was a hallway that they assumed led to a bedroom and bathroom.

“Please have a seat. May I get you a coffee, water, or tea?” she asked.

“Nothing for me, ma’am,” said Angel taking a seat to lower himself to her eye level.

“I’m fine, child,” said Irene reaching to pat her hand.

Sister Agatha pulled back so quickly Angel’s heart nearly stopped. Her face flushed and her eyes filled with tears.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered.

“No. No, it’s my fault,” said Irene. “I should have known touch might be difficult for you.”

“It’s a nightmare,” she said shaking her head. “I was teaching at the school affiliated with the convent and even the children hugging me sent me into a tailspin. My life is over as I knew it. I thought this was my calling. I thought God needed me for something special.”

“He did, Sister Agatha,” said Angel.

“It’s not Sister Agatha any longer,” she said shaking her head. “I’ve given up my habit. My name is Jenna. Jenna Brooks.”

“Alright, Jenna. How are you doing?” asked Angel.

“Terrible,” she said shaking her head and wiping the tears. “I’ve been sitting in this apartment for six months waiting for this case to go to trial while that horrible man is behind bars. There’s a member of his gang always watching me to be sure I don’t speak to anymore police or any lawyers beyond the terrible one that was appointed for me. I was supposed to have a meeting yesterday with a man from the FBI and he called and cancelled. Said that he was busy.”

“The FBI said they were too busy?” frowned Angel. She nodded and Angel heard the comment in his ear.

“Checking on it now ,” said Ace.

There was a soft knock on the door and Angel stood, gripping the weapon at his waist. She gasped but Irene turned to her and smiled.

“It’s alright. One of my other sons is outside. He was checking on something,” she said.

Sure enough, Angel opened the door and Trak walked in with a small smile for the frightened woman.

“This is my other son, Trak,” she said proudly.

“You have a lot of sons?” asked Jenna.

“Dozens,” smiled Irene. “Some are blood, some not. But they’re all my boys.”

“I’m sorry I reacted that way. I thought you were that biker across the street.”

“No,” said Trak. “He’s gone.” Angel and Irene knew what that meant but poor Jenna was lost.

“They’ll send his replacement in a few minutes. I’m never left alone.”

“Can you tell us what happened, child?” asked Irene.

“Wrong place, wrong time, or wrong place, right time. I’m not sure any longer. I saw the motorcycles at the grocery store when I went in to buy supplies for the convent. I didn’t think anything of it. Frankly, I find them fascinating. Loud, but fascinating.

“I was standing in the produce section and turned to put the tomatoes in my cart. This man grabbed my arm and pulled me close to him. I was in my habit. I would have thought that would matter but it didn’t,” she said shaking her head.

“Take your time sweet girl,” said Irene.

“I asked him to let me go but he refused. Jeremy, the boy who works at the market tried to help me but he-he shot him. No thought for his life at all. He just shot him. I could hear people screaming and running. Then-then he started pushing up my skirt and pushing me to the floor.

“I started screaming for help but no one came. No one. I gripped my cross and began praying as he ripped off my undergarments. He hit me with something, I’m not sure what but I blacked out.”

“Maybe that was a good thing,” said Irene.

“I think it was a blessing,” said the woman softly. “When I woke, I was in the hospital and they said they hadn’t expected me to live. While I was knocked out, he beat me severely. Most of my injuries are healed, although I hurt when it rains. I had several broken bones.”

“That’s normal,” said Angel. “I have had a lot of injuries as well and hurt when it

rains. So has Trak.”

“I am faster than he is. I do not have as many injuries.” She couldn’t help but smile at their attempts to ease her discomfort.

“Are you police officers?” she asked.

“We were in the military and now we run a security agency,” said Angel. “We heard about what the Flaming Skulls did to you.”

“Th-they won’t leave me alone. Parishioners bring me food but I don’t leave the house at all.”

“Why did you leave the convent?” asked Irene. “You weren’t to blame for what happened. No one blamed you. You didn’t have to leave.”

“I’m different now,” she said shaking her head. “I-I have different thoughts.”

“You’re frightened,” stated Trak.

“I am. But I’m also filled with thoughts of vengeance. I have no way to give it but I’m consumed by it.”

“Miss Jenna,” said Angel, “the man across the street is taken care of. His people won’t find him.” She eyed Trak who just stared at the woman, trying to reassure her that all would be well.

“They’ll send more and blame me. They’ll make it worse for me.”

“You’ll come with us,” said Trak. She stared at the strange native, titling her head at his tone. These two men didn’t make her fearful, instead made her feel as though she

would be alright.

“Come with us, child,” said Irene. “You’ll be safe on our property and no one will know where you are. If you need legal help, we can provide it.”

“That would be helpful,” she said shaking her head. “My lawyer informed me yesterday that he didn’t think handling my case was a good idea. He said that I wasn’t listening to his advice and if I wanted him to stay, I had to do what he told me.

“I’m not doing what he tells me. I refuse. I would have to find another lawyer and that only delays the trial again. I’m not sure how much longer I can do this.” Her hands were shaking and tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Then come with us now,” said Irene. “You’ll be safe, we have attorneys that can help you, and we’ll fight this with you. These men are trouble and we believe they’ll be lookin’ for trouble around New Orleans, real soon. Let my boys keep you safe.”

“What if I put you in danger?” she asked. Angel and Trak both gave a small smile, shaking their heads.

“It’s not possible.”

“I think you underestimate these men. They’ve made my life a living hell for the last six months and I am a woman who has studied hell intimately.” Irene gently gripped her hand, hoping she wouldn’t pull away.

“Then let’s give you back a little peace and a slice of heaven.”

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“They’re on their way back now,” said Ace looking at the men gathered for dinner.
“The woman is with them.”

“Sister Agatha is with them?” frowned Ghost.

“She no longer goes by her name as a nun. She’s gone back to her given name. Jenna Brooks.”

“Wh-what did you say?” asked Nash giving the room a strange expression of uncertainty and familiarity.

“Jenna Brooks. Originally from Arizona, moved to Louisiana to join the Sisters and become a nun. She’s lived here ever since.”

“Arizona,” he whispered.

“Nash, you okay?” asked Kane.

“I don’t know. I knew a Jenna Brooks a lifetime ago. We went to high school together in Arizona. I left for the Marines and she was going to go to college. We just lost touch.”

“Well, if you know her maybe it will make this transition easier for her,” said Nine.

“I don’t know. Like I said, we were just kids the last time we saw one another. I can’t imagine that she even remembers me.”

“You’re about to find out,” said Ghost nodding toward the door. Irene walked in first, Jenna behind her with Angel and Trak at the rear. The woman immediately looked up and her eyes went right to Nash’s.

“Nash,” she mouthed without a sound.

“Jenna. Jenna Brooks,” he grinned slowly walking toward her. Irene quickly moved toward him, whispering to him.

“She’s scared and skittish, baby. Take it slow. Let her lead.” He nodded then continued toward her.

“We can stay if you like, Jenna,” said Angel.

She turned, smiling at the two very sweet protectors sent for her. Although, she believed the older woman might be the one to truly fear, she knew that she was safe.

“No. No, he’s an old friend from Arizona. A very old, very dear friend,” she smiled.

When Nash stopped in front of her, she looked him in the eyes then crumbled to the floor, sobbing. Nash knelt beside her, gently placing an arm around her shoulders.

“It’s alright, Jenna. You’re safe now,” he said softly. Bree knelt beside them along with Doc, both of them introducing themselves to the woman.

“Let’s get her to the private clinic space in the office,” said Bree.

“No. No, I’m okay now,” she sniffed. “I’m sorry. It was just such a shock seeing Nash. It’s been almost forty years. You joined the Marines. You went off to protect our country. I should have stayed in touch with you but the convent wouldn’t allow letters to males unless they were relatives.”

“I did join the Marines,” he nodded. “I became a Special Forces Marine.”

“Oh,” she smiled. “Well, that makes sense. You were always special Nash and handsome. He was the most handsome boy in school.” Nash could only shake his head at his old friend.

“Why don’t we get you two off the floor,” said Doc. “A good plate of food will make you feel much better. When you’re done, Nash can show you to your cabin on the private island where we all live. No one gets on the island without us knowing about it. And no one knows where it is.”

She nodded, standing with Nash as he offered her his arm. They walked toward the food and she laughed for the first time since they’d met her. Gaspar looked down at his mother.

“Did you know about that, Mama?” he asked.

“Why are you always so suspicious, Gaspar? The world is a mysterious place and mysterious things that can’t be explained happen all the time. That’s all.” She walked away and Kane chuckled.

“She didn’t answer your question.”

“She never does, brother. Never.”

Nash sat alone with Jenna near the windows, allowing her to not feel so closed in. He asked about the last forty years of her life and what made her become a nun.

“I knew you were a devout Catholic,” he said, “I just didn’t realize you were that devout.”

“Well, I was and I wasn’t,” she said looking at him. “My folks really hit a rough patch and couldn’t afford to send my three sisters and me to college. Jeannie got a scholarship for music. She was always so talented.”

“I remember,” smiled Nash. “She played the piano, didn’t she?”

“She did,” nodded Jenna sadly. Nash felt the pit in his stomach realizing that she’d lost her sister. Likely, her parents were gone now as well. He’d been so wrapped up in hiding himself, he didn’t think about old friends that might have needed him.

“Hey, I’m sorry,” he said reaching for her hand. She pulled back, settling her hands on her lap and he shook his head in apology again.

“No. No, it’s me,” she said. They were quiet for a few minutes, just eating in silence. “Anyway. The twins, Jillian and Jari got married right out of high school. I’m not sure what happened with all of us but I’m the only one left. Jillian was killed by a drunk driver and Jari had a stroke at forty-one. Mom and dad are long gone. So, it’s just me. Joining the convent seemed my chance to get a college degree and do something to help others.”

“Then why leave? What happened isn’t your fault.”

“I know,” she said. “I know that but I can’t go back. I just can’t. I’m not the same any longer, Nash. I’ll never be the same again.”

“Well, you don’t have to go back and you don’t have to be the same. You can stay here and think about how you want to proceed with your life. We’ll all protect you and you’ll have access to our legal and medical teams.”

“You mean psychiatric care,” she frowned.

“No. I mean medical care for any injuries you have. If you want to talk to someone, yes we have counselors, therapists, psychologists, and much more. Everyone needs someone to speak with now and then. I’ve just moved here but I can tell you that these people are extraordinary.”

“I was beaten nearly to death and repeatedly raped on a grocery store floor, Nash. Not one person has stepped forward as a witness. Not one. I don’t need a therapist to tell me that I’m never going to find a resolution to this.”

“Yes, you will,” said Ghost walking toward the couple. “Evening, ma’am. I’m Ghost.”

“Ghost?” she frowned.

“Just a nickname. We’re going to make sure that you’re safe here and that this nightmare ends for you. Those men threatened our friends and family and no one does that and gets away with it.”

“They’ve done it before,” she said. “The first attorney tried to scare me away from them and told me they’d raped and killed dozens of women and yet they never went to jail. He even said that they held women hostage in their homebase, their club house. He said I should watch myself so that they didn’t take me.”

“We’re aware of all of that. But your attacker is in jail now,” said Ghost.

“Because I pointed him out in a line-up and proceeded with my case. I didn’t care if they knew who I was.” Nash looked at his old friend.

“Well, we care and no one will ever touch you again.”

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“This one is going to bring a lot of shit our way,” said Ghost looking at the other senior leaders. “I know you all know this. We’ve dealt with one-percenter gangs like this before. These guys are different at every level. It’s almost as if they want to take over entire cities. They might be small cities, but still.”

“We need to get the footage from that grocery store. There were witnesses to her rape and they’re terrified. If we can find them, we need to speak with them,” said Nine. Code turned to them and frowned.

“The grocery store mysteriously lost their footage in a storm,” he said skeptically.

“Shit.”

“I didn’t say I couldn’t find it,” grinned Code. “Everything gets uploaded to the cloud nowadays. I guess they didn’t think about that. One of the members went in and wiped out an entire week of video but didn’t think about it being uploaded.”

“Why didn’t her attorney think about that?” asked Nine.

“Sam Bolchek is a fifty-three-year-old father of a daughter. Samantha Bolcheck went missing about six months ago, around the time that he took Jenna’s case.”

“Shit, they’ve got his daughter,” said Ian.

“I would think that’s right,” said Code. “He lives in Maringouin and his office is next door to his home. He’s just a small-time lawyer and has never prosecuted a criminal case. This was all a set-up.”

“Code, we need to see that footage from the grocery store,” said Gaspar. Code shook his head.

“No. No, you don’t.”

“Code, we do,” said Nine.

“Fine. But don’t say I didn’t warn you.” He looked around the room at the other men and his eyes landed on Trak. “Don’t rush out of here and do something stupid. You know what this is going to look like.”

The grainy security footage came into view and they could see that there were at least twenty, maybe thirty other people in the store. Jenna was in the produce aisle choosing tomatoes when the bikers walked into view. Other patrons scattered as she turned.

She seemed calm and unfazed by the men, simply nodding at them and trying to move around them.

Code looked at the men in the room, watching as their fists opened and closed, opened and closed. As predicted the one that worried him was Trak. Standing stiff and straight, you could see him glaring at the faces on the screen, embedding them into his memory.

What he didn’t expect and should have paid more attention to, was Nash, silently weeping at the end of the table.

Gripping Jenna’s arms, two men held her to the floor while the third ripped off her habit and brutally raped her. The men switched places, laughing as they brutalized her, beating her face and body until the color blended with the crushed tomatoes.

When they were finished, they threw the vegetables on top of her, spitting on what they most likely presumed was a dead body. Then they made a crucial error. They turned, looking directly into the cameras realizing that they'd been filmed.

The footage disappeared from the screen and the men said nothing, only hearing the sniffs from Nash.

"Brother, we'll get these men," said Ghost. Nash nodded.

"I know that," he said. "I know we'll get them. It's just that she is, was a nun. A woman filled with so much kindness and goodness. She didn't hurt anyone. She didn't do anything to any of them. She was brave enough to offer protection and safety to those that were abused."

"That was enough to anger them, Nash," said Ghost. "We've seen men like these before."

"I've seen them before," said Winter standing in the doorway.

"Winter, honey, how much of that did you see?" asked Nine.

"Enough. Enough to remember what it was like when my own grandfather did those things to me," she said swallowing. Nash frowned at the woman, shaking his head.

"I'm so sorry," he said in a cracked voice.

"Don't be. It brought me here to these beautiful people and to my amazing, wonderful husband, Hiro. I have a wonderful life, Nash. Jenna will have a wonderful life too. I think I can help her if it's alright with all of you." Ghost nodded with a sad smile.

"Check in with Bree and Ashley, sweetie, but I think you can help her as well."

“Nash? When you’re ready to talk about this, come and see me,” said Winter. “I’ll tell you what that was probably like for her. What they said to her. I know. I’ve been there.” She walked away and Nash just shook his head.

“Do we know where they are?” he asked.

“We will by the end of the day,” said Code. “Once I can get a drone above them and see if I can find any sign of Samantha Bolchek, we’ll get in and get her out.”

“We can use the stealth netting,” said Ghost.

“You can,” nodded Kane, “but remember that we have Griffin and Juan.”

“Juan shows up naked in their clubhouse and he’ll be dead, brother,” said Gaspar.

“Maybe not,” said Juan, suddenly staring at them. It was only his head, but he was staring at them in the front of the room.

“What the fuck?” muttered Angel.

“It’s the stealth netting, modified a little bit,” smiled Juan. “It seems I can strip off my regular, synthetic clothing and carry this with me. It works.” He lowered the netting around his waist and Nine held up a hand.

“That’s far enough,” he smirked. “I believe you. Alright, we’ll send in a few of our own boys to create a distraction, draw them out of the clubhouse and you guys get in along with Tailor, Alec, and...”

“Me,” said Trak.

“Damnit, Trak! You can’t do it all,” said Nine.

“Yes, I can. Besides, Alvin said the bison would like the opportunity to trample some things. They are getting itchy.”

“Itchy? Fucking itchy? And just how do we transport the bison?” he frowned. Trak stared at him, shaking his head.

“They know how to walk.”

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“I think your gifts are patience,” smirked Kane, looking at the senior leaders.

“You have no idea, brother,” said Ian.

“I’ll say it again, your team is remarkable. It’s only been a few weeks and they’ve already figured out a way to modify that netting for Juan. That’s a genius that even I can’t comprehend.”

“We’re lucky,” nodded Gaspar. “My parents are beyond ordinary or extraordinary. They’re, celestial.”

“Funny,” smirked Nine. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard you describe your mother as celestial.”

“Well, I’m getting older and appreciate her more every day.” He smiled at them, then noticed that Hawke and Hawk were walking toward him. “Hey, what’s up.”

“Well, we’ve been trying to figure out some ways to distinguish between the two of us. I’ll continue to use Hawk, and he’ll be known as Hawke-bird. It seems an easy resolution,” smiled Hawk.

“Alright. Hawke-bird. I like that,” nodded Gaspar. “Any chance Hawke-bird could find a way to join our drones and look for the Flaming Skulls.”

“I believe you have a falcon on the island. We’ve become great friends,” he smiled.

“You’ve used him, I mean been in his head, or whatever?” asked Gaspar.

“Your father asked if I could give him a, um, birds-eye view of some islands to the east. I think he owns them and wants to build on them.”

“Of course, he does,” laughed Nine. “Of course, he does.”

“Well, what did you find?” asked Killer.

“Nothing,” said the man shuffling from one foot to the other. “There was nothing there.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” he said standing to move toward the younger man. “We were there! We saw those fucking bikes and those old assholes. I want to know everything they’re doing!”

“We know, Killer, but I’m telling you. It wasn’t there. It’s like they leveled the ground and moved on.” He shook his head, fuming at the thought of it.

“A business like theirs doesn’t just move on. They own that land and they own that bike shop. They wouldn’t move because of us. They’re not those kind of men. I could tell.”

Pacing the long space he stared at the men seated around him. More than a hundred men here, two-hundred more at his fingertips. They were fast becoming the strongest and most powerful motorcycle club in the world. No one was going to fuck with them.

He had men in the wings ready to take over public office. Dressed in their business suits, their tattoos covered, they were pretending to be honest, good citizens while secretly trading drugs for bodies, killing men and women who dared to defy them.

In the corner of the room were seven young women, barely clothed, barely fed, but

used to the delight of he and his men. One of them served a particular purpose. As long as she was alive, her father would do as he was told.

“Speak of the devil,” he mumbled to himself as two men walked in with Sam Bolchek. “Why is he here?”

Sam looked into the corner, seeing his daughter looking terrified and abused. It was breaking his soul.

“Someone killed Dip,” said the man.

“Say what?” frowned Killer.

“We went to relieve him and he was lying on his bike, like he was asleep. Someone broke his neck, Killer. He was dead and that bitch nun is gone. No one saw where she went.”

“Fuck!”

“We asked around but no one saw her leave, no one saw anyone speak with her. We decided to pick him up and find out when he last saw her.”

“It’s been a week or more, Killer,” said Sam. “She was more determined than ever to go through with the trial, no matter what I said to her. She’s just not giving up.”

“Did you help her? So help me God, if you fucking helped her, you can say goodbye to your little girl right now. She’s a sweet morsel but I’ll kill her myself.”

“No, please! Please, no,” he begged.

“Do it,” said the weak voice behind them. The girl stood defiantly, staring at her

father, then back at her captors. “Do it. I’m already dead.”

Killer started to walk toward her and then five men walked into the clubhouse.

“What?” he screamed.

“Killer, we got a big problem, brother.”

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“We found them,” said Code running toward the group seated together at dinner. “They’re at an old warehouse out near the airport. Hawke-bird, counts eighty or ninety men outside and that’s not all.”

“Of course it’s not,” frowned Gaspar.

“They just brought Sam Bolchek there.”

“Where are the bison?” asked Nine.

“Oddly enough,” smirked Code, “they were in the area along with the elephants and Alvin. Semu seems to have hitched a ride as well.”

“And the boys?”

“Tailor, Alec, Juan, Angel, Trak, Antoine, Max, and Wilson are there under cover. I have the footage on the drone if you want to watch the feed.”

“Hell, yes I do,” smirked Nine picking up his plate. “Let’s go. Dinner and a show.”

“What the fuck?” muttered Killer seeing all the animals.

Cars were stopping on the roads, staring at the sight of wild animals trampling motorcycles and kicking up dirt. One of the men raised a weapon and he gripped his arm.

“Don’t you fucking idiot! Do you see all those people with their phones out? They’re

watching this to see what we do. You kill these wild animals and we'll be run out of town. Try moving them away."

"We've tried!" said one of the men. "That fucking gator tries to take your balls off."

The team smirked at one another beneath their stealth netting, carefully moving around the animals toward the clubhouse. There were only a few men inside, Alec, Tailor, Antoine, and Wilson happily dropping them to the floors. The women just looked stunned, unsure of what was happening. Alec removed the netting from his face and the girls gasped.

"Don't be afraid, little bits. We're here to get you out," he said.

"They'll kill us," said one of the girls. "They said if we escaped they'd come and find us and kill us all."

"They won't find you and they won't kill," said Alec. "Let's go. You're gonna hold tight to us. Get on our backs, the others we'll carry. Don't move, don't scream, don't say a word. Clear?"

"Clear," nodded Samanth Bolchek.

Doing as the men asked, four women crawled onto the backs of the massive men, three more, carried by Wilson, Tailor and Alec. The men easily moved out of the clubhouse, watching the chaos of men trying to avoid thousand-pound beasts.

Motorcycles were crushed beneath their weight, men groaning and moaning at the loss of their only property. Passing Trak, he nodded at them and made his way toward Killer. With speed and agility, he stabbed the needle into the man and he yelped like a little girl.

“What the fuck?” he said grabbing his ass. “Something stung me.”

His men stared at him, wondering if he’d lost his mind. There was nothing that could sting you out here, only things that could trample you.

Bolchek stared at the crazy scene, then felt a tug as someone gripped his body. The visions in front of him blurred and the next thing he knew, he was standing next to a black SUV.

“Wh-what? What just happened?” he stammered. David smiled at the man, bowing at his waist.

“You’re welcome,” he grinned.

“No. No,” he said looking around him. “You have no idea what you’ve done! He’ll kill my daughter.”

“No, he won’t,” said Alec setting the girl down in front of her father. Bolchek reached for the girl and she backed up, standing behind Alec.

“Samantha. Honey, it’s me, dad,” he said tearfully.

“I know who you are. You’re the man that sold out your own daughter because of fear. You were ready to allow them to kill that poor nun because you’re a coward. You make me sick!”

“Samantha,” he whispered, swallowing the bile rising in his throat. “Samantha, you don’t understand. I didn’t have a choice.”

“There is always a choice, dad. Always. Isn’t that what you taught me about drugs and alcohol and sex! All the things I didn’t get a choice of because you sold me to

those men! I despise you. I will help put you in jail for what you've done."

"Honey, maybe tone it down a notch," said Alec. "I don't agree with what your daddy did, but he thought he was protecting you, keeping you alive."

"Yeah? Well, I'm anything but alive."

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The seven young women were led into the clinic to be examined, given clean clothing and showers. Six of them would eventually be reunited with their families in other states, after they filed police reports with those the team knew they could trust.

The seventh woman, wanted revenge.

“The clubhouse is in chaos,” said Code looking at the men. “The animals definitely did their job. If the trampling wasn’t bad enough, the bison and elephant shit is everywhere. Semu did quite a number on the bikes. She actually bent the pipes and frames. They won’t be using those for a while.”

“Good,” smirked Nine. “Of course, that’s going to make them more desperate for our bikes. Where is Killer?”

“He’s unavailable,” said Trak. They all looked at him with raised brows. Wilson just laughed.

“My dear friend asked for a syringe of the most powerful drug that would induce diarrhea. I suspect Killer is sitting on his, uh, throne.” Trak smirked at the men, wiggling his eyebrows.

“This is why I love working with him,” laughed Angel.

“Where is Bolchek?” asked Gaspar.

“He was trying to speak with his daughter but she wants nothing to do with him. The girls were all eighteen or older but what they did to them was pretty awful,” said

Wilson. “They were lucky that they hadn’t been forced to take drugs yet but they were all raped, typically by more than one man at a time. They were forced to dance and strip, perform acts of sexual pleasure in front of the others, all the usual fucking, disgusting bullshit.”

Nine nodded, staring at the others. Miller walked in with Bolchek shoving him into a chair.

“Who are you people?” he asked looking around the room.

“We are defending Jenna Brooks,” said Ian. “Not you. You’ve been replaced as her counsel of record.”

“Wh-what? No. No, I have to.”

“No, you don’t,” said Ian. “Your daughter is safe now. Although she doesn’t want a damn thing to do with you. I can’t say that I blame her for that.”

“I had to! What they would have done to her if I didn’t do this would have been much worse.”

“Worse? She was fucking raped. Gang raped, beaten, forced to do shit with those men that you can’t possibly imagine. You had choices,” said Ian.

“I had no choices,” he said slamming his hand on the table. “None! He owns everyone. The mayor, the police, the feds, he owns them all!”

“He doesn’t own everyone,” said Gaspar. “He damn sure doesn’t own us.” Bolchek shook his head.

“I have no idea what just happened back there but he will come for me and for my

daughter again.”

“He won’t get to either of you,” said Ian. “If you’ll cooperate with our legal team, we’ll protect you both until this is over.”

“You don’t get it. It will never be over. He. Owns. Everyone!”

“No, he doesn’t,” repeated Ian.

“Listen to me, I was at a meeting between him and the regional FBI director, along with the state’s Homeland director. He owns them. His plan is to help them be placed in high offices and eventually, he will be in a high office. They were both former, or current members of the Flaming Skulls.”

The men looked at one another and then at Code and Sly. The two men nodded, knowing exactly what they needed to do. Time to turn the page on the Flaming Skulls.

“Again, you could have found someone to help. Not everyone at the FBI or Homeland is on their side,” said Ghost.

“Listen to me. Those men are former members of the club. Not even former. They are current members but hide it. They’ve had their tattoos lasered off, they’ve gotten their college degrees, and now they are in positions of power and authority. This isn’t something he slapped together a few weeks ago.

“Killer knows what the fuck he is doing. He learned from the best. His father and grandfather.”

“And who were his father and grandfather?” asked Miller.

“Harry Clayton, Sr. and Jr. Killer is Harry Clayton, III.”

“Harry Clayton?” frowned Gabe. “He was convicted of child molestation and trafficking and sentenced to death. The son started the motorcycle club but he moved to another state.”

“He moved to another state so that he could do what he needed to do,” said Bolchek. “He impregnated a young girl, who gave birth to Clayton, III. Following in his father’s footsteps, Killer raped a woman and had a kid. The kid was adopted by another family and Killer stole the kid, kidnapping his adoptive mother.

“When Killer was five, his old man made him watch as he allowed the members of the club to gang rape his own mother and then told his son that she wasn’t any good for them any longer. The kid shot her. Five damn years old.

“Now, you might think you can handle whatever these men are going to send your way but I’d prefer to be away from them when that happens.”

“You can leave,” said Nine. “After you give our legal team every damn thing you have. Once that’s done, you’re welcome to go anywhere you want but your daughter stays if she wants to.”

“You’ve all lost your minds,” he said shaking his head. “This place won’t keep them from you. He has hundreds of men.”

“Good for him,” smirked Ghost. Code handed him a sheet of paper and Ghost smiled, nodding as he handed it to the other senior leaders. “Have a seat. You might enjoy this phone call.”

When the faces of the director of the FBI and Homeland appeared on the split screen, the two men smiled at the familiar faces.

“Shit, I thought you guys were finally dead,” smirked Asa Winston, head of the FBI. Leland Mack with Homeland laughed, shaking his head.

“Haven’t you heard the rumors, Asa? They struck a deal with the devil and they’re all immortal.”

“Damn if I don’t believe it. What can we do for you boys?”

“You’ve both got an issue with state heads,” said Gaspar. “Julius Campbell and Ed Finch are members of the Flaming Skulls and attempting to get their members in high-ranking roles in the government.”

“Campbell,” frowned Winston.

“Finch,” said Mack.

“You know?” frowned Gaspar.

“No. We suspected that the two of them were doing dirty business but we couldn’t ever prove it. Their backgrounds were squeaky clean, put on our desk by someone much higher up, and it just seemed off.”

“How so?” asked Miller.

“It was like interviewing a bouncer in a bar for the role of Pope but he spoke like an educated bouncer in a bar. I’m not sure how either of them got all the way through the process and up the ladder, but they’re sitting there and we’ve been watching them,” said Winston.

“If you guys don’t find a way to get them out of their offices, you’re going to have a very big issue on your hands. Their club leader, a man named Killer, real name,

Harry Clayton, III, has been causing havoc wherever they go. They tried to get us to build bikes for them, then took seven women and abused them.”

“You got them?” asked Mack.

“We got them.” The two men nodded.

“What do you want us to do?” asked Winston.

“Fire them both. We’ve got their police records, along with their fingerprints, which someone obviously hid from all of you. Present it, let them know they’re done, and that will be one problem solved.”

“We can send men,” said Winston. “We’ve been watching this gang for a while now.”

“You can’t watch a gang like this, Asa. You know that,” said Skull. “Clubs like this have to be abused, tortured, tormented, until they fall apart and collapse.”

“Some of us have rules we have to follow, Ghost,” said Asa. “I know you don’t have to but you should. We’ll get these two out of their positions and be available to help in any other way you need.”

“If you take care of those two, we’ll make sure the local law enforcement is shut down and put out of business. If they have no one on the inside to help them, they’ll have no one to feed them information about the case involving Sister Agatha,” said Nine.

“And then?” asked Mack.

“And then, we really start to have fun.”

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“Jesus, what happened here?” asked Campbell.

Killer was sitting at table hunched over, moaning with stomach cramps and pain. His face was a pale yellowish-green and the odor of feces was nearly overwhelming.

“What the fuck are you doing here? You’ll fuck everything up!”

“We were fired,” said Finch. “Both of us were called in today. They had our prints, our criminal history, photos, everything that you said was hidden. We’re done and we’ve been charged with impersonating a federal employee, gross criminal misconduct and a bunch of other shit.”

“How? How the fuck is this happening?” he moaned.

“I don’t know but we won’t be able to get back in, that’s for damn sure,” said Finch. “We both tried to find where that nun was moved and couldn’t find her. Worse than that, Banger has been moved to solitary. They said it was for his own safety.”

“Shit!” he screamed, slamming his hand on the table. He moaned then ran toward the bathroom, the others all staring at him.

“What the fuck is wrong with him?”

“Don’t know. Something weird happened here. All these fucking wild animals trampling our bikes, shitting everywhere, and then the girls disappeared. An hour later, he was shitting all over himself. He’s changed his clothes like three times and he’s still going.”

“Damn,” muttered Finch. “Somebody figured it all out and it was damn sure someone who had connections. Our shit was hidden deep.”

“Where are the new bikes?” asked Campbell.

“Don’t have ‘em,” said one of the older members. “Fuckers refused to sell them to us. Beautiful damn bikes too. Not like what we had. Don’t know what we’re going to do now. If we don’t have bikes we’re not much of a club and we’re sitting here vulnerable.”

“Did you go back to the shop and try to convince them that they should sell to you?” asked Finch.

“Of course we fucking did,” growled Killer from behind them. “Bastards were gone. All of it. The entire fucking shop was gone.”

The two men in suits stared at one another then looked at their leader. Maybe he was losing it and needed to be replaced.

“I’m not fucking crazy. Ask the boys. They went out to find it and couldn’t. It was fucking gone.”

The two men looked at one another, then back at the men in the room.

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?” barked Killer.

“Look, Killer, I know you want this but I think we have to move on,” said Campbell.

“Why?”

“We never had to meet these men or speak to them but we heard the stories and

rumors. I think you're dealing with a bunch of dudes that were all former Special Forces. Like serious Special Forces. Not just SF, but the best of the best SF. They started out as REAPER and Steel Patriots, then REAPER-Patriots. The fucking mafia runs from them, brother."

"I've heard of them," whispered Killer. The look on his face told them all he had indeed heard of them. "I thought they'd all be dead. It explains their behavior in the bike shop. I should have made the connection between them and Patriot Cycles."

"We need to leave them alone, Killer," said Finch.

"No. I'm not letting them win this. They owe me bikes and those bitches they took from me. Plus, if they're involved in helping that fucking nun, we're screwed and so is Banger."

"He's just one member. He won't talk," said Finch.

"We're not leaving him to rot in prison," said Killer.

"Brother, he'll get out in time. He'll do good behavior and be free. We've all done it. We can't risk everyone for him," said Finch.

"We will!" They all stared at him as he sat down, clutching his gut once again. One of the men set a bottle of water in front of him and he nodded his thanks.

"We will because he's my son. I asked him to rape that nun, to beat the fuck out of her and make sure she didn't open her damn mouth or help one more girl. I asked him to do that."

"But he didn't do it," said Campbell. Killer glared at him. If he were feeling better, he'd kick the shit out of him. Normally, he wouldn't push Killer like this but he'd be

damned if he was going to risk his life for his Killer's piece of shit kid.

“He tried. He just didn't get to finish the job. So we'll do it for him and get him out of there. No matter what.”

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“May I join you?” asked Nash. He’d been watching Jenna sitting near the fountain in the gardens for nearly an hour. They were all watching her, concerned that she might harm herself.

“Of course, Nash. I actually owe you an apology.”

“Me?” he frowned. “You don’t owe me an apology. You’ve done absolutely nothing wrong.”

“You reached for my hand out of friendship and I shunned you,” she said looking down into the fountain. Nash shook his head.

“Jenna, a man attacked you. The touch of a man will set you off for a while. I should have been more considerate. I know it wasn’t about me. It was about your attackers.”

“Thank you for saying that,” she said. “You always were the nicest boy in school. I remember when your family was transferred to Arizona. You were only in eighth grade, I think.”

“That’s right,” he smiled. “We had been at a base called The Depot. In fact, many of the people here were there.”

“Really? That seems odd,” she frowned.

“Yes,” he laughed. “I suppose it does feel odd. We’re all different, Jenna. We were exposed to something while at this strange base and now have unusual skills.”

“Like what you did at the lake when we were in high school?”

“You remember that?” he asked. She nodded. “I never meant for anyone to see me. If I hadn’t done what I did, Josie would have died.”

“I saw it as a miracle from God, Nash. I never thought you were strange. You lifted that water like it was nothing and there she was, crawling her way along the bottom of the lake. You saved her life.”

“I can’t believe you saw me. I wish you had told me,” he said smiling at her. “I felt alone during that time. I couldn’t tell everyone what was happening to me.”

“I’m sorry. I should have come to you. You were my friend, my dearest friend. I hated that we lost touch after I went to the convent.”

“Why did you go?” he asked. “You were one of the smartest people in school. Surely you had scholarship offers.”

“I wish that were true,” she said. “My parents were so poor at that time they didn’t even have the money to submit my college applications. I knew that I needed to go to work and help support them. But if I took a job, I wouldn’t be able to support them and myself. The convent seemed logical.

“I was a devout Catholic, so were my family members. The convent allowed you to live there rent free and when I became a nun, all of my small salary went to them. It was enough for a while, then everything just crumbled.”

“I’m sorry,” he said reaching for her hand again. He hovered above her, then pulled back but this time, Jenna reached for him.

“We shouldn’t be afraid to touch when we’re old friends,” she said. He nodded,

smiling at her.

“I’m sorry about what happened to you, Jenna but I’m so glad I’ve found you again. I’ve thought of you many times over the years.”

“Same,” she smiled. “I had a terrible crush on you when I was in high school.”

“Why didn’t you say something?” he asked.

“We were such friends, buddies almost, I didn’t want to ruin that. All the girls wanted to date you and they were so beautiful and dressed perfectly. I was the poor girl from the wrong side of the tracks.”

“No. No, you weren’t,” he said shaking his head. “You were my best friend and I had a crush on you as well.” He squeezed her hand and she smiled, nodding at him.

“Funny how the world works, isn’t it. All those missed opportunities for us and look at us now.”

“We’re the same people, Jenna.”

“No. No, I’m not,” she said. “What that man, those men, did to me left me a shell of myself. I’ll never be alright again. Never.”

She stood quickly and walked down the path toward the river. He started to follow and felt the cool hand at his shoulder.

“Let her have some time to think,” said the ghostly figure of Nathan. “What happened to her didn’t just destroy her as a woman but destroyed her faith. That’s not easy for a woman who was a nun.”

“I care for her, Nathan.”

“I know you do. You must let this happen in its own time. Do not rush her or she may leave and place herself in more danger. Did you speak with Winter and Hiro?”

“No,” he said shaking his head. “Not yet.”

“Do it now,” said Nathan.

“I’m getting orders from a ghost,” he smirked. Nathan nodded as Franklin, Yori, Archie, Grip, and the other male ghosts appeared. “Okay, okay, I get it. I’m getting orders from all the ghosts.”

“Not all,” smiled Yori. “The women have chosen not to push you. Yet.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. The last thing I need is Martha haunting me in the middle of the night.”

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“I wondered when you might come and see us,” smiled Winter. “Did Yori send you?”

“Yori, Nathan and the others. I don’t want to bring up painful memories for you, Winter.”

“They will always be painful memories, Nash but I’ve learned to handle them. I can thank Hiro for that,” she said smiling at her husband.

“I want to help her.”

“You are helping her,” said Hiro. “You’re here for her. You’re not threatening her and you’re being patient. Just keep doing that.”

“But she seems almost worse than when she got here.”

“She is,” nodded Winter. “She’s worse because Bree and Ashley are forcing her to speak about it. Every time she relives that day, the wounds open again and bleed.”

“Then why make her relive it?” he asked, frustrated by it all.

“If she doesn’t, Nash, it will eat her alive. She’ll continue to fold into herself and hide from the world. She’s too young to do that. Too full of life, love, and goodness to hide. Don’t allow her to do that.”

“Winter, I can’t force her to speak with me,” he said shaking his head.

“I don’t want you to force her. I just want you to be there for her. She’s going to

crumble at some point.” Nash just stared at the couple unsure of what he was supposed to do.

“Listen, Nash. When Winter arrived here she was a shell of what you see now. She barely spoke to anyone other than Keegan. She kept her hair over her face, she hid the marks and tattoos that had been placed on her.”

“Tattoos?”

“My grandfather’s motorcycle club put an ownership tattoo on me. Hiro bought the laser machine that took it off,” she said smiling at her husband. “That’s how I knew he would never harm me. Also, he didn’t push me. He was there, ready in case I fell. But he never pushed me. I think the turning point for me was the day I screamed.”

“Dear God,” muttered Nash. “You screamed?”

“It’s not what you think. I screamed to let out everything I had held in. You see, my grandfather delighted in hearing the women cry or scream. Me included. I was caged, forced to be without clothing and food, beaten, raped, and sodomized.” Nash had tears in his eyes shaking his head.

“Winter, I’m so fucking sorry,” he wept.

“I know,” she smiled, touching his arm. “I was lucky. I had all these people to help me. I’ve watched the film of Jenna. It was-it was horrible but I noticed something. Although she attempted to fight back, she never screamed. Never.”

“I don’t understand. What does that mean?”

“We think that she was probably taught that screaming was not appropriate,” said Hiro. “The convent would have encouraged her to be a quiet, well-behaved sister.

Even while being beaten and raped, she didn't let go of that. If I had to guess, she was most likely praying that God would help her. That's why she's lost her faith right now."

"What if those men find her?" asked Nash. "What happens if she actually has to face that guy in a courtroom? I'm not sure she can manage that. She thinks she's doing well, managing things well, but I don't think she is at all."

"I can't answer that," said Hiro. "You being there for her makes a difference. All of us being there for her. She won't crumble but if they have a good attorney, she might find it difficult to speak about the details."

"I don't want her to go through that. It's not right," he said. "Did you face your grandfather?" Winter smiled and nodded.

"Not in a courtroom, but I faced him. I stood in front of him and let him know that he would never touch me, or any woman ever again. Then I shot him." Nash smirked at the tiny woman.

"Good for you," he grinned.

"It felt wonderful," she said. She looked up to see Jenna seated on the dock and kissed her husband. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to offer a makeover for Jenna. Hair, nails, make-up, all of it. It usually makes a woman at least feel better for a while."

They watched as she walked toward the woman who was seated with her head down, not looking at anything except her feet.

"She won't be able to handle the courtroom, Hiro." He nodded as they turned to see the man walking toward them.

“I have an idea.”

Weaver Crup pushed what passed for food, around on his plate. He was losing weight every day trying to avoid the slop they were feeding him. His old man promised that he'd have him out and he trusted him. He wouldn't lead him on.

Twenty-six and the bastard son of the head of one of the most vicious one-percenter clubs made him feared by many. For the rest, he was their daily target. Fortunately, he'd learned to fight and that was keeping him alive and preventing him from being raped.

When the alarms went off, again, he knew someone was doing something fucking stupid.

“In your cells!” yelled the guard. “Crup! Move!”

“I'm moving. Fuck!” he growled.

He walked up the steps to the level of cells above them and took a seat inside his own cell. When his cellmate didn't arrive, he wondered if it was him causing the problems. He seriously doubted it. The guy was afraid of his own shadow.

The doors closed and the locks were engaged, the sirens still blaring. He leaned his head against the wall and let out a long sigh.

“I fucking hate this place.”

“Don't worry, you'll be leaving soon,” said the voice.

He jumped up looking around the cell then moved to the bars. No one was there. Walking back to his bunk, he sat back down and shook his head.

“Hearing things, Weaver?”

“Who is that? Who’s there?” he called.

“Ain’t nobody anywhere, Crup,” yelled the inmate in the cell next to him. “The guards are taking care of something. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Nothing is wrong.”

“You raped that nun, Weaver. You beat her, raped her, and nearly killed her. For that, you deserve to die.”

“No. No, you’re not real,” he whispered to himself. “It’s the drugs.”

“Funny you say that,” said the voice again. Suddenly a man appeared before him, only his head but he was there. Weaver tried to lash out at him but the man disappeared, moving out of his reach.

“You’re not real. You’re not real!” he yelled.

“What the fuck is wrong with you, Crup?” asked the inmate again.

“It’s time you paid for your sins,” said the voice. “You hurt Sister Agatha and now I will hurt you.”

He felt the burning sting of something on his hand and looked down to see the long knife wound, bleeding on the floor. He gripped it with his free hand, shaking his head.

Then he felt another sting, this time at his neck. From his spine to just below his ear, another knife wound, bleeding everywhere. He kept turning inside the cell, searching

for what wasn't there. Dizzy and losing consciousness, he sat back down on the bunk, trying to squelch the bleeding.

"You're going to die, Weaver."

"M-my name is Banger," he muttered beneath his breath.

"No. You are no one. You are nothing. And you will not enjoy hell."

He felt the stab and twist of a blade, then another sting as it was brought around his neck, ear to ear. Choking on his own blood, he could say nothing as he stared at the emptiness of the cell.

Suddenly a man appeared. A full body of a male. Naked.

"I'll tell Sister Agatha that you're on your way to hell. Just like she prayed. Enjoy the weather."

Juan watched as he choked on the last bit of warm blood flowing from his body, falling back against his bunk. Blood was everywhere, making it appear that multiple people attacked him. He waited a few moments, then checked his pulse. The alarms stopped and he knew that David had done his job on the alarm systems.

Pulling the stealth netting over his head, he disappeared once more, leaving Weaver Crup dead in his own blood. No witnesses, no fingerprints, no cellmate. Locked inside his cell and dead.

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“Jenna? Can we speak to you for a moment?” asked Kari.

“Y-yes,” she whispered.

“It’s alright, Jenna. Nothing is wrong,” said Kat. “We’ve just heard from the federal prison that Weaver Crup was found dead in his cell. There were no witnesses, no camera footage, nothing. We can still take the club to trial if you want, but he’s gone. You won’t have to worry about him any longer.”

“Th-there were other men. I didn’t see their faces but there were others,” she said bravely.

“Yes, there were. Again, we can go to trial but if we don’t have names or faces, it might be challenging to get a conviction,” said Kari.

“I saw tattoos and I heard voices,” she said. Nash was listening at the table behind her, admiring her determination. Kari smiled at her, nodding.

“I have to give it to you, Jenna. You’re brave as shit. Most victims of sexual assault are too afraid to point out their attackers.”

“If I don’t, I’ll live in fear for the rest of my life that they’ll come after me. I would know their voices if I heard them again. One had a lisp and the other one was deep and raspy. His voice sounded like it had been damaged. I told Mr. Bolchek that.”

“He seemed to forget to put that in the notes,” said Kat frowning at Kari. “I’ll get with him and see what I can find out.”

“What do I do?” asked Jenna.

“You stay here and stay safe. Do you have everything you need? Can we get anything for you? Would you like to visit the Sisters at the convent?”

“No. No, I don’t want to see them. They made me feel different afterwards.”

“Honey, they might not have known what to say or what to do for you. I’m sure it was difficult for them to see you in such pain,” said Kari.

“M-maybe. I just can’t do that right now. As for needing anything, I can’t think of one thing I would need. You all have shown such kindness to me. Winter gave me a make-over earlier today. It’s the first time anyone has ever done that for me.”

“Your hair looks lovely,” said Kat. “Did she color it?”

“Yes. Is that vain?”

“If it is, we’re all guilty,” smiled Kari. “It’s beautiful and suits your skin tone. I like the cut she gave you as well. It’s very sleek. Not quite as severe as your previous cut.”

“Yes, well, the convent had pretty strict regulations on how your hair should look. I never understood that. God surely doesn’t concern himself with the hair length of his nuns. She gave me all this new skincare stuff and I have to confess, I’m a bit lost.”

“Well,” laughed Kari, “if you need any advice they’ll be there for you and so will Avery. I’m guessing the products are from her line.”

Jenna nodded again, turning her face toward the sun and the docks at the end of the tree-lined walk. She was nibbling on her bottom lip.

“Is there anything else, honey?” asked Kat.

“I’m not sure. Were either of you, did anyone ever...”

“No,” they said in unison.

“No, but someone was trying to kill me,” said Kari. “Pierre, my husband, they call him Miller, he was the man sent to guard me and we fell in love.”

“That’s wonderful,” she said with a sad smile. She looked at Kat.

“No. My story is similar. Someone wanted to arrange a marriage as a sort of business arrangement. I refused and they tried to come after me. Nathan saved me.”

“The ghost?” frowned Jenna.

“No,” laughed Kat. “Nathan is his great-grandson. We had been dating, seeing one another before then.”

“I know, I know that Hiro fell in love with Winter after what she went through. I know it can happen but it doesn’t feel real to me.”

“It doesn’t feel real because it’s too soon, Jenna. Listen, honey. You’ve been through a lot. You’ve had someone take something very precious from you, abuse your body, and because of that, you left your profession, your passion.”

“It wasn’t my passion,” she whispered. Kat and Kari stared at one another, then the woman. “I might go to hell for that. It wasn’t my passion. It was my only choice to help my family. After a while, I realized it was comfortable. I was comfortable.”

“First off, you’re not going to hell for telling the truth. You served the church with

faith and honor. God won't hate you for that and if you want a professional opinion, ask Irene." The women all smiled at one another, nodding in agreement.

A cool breeze blew across the property, causing Kari to look up to see if rain was coming. But the sun was shining and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. She noticed that Jenna had closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath. Kari looked around them to see if Irene or Matthew were near. She wasn't sure why, she just felt certain that the breeze was from them.

"I'm going to take a walk," said Jenna. "Can I let you know later whether or not I want to proceed with this?"

"Of course. Take all the time you need," said Kat. They watched as the woman walked away from them, headed toward the water.

"I worry every damn time that she's going to jump in and not come up," said Kari. "I cannot imagine what she went through and the moral dilemma she is running through her head. Forgiveness. Not forgiveness. Virginity. No virginity. I don't know what I would do if I were her."

"Me either," said Kat. "I know one thing for sure. I'd be damn happy that Weaver Crup is dead and I'd be worried sick about what his father is going to do."

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“How?”

“No one seems to be able to answer that question, boss. Several knife wounds, the one that killed him across the throat. The cameras were in and out but no one was seen inside the cell. The guy next to him said he was talking to himself.” Killer pushed his chair back, standing quickly with his fists clenched.

“You sayin’ my boy was crazy?”

“No. No, sir. I’m telling you what the guy next to him said. He said he was speaking to someone but there was no one in there,” said the man backing up, shaking.

“My boy wasn’t crazy. Someone killed him and I want to know who it was.”

“Hey, boss!” yelled another walking through the opening in the wall that the bison had left for them. “That motorcycle company is at a bike show this weekend downtown.”

“Yeah?” he asked with interest.

“Yeah. They’re at the convention center with like fifty bikes they’re showing off. Got maybe fifteen or twenty guys there. Easy for us.”

“No,” said Finch, shaking his head. “No, fucking way. If you see fifteen or twenty, that means there are a hundred somewhere. I love this club, but I’m not walking into a death trap.”

“You’ll do what you’re fucking told,” growled Killer.

“You know what, Harry ,” he said in a low voice. “I’ve known you since we were kids. We grew up in this shit. Your old man lasted because he listened to those around him. We’ve tried to tell you not to mess with these guys. You need to leave this alone and move on.”

“He’s right, boss,” said Campbell. “We’re all sorry about your kid, but they could still come after the other two boys. I think we cut our losses, lick our wounds and move on. This is not the group we want to die with.”

“What the fuck is going on here? Did you guys suddenly become a bunch of pussies?” he yelled.

“I ain’t no pussy, Killer,” said his road captain, Digger. “Don’t call me that. But I did some reading on these guys. Hard to find anything but what I did find tells me we’re fucking with the wrong men. I ain’t afraid of nothin’ but I also ain’t stupid. I don’t have no death wish. I want to live to fight another day and fight another club. A club where we can take their land, their money, their bitches and their bikes. I don’t need government trained assassins coming for me.”

“I’m not believing this. You’re all afraid of these guys. A bunch of over-the-hill, old as fuck retired army grunts,” he laughed. Finch picked up his duffel bag and started toward the door.

“You should be afraid of them too, Killer. And they’re not a bunch of old retired grunts. They were SEALs, MARSOC, Delta, Rangers, Green Berets and shit you don’t even know about. They won’t let you live and when you die, it won’t be an easy death.”

“You’re not leaving!” he screamed. “I’ll sign your death warrant!”

“You already have,” said Campbell following his friend out the door.

“Who else? Who else is gonna be a little bitch!” He looked around the room, the men moving from one foot to the other. “I tell you what. I’ll turn my back and you can decide what you want to do. You wanna leave? Fucking leave. You stay, we go to war.”

He turned his back waiting to hear if anyone moved. At first, there was no sound at all and he smiled to himself, knowing that they were his men.

Then, without warning, chairs were pushed backward and he heard the door opening and closing. Most of the bikes were destroyed but those that had them, were on them and gone. The others were using the trucks they had on the property. They had fucking deserted him. He slowly turned, seeing only six men left. Six of almost a hundred.

“So, that’s how it is then,” he mumbled. “Fuck ‘em. We’ll show them they were all stupid. We’ll win this, take those bikes, and find those fucking women again. When I’m done, I’ll personally kill that damn nun.”

“We gotta do this smart, boss,” said one of the men.

“Yeah. I’ll do it smart. Find me Bolchek.”

“Why didn’t you keep the notes about the other men?” asked Kari, staring down Sam Bolchek.

“There wasn’t a reason. We were never going to make it to trial. Or at least that’s what I was told,” he frowned, pushing the folder back toward the two women.

“Well, guess what, asshole. We’re going to trial. Weaver Crup is dead and Jenna

wants the other two men to pay for what they did to her.”

“She’s crazy,” he said shaking his head. “She’s fucking crazy. They’ll kill her.”

“Who were the other two men?” asked Kari.

“I don’t know,” he said shaking his head.

“I don’t believe you,” said Kat. “You knew. They made sure you knew so that you would be a liability. If you talked, they’d kill you. You definitely know.”

Bolchek was quiet, chewing on his bottom lip and looking out the windows. He didn’t care what they thought of him, he wasn’t going to die for the stupid nun. If she’d just done what she was told, none of this would have happened.

“Need some help?” asked Kane. Kari grinned at the man and nodded.

“Yep. Our friend here says he doesn’t know who the other two men were who attacked Jenna.”

Kane placed a firm grip on Bolchek’s arm. At first, the man tried to pull free but Kane was much stronger. He stared at his face, tilting his head back and forth.

“He’s lying. He knows who the other men are and he knows a lot more than that.”

“Shut up! You don’t know what’s in my head. What the fuck are you people?”

“We’re the people that finish the job you should have been doing all along. Who were the other two men?” Bolchek said nothing, just looking from one person to the other, a fine sheen of sweat forming on his face. “One is older. The other is middle-aged. I can see the tattoos.”

“N-no. No, you can’t!” he yelled. He pulled hard trying to break free then felt the iron grip on his shoulders.

“I wouldn’t move if I were you,” smirked Alec. “See, that’s my sweet sister-in-law there and I adore her and Kat both. You do anything that might harm them, I’m gonna be a really, really angry boy.”

“You’re all mad. You have no idea what these men are capable of.”

“Oh, I think we do,” said Kane. “We’ve been dealing with men like these for decades. And believe me, they never win.”

“You’re all crazy,” he said shaking his head. Kane held steady to his arm, glaring at the man, then shaking his head.

“The other man was Killer. It was Harry Clayton.”

“No! No, I never said anything to you!” he screeched.

“You make me sick,” said the small voice at the door. He turned to see his daughter and started to speak but she held up a hand, stopping him. “You let them take me, you let them beat me, rape me, and prepare to sell me. You allowed them to beat and rape that poor nun, and all those other girls. You knew about them. You knew who they were and you were too much of a coward to do anything about it.”

“Samantha, it’s not what you think,” he said shaking his head.

“Oh, I think it’s exactly what I think. I’m going to help these people to put them behind bars and when that’s done, I’m going to disappear from your life. Don’t call me, don’t speak to me, don’t try to find me. If you do, I’ll kill you.”

She left the office building, walking away from her father. Alec sat in front of the man and nudged his knees.

“How does that make you feel? Father of the year material for you?”

“What would you know?” he sniffed.

“I know that I chose what was right for my son, instead of what was easy. I didn’t ignore shit that could have hurt him and if it did, I ended it.”

“So, that’s your answer for everything?” he scoffed. “Kill, maim, or beat to a pulp anything in your way.”

“No. That’s not our answer for everything,” said Kane. “But it’s a damn good start. Defend what you love, what’s important to you. I suspect that you were doing that. The problem is that your daughter wasn’t your priority. Your money, your reputation, and your practice were priority.”

“I will remind you again,” said Alec. “If you attempt to leave this property or phone Clayton to warn him, I will rip you to pieces and carry them to him.”

“I’m aware. You forget that I’ve been exposed to Clayton and his men for months now and you’re not much different. Maybe better educated, maybe more formal training, but you’re still just like he is and I recognize it right away,” he said shaking his head. He turned and left the offices, Kari and Kat staring at Alec and Kane.

“He’s going to try and warn him,” said Kat. Alec nodded.

“Yep. I know. And we’ll be there to finish him.”

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“I can’t believe I actually got an appointment with you guys,” smiled the man.

He looked down at the motorcycle with lust and desire, like a man would look at a naked woman. He’d asked specifically for a 110 cubic inch bagger with header, custom paint, and custom seat and handlebars. They’d do the custom paint later, but the bike was ready to roll other than that.

Skull and Whiskey, nodded, smiling at him.

“We can be difficult to get a hold of but that has to do with the demand for the bikes,” said Whiskey. “We had fifty bikes yesterday morning and now we’re down to just these eleven. Guys were coming in with cash.”

“Brother, you should have auctioned them off. You would have gotten twice their value,” said the man.

“Naw, that’s not how we work,” said Skull. “We charge a fair price for the bikes and we get a fair price. Usually they’re all custom ordered but on occasion we’re able to offer them like this. It’s not very often, so consider yourself lucky.”

“When can you guys start on the custom tank?” he asked.

“We should be able to start on that next week. With any luck, we’ll have it done in three to four weeks,” said Skull. “I’ll handle it personally. Do you have an idea of what you want?”

“It will be pretty simple,” he smirked. “I feel certain you’ve done it before. I’d like

the Navy logo on one side and the Coast Guard on the other.” Skull and Whiskey stared at the man grinning.

“You served?” asked Skull.

“Yes, sir. Navy for fifteen years and then transferred to the Coast Guard. I just wanted to be closer to home for my folks as they were getting older.”

“How are they?” asked Whiskey with genuine interest.

“They both passed. Thank you for asking. But the last few years were wonderful. I was there for doctor’s appointments, memories, all the things we wish we could have,” he said smiling. “I wouldn’t trade it for anything. I was there at the end for both of them and if I had been deployed with the Navy, I would have missed that.”

“I’m glad you got that, brother. Listen, you should have told us you served up front. You get a fifteen percent discount on the bike as a veteran.”

“Really? I can’t believe that,” he said shaking his head. “The only reason I can even buy it is thanks to the money my folks left me. It wasn’t much but it was enough to make me okay for a few years.”

“Now that’s a treasure for sure,” said Whiskey. “I’m Whiskey, by the way. This is Skull. What’s your name?”

“Leo. Leo Tilbury.” He shook their hands again, nodding.

“Leo, what are you doing now?” asked Skull.

“I’m actually working at the marina on boat motors,” he smiled.

“You’re a mechanic?” asked Whiskey.

“I am. Certified boat, car, and motorcycle mechanic. I have a bachelor’s degree in business but I like working with my hands,” he smiled.

“We understand that. We all have college degrees but prefer working with our hands,” said Skull looking over his head. He could see a few men that looked familiar and knew exactly who they were. He nudged Whiskey who nodded and turned to speak with the other guys in the booth.

Leo casually strolled around the motorcycle, looking up in the direction the men had looked.

“Ah,” he said. “Yeah, I saw those guys outside. They were speaking to local security and police, handing out cash if I’m not mistaken.”

“That’s good information,” said Skull. “They’ve become a bit of a problem. They demanded our bikes and we refused to sell to them. Some things and people, we don’t want our name attached to.”

“I can understand. I heard from one of the guys at the marina that one of their boys was in jail, accused of raping a nun for shit’s sake.” Skull nodded again.

“Hey, man. We’ll hold the bike for you but you might want to step back. It’s not a surprise that they’ve shown up at the end of the day. The floor is getting empty and people are starting to leave. I’m guessing our friends are about to cause some trouble.”

“If you don’t mind, I’ll stick around,” smiled Leo. “I haven’t had a lot of fun these past few months. I think I could use an energy release.”

“If you’re sure,” nodded Skull. “We never turn away a brother looking for fun.” Leo stood off to the side, still admiring the motorcycles, when Killer walked toward the booth.

“Well, well, well,” smirked Whiskey. “We heard you were feeling under the weather. Looks like you lost a few pounds.”

“Fuck you,” he growled. “I know you’re behind what happened to us.” Whiskey looked at the small group with him and grinned.

“Looks like you’ve lost a few men as well as weight. What’s up with that?”

“Again, fuck you!”

“Your vocabulary is seriously limited,” smirked Skull. “Even a big oaf like me knows more than just ‘fuck you’. Maybe try something new, something fresh.”

They could see the man rolling things through his mind, like he was trying to find new words or phrases, but it wasn’t working for him.

“You owe me some motorcycles,” he growled.

“How do you figure?” asked Blade, standing beside Razor, Bryce, Blade, Noa, and Noah. He stared at the big line-up of men and for just a moment wondered if he’d made a mistake but his ego wouldn’t allow him to think that way.

“You destroyed my bikes. You owe me the motorcycles. All that you have here.”

“That’s not the way this works,” said Whiskey. “See, you have to prove that we destroyed your bikes, file a suit in court, oh wait. You wouldn’t do that because you don’t like law enforcement unless you can pay them to do your dirty work. Like you

paid the security team to ignore the fact that you're on the floor after the show has officially closed."

"I will kill you," he said with spittle flying from his lips. He was so angry, foam formed in the corners of his mouth.

"You will try," said Skull. "You won't succeed."

"H-hey, boss," said one of his men.

"In a minute!"

"B-boss," said the man again. Killer turned to find his men all being held at gunpoint. Even Leo had a man in a chokehold with crowbar crushing his windpipe.

Killer shook his head, hearing the words of the men who'd told him, if you see a dozen, count on there being a hundred in hiding. They were at least right about that.

"Did you kill my son?" he asked.

"Never met your son," said Skull. "Poor kid having a father like you must have been disappointing."

"You think you've won but you haven't. I will get the bikes. I will get the girls back. And I damn sure will make certain that nun doesn't fucking testify."

"Oh, see that's where you're wrong," said Blade. "You won't ever see that woman again. But you'll damn sure know that she put your ass in prison. Do you know what they do to men like you in prison? Harry."

He wanted to scream. He wanted to lash out. He wanted to kill. But they had bested

them, at least for now. He nodded at them, then backed up.

“You’ve won this round. But you won’t win again.” He walked toward the escalators leading to the main floor of the convention center. One-by-one, the men released his men and they practically ran toward their boss.

All eyes turned to Leo who had a big smile on his face.

“That’s was fucking awesome!”

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“Dude was great,” said Whiskey. “He offered to stay with the boys and guard the remaining bikes. We had footage of Killer paying off security and a few local officers. They’ve all been fired.”

“And this guy, Leo. You think we should put him through our interviews?” asked Luke standing with the senior leaders.

“I think he’s a shoo-in, Luke. He’s young, single, two different branches of service for all the right reasons. Solid dude and damn sure showed his ingenuity in this situation,” said Skull.

“Alright. Have him contact me tomorrow and if he’s interested, I’ll start the interview process. You guys need any help at the convention center?”

“We got it, Luke. But you’ll be the first to know if we don’t,” smirked Whiskey.

Luke laughed, then walked toward his father, hugging him, giving him a kiss on the cheek like he always did. Years ago he’d made the decision to always leave the room with a hug and kiss for his parents, but especially for his father. You never knew when he, or you, might not come home.

“How in the hell does this idiot think he’s going to take us on with only a few men?” asked Ian.

“Remember that he has men in other states,” said Ghost. “We need to see where those men are and if they’re headed this way.”

“On it!” yelled Sly from the comms room. They all grinned, nodding.

“That could present a problem for all of us if that happens,” said Ian. “Depending on how many men they have, they could start chaos in the city, local businesses, anyone and anything just to find us.”

“I guess that means we need to find them first,” said Ghost. He turned to Kane.

“Kane? Can you send up Hawke and see if he can find them, maybe listen in on what they’re doing? I mean, can he listen in?” Ghost shook his head. “Sorry, we’re still trying to learn how all this works for you guys.”

“So are we,” laughed Kane. “We’ve been like this nearly our entire lives and we learn something new every day. For instance, Hawke learned a few years ago that small birds don’t work as well as large bird species like eagles, hawks, vultures, that sort of thing.”

“Vultures?” frowned Gaspar.

“Hey, he doesn’t taste what they eat,” laughed Kane. “He only sees what they see.”

“That’s just crazy,” said Nine. “I’m no scientist but how that dust affected you guys really has me curious. Imagine being able to enhance skills.” They all turned to look at him with a shocked expression.

“I’m not suggesting that,” he frowned. “I’m just saying I understand the appeal of those that tried to do this.”

“They didn’t just try, Nine. They succeeded. What we don’t know is the long-term effects on all of us. We were particularly worried about David and Griffin and the toll on their muscles, joints, and internal organs but it seems they’re doing well. Or

Griffin was.

“Regan is the one that has the most side-effects. When he absorbs large amounts of data, his body just seems to give out.”

“Well, hopefully we won’t need for him to do that again,” said Nine. “I don’t want anyone doing anything that would strain them. Maybe have your team focus on just being themselves right now.” Kane laughed, shaking his head.

“Is that funny?” asked Gaspar.

“Wellllll, let’s just say your mama is very convincing.” Kane nodded toward the windows and Gaspar saw Irene walking with Ivy – Regan’s Ivy – Nash, Hawke, and Nat.

“What the hell is she doing now?” Gaspar stood and walked toward his mother outside, the others following to watch the ensuing spectacle. “Mama? Mama, what are you doing?”

“Oh, hello son,” she smiled. “Well, I’ve just learned that Ivy is able to make anything grow, if it once grew in the earth here. That means we could regrow some of our extinct species of plants.”

“Mama, is that a good idea? I mean, maybe it went extinct for a reason,” said Gaspar, concerned for all of them.

“He might be right, Mama Irene,” said Nine. “I mean what if it’s some sort of pre-historic Venus flytrap that could eat a human.”

“Sometimes you boys don’t make any sense at all,” she said with a disgusted look. Ivy just laughed, shaking her head.

“Don’t worry, Gaspar, Nine. It’s odd how my gift works. I can sense plants that we need. Shade trees, fruit trees, extinct flowers for the bees to become more active, herbs, that sort of thing. It’s like my body feels when something could be dangerous.”

“Like?” frowned Ian.

“Well, Silphium was used as an aphrodisiac in ancient Rome. It was also used as a spice but had some very odd side effects. I’m not sure we want that everywhere today. Here in Louisiana, there are water invasive plants that we want to keep away because they clog drains, cause problems in the bayous and could destroy the delicate ecosystem balance.”

“How do you have all that in your head?” asked Ghost.

“I don’t know,” smiled the woman. “I just touch the earth, feel the plant, know its name and origins. I wish I could explain it. All I’m doing with Mama Irene is helping the things that were natural to Belle Fleur to grow again. Some of these plants and trees could offer natural protection and borders for the property. It might even go so far as to offer camouflage.

“A lot of the cypress trees and live oaks have suffered due to hurricanes and floods. If we could just bring back half of what was lost here, the property would change dramatically.”

Gaspar nodded and looked around the gardens that backed up to the offices. They’d once been moderate, pruned to perfection and now looked almost overgrown.

“What’s new here?” he asked.

“Pear, peach, apple, and plum trees. Rows and rows of sweet corn and other vegetables. If we had a place for livestock, we’d be nearly completely sustainable.”

“Is that true, Irene?” asked Nine.

“Well, yes but you all know how I feel about killing the animals,” she frowned.

“Mama, we all eat chicken, beef, seafood, all of it. Where do you think we get it?”

“The market, like everyone else,” she said with a sharp tone. “I won’t grow animals for us to eat. That ain’t what we’re gonna do here.” The men laughed and Ivy smiled at the older woman.

“Okay, Mama. But what are the rest of them doing with you? What are you making them do?”

“She’s not making us do anything,” laughed Nat. “I’ve been carefully burning parts of the property to clear for gardens and Nash makes sure that the fire is extinguished, while Hawke ensures nothing jumps.”

“It sounds, um, efficient,” smirked Ian.

“I promise, it’s all good,” smiled Ivy. She looked down at Ian’s feet and smiled. “In fact, let me show you.”

She knelt beside Ian, holding his ankle with one hand and placing her other on the ground. Ian felt the earth moving and stared down at his foot. After a few moments of shaking his leg lifted, beneath it, a small tree already growing.

“What the hell?” he gasped.

“I think we’ll call this one Ian’s apple tree,” smiled Ivy. Irene laughed, nodding them.

“I think that’s a great idea. In fact we might be able to come with a whole new

species of trees and plants that are just ours. If they work out, we'll introduce them to the world. Let's go children. We got lots to do!"

They all laughed, following the elderly commander as if she were their personal general. Gaspar just shook his head.

"What do you think?" asked Nine.

"I think I can't argue about plants, trees, and food. It kind of pisses me off."

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“We found them,” said Sly walking toward the seniors. “Right now, they’re at a campground outside of Abilene, Texas. About a hundred guys all on bikes with tents.”

“A hundred men,” nodded Nine. “We could just take them out.”

“We could,” said Gaspar. “That could bring a lot of eyes our way. They’re doing what they were ordered. Besides, wouldn’t it be more fun to fuck with them?”

“I’m listening.”

“This doesn’t feel smart,” said one of the men whispering to another. “I know he loved that kid, but he was a fucking loose cannon and shouldn’t have touched a damn nun.”

“I agree but what do we do? The others have all left. This is the life I’ve come to know. If I walk away from this club I become a nomad or I join another club that’s going to make me start all over again. I’m too old for this shit.”

“Yeah, but you heard the rumors. These guys shouldn’t be fucked around with. I’m just not keen on this idea.”

“What do we do?” asked a third man.

“I don’t know. That’s the problem. I don’t know what we do.”

The massive bonfire was the center of their camping area. It was against campground

regulations, considering the dry brush in the area, but they didn't pay much attention to rules and the campground was smart enough to not test them.

As usual, they drank too much, ate too much, and wanted women. Unfortunately, they never traveled with their women. That is, if they had a steady woman.

There were always clubhouse bitches that were there to cook, clean, and satisfy their urges. But a few of the men had old ladies. Some married. Some not.

Hearing a disturbance a few rows over, the men stood to see what was going on. They could hear yelling and screaming and wanted to see what was happening. If it was a fight, they could damn sure expel some energy and if there was a woman involved, all the better. They'd have a little fun.

With their backs turned, the team moved in.

With Flip by her side, Nat raised her hands, sparks and flames rising from her fingertips. Focusing on the tents, she set each on fire, then focused on the bikes.

Flip concentrated on the heavy machines and with a flick of his wrist, turned each of them over, while Nat set the tanks on fire, watching hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of motorcycles go up in flames.

Above them, Hawke circled to keep an eye on the winds and fire, while Nash stood near the small pond, ready to douse the flames should they get out of control.

"What's that smell?" said one of the bikers, looking around. As he turned from the distraction of the young couple fighting, he saw the impossible. "Fire!"

A hundred men ran back toward their camping spot, horrified at the speed at which the flames had destroyed their things.

It was too late. The tents were already dust, while the bikes were melting from the incredible heat.

“It’s not possible! This isn’t possible. Do you know how hot those flames had to be? We just turned for a minute!”

“I know, I know,” said another man. “What the fuck do we do now? We got no way of moving on or going back.”

Valentina slowly walked toward the men who all stopped to stare at the stunningly beautiful woman. Her long hair blew back from her face, her violet eyes nearly glowing in the firelight. She smiled at them.

“Bitch, any other day and I would eat you alive,” smirked the man. “Not today.”

“Your hate is too much,” she whispered. Mesmerized by the sound of her voice, the others turned to stare at her, tilting their heads as if hypnotized. “There is no place for hate here. Only love.”

She continued to repeat the words as Ian, Ghost, Nine, and Gaspar watched from the SUV. They were ready to jump to her rescue if needed, but it seemed their new friends were more than capable of handling things.

Valentina’s skills were unusual in that she had to be close enough to change someone’s desire for hate or love. She was never allowed to get close enough to the agency people but here, she was near enough, and the hate was heavy enough, that she had no problem tuning into it.

“Love wins,” whispered one of the men. The others nodded at him.

“Love wins.”

“I’ll be damned,” muttered Ian. “We’ve destroyed their tents, their bikes, and their desire for hate. This is fucking scary.”

“It’s the most incredible thing I’ve ever witnessed,” said Gaspar. “I thought we’d seen it all back home. These guys are something else.”

“Fire department is about two miles out,” said Hawke.

“Thanks, brother. Let the bird go, or whatever it is you do. We’ve got this handled.” They could hear Hawke’s laughter in their heads, then watched as he appeared walking across the field.

“I don’t have to let him go. He’s free already. I just ask him for a little help and he gives it to me.”

“Whatever,” smirked Ian. “Pretty cool fucking gift if you ask me.”

“It gets easier as I get older,” he smiled. “We good here?”

“Yep. All good. Time to leave children. Mama will want us home for dinner,” said Gaspar.

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Matthew walked the quiet streets of the small town, wiping his brow every few steps. When he came upon the church, he walked inside, touching his fingers to the holy water and crossing himself as he entered.

Taking a seat in one of the middle pews, he listened as the choir practiced, singing in beautiful harmony one of his favorite songs. He let the music float over him, covering him in feelings of peace and blissfulness.

“That’s enough everyone. We’ll practice again tomorrow,” said the woman. She turned to see the gentlemen fanning himself with his hat and frowned.

“Get me a bottle of water,” she said to one of the other women. The woman scurried away, bringing the bottle back to her.

“You look hot and tired,” she smiled handing him the bottle. She was at least as old as Matthew’s grandsons, or so he thought.

“That’s kind of you,” he said. “I saw the church and thought it was beautiful.”

“Thank you,” she smiled. “Our convent is attached to the church. Most of those women you were listening to are young novices. They’ll be nuns soon enough.”

“I see. And you’re the Mother Superior?” he asked.

“Oh, no. Not me. I’m Sister Frances. I’ve just been here forever,” she smiled, nodding. “It was my true calling. I can’t show you the inner sanctum of the convent, but would you like a tour of our gardens and the church? It’s very old.”

“I’d love that,” nodded Matthew.

“You seem familiar to me,” she said. “Do I know you?”

“No, no, not me,” he smiled. “I live much further south. I’m just passing through here.”

“I see,” she nodded, uncertain of her strange feelings. “Well, as you can see we’ve got flower gardens, but also vegetable gardens that we use to feed our staff and our community should they need it. We’ve been very fortunate here.”

“You know, I have six daughters of my own. None wanted to follow a path into the church, which was fine with me, but I wonder what makes a young woman choose this path,” he said.

“Well, for many it’s a true calling from God. They only want to serve him. For others, it’s a family thing. Perhaps generations have sent their first or second born to become priests or nuns. Still others choose because of poverty or, or other reasons.”

“Like violence,” he said staring at the woman. She stared back at him, swallowing hard.

“I s-suppose that could be true. I don’t know.”

Matthew nodded at her and took a seat on the bench beneath the crepe myrtle tree. She sat at the other end of the bench, folding her hands in her lap uncomfortably.

“You know, I’m a man that owes everything in my life to God. I believe that, truly. Yes, I’ve had great luck, a beautiful, intelligent wife, fifteen wonderful children, but it was all through Him that it was possible.”

“That’s very enlightened,” she smiled.

“I’ve been blessed with an ability to know when people are telling me the truth or not.” The woman fidgeted, turning to stare at the old man. What was his game?

“You’re not telling me the truth.”

“I beg your pardon,” she said quietly. “Are you calling me a liar?”

“Yes, ma’am, I guess I am. You know very well why women choose to be here. Why you would come to a place like this? For instance, you might have been a young girl with her whole world ahead of her. School, marriage, anything your heart desired.

“Then one night coming home from the movie theater with friends, you stop to have a milkshake at the old drive-in that used to be at the end of the road.”

She startled, turning with a gasp and Matthew touched her arm, willing her to stay.

“There were men on motorcycles. Big men that looked scary, dangerous, but you didn’t want to leave. You didn’t flirt but you didn’t discourage the men from speaking with you. Your friends got scared and left you. They left you with more than a dozen men.

“The drive-in got scared and closed their doors, leaving you alone with all those men. It was horrible for you. I know that it was. Those men abused you, abused your body and left you in shame, naked on the side of the road.

“When the sheriff found you, he took you home to your parents’ horror. They were going to send you away for a while. Somewhere that no one would know you. Until after the baby was born.”

She stared at him, swallowing as tears filled her eyes.

“Turns out, you were sent to another convent. You were forced to have that baby, give him away, and then join the convent. This wasn’t your calling. It wasn’t what you wanted and for years now you’ve counseled young pregnant women to give up their babies, no matter what their situation, and then forced them to become nuns. When Sister Agatha was attacked, it was different. She was too old to become pregnant but you couldn’t allow her to stay here.”

“H-how do you know all of this? Who are you?” she asked staring at his angelic face.

“Oh, I know a great many things,” he said smiling. “Like that you are the mother to Weaver Crup. Harry Clayton raped you and impregnated you. You actually ran away once upon a time and asked him to marry you. He laughed at you. I know that must have hurt. He’d taken the child from his adoptive parents and was raising him in his motorcycle club.

“But when you found out it was your own son and his father that raped and beat Sister Agatha, you wanted to hide that.”

“I never meant to harm her,” she said shaking her head at her folded hands. “I just wanted her to drop the charges. He’s my son.”

“He was your son,” said Matthew. “He died in prison, just a few days ago.” She gasped, shaking her head again.

“No, please no,” she said quietly.

“You were willing to put that young woman through hell, the same hell you suffered, just to keep your son and his father, both of whom wanted nothing do with you, nor cared for you, to allow them to walk free. You knew they were guilty. You had footage of their guilt because you were there in the grocery store as well.

“You saw them come into town and you knew who they were. You followed them into the store, not realizing that Sister Agatha was there. You watched them. You watched what they did to her and you said nothing.”

“There is nothing to be done! I couldn’t have stopped them,” she cried.

“You could have helped Sister Agatha. You could have supported her in her fight instead of making her lose her faith. You chose two men who cared nothing for you or your life, or for the life of any woman for that matter. You went against every vow you took. Why?”

She just softly cried beside him, Matthew still holding her arm to ensure she didn’t run.

“Why?” he asked more firmly.

“Because I love them! I always hoped he would return for me,” she sniffed. “I know it sounds crazy. He raped me, beat me, but he made me feel more alive than anyone ever. I’ve waited for him to return for me. Except he didn’t. He came that day only to create trouble. All the times he came back to scare Sister Agatha or that attorney of hers, he never once came to find me. I even waved at him once. I waved at him!”

Matthew nodded, placing his hat back on his head. He stepped from beneath the shade of the tree and looked at the woman.

“I believe you have some decisions to make. God will be watching to see what you do. So will I.”

“Wh-who are you?” she pleaded. “Please tell me who you are.”

Matthew bent at the waist, gripping the woman’s neck and kissed her forehead. He

whispered something to her and then walked away.

It was nearly three hours later that the sisters found her seated in the gardens. Worried about her mental state and her inability to speak, they called an ambulance and began to pray.

She was already praying for her soul.

Jenna was in her favorite spot, sitting in the garden and soaking in the smells and sounds of nature around her. It was the most peaceful place on earth and if she could just disappear here, she would die happy.

“How are you feeling?” asked Matthew.

“Oh, hello Matthew. I’m feeling well, thank you.”

“Are you?” he asked. She looked up at him and the smile faded from her face. “I mean no disrespect, Jenna but you’re not alright. You won’t be alright until you tell the whole story.”

“I-I don’t know the whole story.” Matthew tilted his head.

“You know, I went to visit the convent today. I had a wonderful talk with Sister Frances.” She tried to stand but something was holding her in place. She couldn’t move. “I wondered why you wouldn’t tell anyone that she was there, in the grocery store watching what was done to you, yet she said and did nothing.”

“Sh-she told me her story. She told me who those men were,” said Jenna. “She begged me not to go to trial. At first, I agreed. I said I wouldn’t do that to them, but that she needed to tell the others about it. She said she would but she lied. She didn’t tell anyone and I was left alone, ostracized by my community.”

“That’s why you left the convent?”

“Partly,” she nodded. “I never belonged there, Matthew. I have faith. I am a good Catholic. I believe in God but that is not the life for me.”

“You knew what happened to her was the same as what happened to you,” he said calmly.

“Yes. I knew. Which was why I couldn’t fault her decision to try and save her son. I was trying to do what God might have wanted me to do but it all felt wrong and I was confused.”

“You were confused because no one would ever ask you to harbor a rapist, attacker, or killer. No one. She was manipulating you at a time when you needed her guidance.”

“Did you tell the others?” she asked.

“No. It’s your legal team and you need to do that. I can’t force you.”

“Nash will hate me,” she whispered. Matthew actually chuckled at that, shaking his head.

“Honey, there is nothing that you could say or do that would make that man hate you. He cares for you.” She nodded.

“We’ve been friends for a long time.”

“Yes,” he smiled. “Friends.” Matthew stood and began to walk out of the gardens when she called him back.

“Matthew? How did you know?”

He just gave a golden smile and she felt a chill go up her spine. There was true magic in this place. The kind that Jenna would never understand.

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“How?” he screamed into the phone. “How in the fuck did all of your tents, all of your bikes suddenly, mysteriously catch on fire?”

“I don’t know boss, but we’re all safe. That’s all that matters.”

“That’s all that matters? What the fuck is wrong with you? Are you fucking high? I need support here to get to these men. To get our fucking motorcycles and those bitches back! I need that fucking nun.”

“You should really let it all go, boss. Hate is overtaking your life.”

“What the hell,” he mumbled, running his hands through his hair.

“Listen, most of the boys have either hitched a ride home to get their things or bought train or bus tickets to other places. The clubhouse is no more. Someone said it just blew away. No storms, nothing, just blew away.”

“This can’t be happening. It’s makes no sense at all. They’re here. They’re all here. It’s drugs, they’re using drugs,” he mumbled.

“Boss, I think you need a break. I wish you luck,” said the man.

The line went dead and Killer just stared at the phone, unsure of what to do. He was stuck in a city that didn’t want him, with only six men remaining, one who would leave at any moment, and no back up. But he couldn’t allow this to end here. He needed those damn bikes.”

“Boss, why can’t we just buy bikes from another vendor? There are lots of good bike companies out there and they’re less expensive,” said the man before him.

“Because I fucking promised someone it would be those damn bikes!”

His oldest member, someone who had started in the club with his father glared at him, shaking his head.

“You damn fool. You did it, didn’t you? You made a deal with that damn Mexican.”

“He’s Peruvian, but yeah, what the fuck about it Hose? What the fuck do you want to say about it?”

“You’re a damn fool. I already said it. You promised us you would walk away from that man. He’ll kill all of us. All of us that are left,” said Hose. “Your old man refused to do business with him.”

“He refused to sell the bitches to him,” grinned Killer. “I don’t have the same qualms about that. Bitches are bitches. You use ‘em the way you want to and that’s it. Ferdinand wants to use them for special projects.”

“You’ve lost your damn mind,” said Hose standing as best he could. He was in his eighties and still riding a motorcycle but he knew his time was close. “I won’t let you do this, Killer. I’ll follow you, I’ll stay because this club is my entire life but I won’t let you send them girls to that maniac.”

“Then you don’t stay,” said Killer looking at the man. The others stared at him, wondering what would possess him to kick out their oldest living member. It was like sacrilege.

“Maybe you should tell the boys then,” said Hose. The smile left Killer’s face and he

shook his head in a threatening way at the old man. “No. Tell ‘em!”

“Tell us what?” asked one of the men.

“He wants the bikes for that scumbag, Ferdinand. His own father refused to do business with him. He’s gonna send them girls to him. We all love women, don’t mind usin’ ‘em for ourselves, but this sick fucker is gonna breed with them and then use their kids. When they can’t breed no more, what he does to their bodies is disgusting.”

“I heard he hangs the women at his gates to warn others,” said a man.

“That’s right,” nodded Hose. “That and other things. If he don’t get those bikes and those women, he’s coming for all of us.”

“That true, Killer?” asked a man.

Killer glared at the old man, silently vowing to take his life himself. The problem was he needed them all to stay. But the bigger problem was he couldn’t lie about this. Ferdinand was showing up tonight.

“Yeah. Yeah, that’s true or at least that’s the rumor. I’ve never seen it myself. He’s offered us millions to do this,” he said.

“Fuck me,” mumbled another man. “No thanks. I’m done.” He grabbed his bag and left through the new Semu custom door.

“I’m gone too, Killer. You’ve gone too far,” said another man.

Within minutes, they were all gone. He was left sitting by himself inside a crumbling clubhouse for a biker club with no bikes. They had no money. No drugs. No women

and he damn sure couldn't get all of that by himself.

Ferdinand would be there in only a few days. If he didn't have something for him, he was a dead man. He'd been in worse situations. He couldn't remember any at the moment but he definitely had been in them.

He'd find someone to help him and when he did, he'd make sure that the whole damn world knew he was back with vengeance.

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Kari and Kat stared at the woman seated across from them, shocked by her admission and addition to the case.

“So, there was a witness who saw it all but doesn’t want to come forward?” asked Kari.

“Yes. She says she doesn’t have to because she has a relationship with the man and his son that did this to me. It’s her son as well.”

“Who is this woman?” asked Kat.

“She is a nun at the convent.” You could have knocked them both over with a feather. Staring at Jenna, Kari leaned back and shook her head.

“Jenna, why wouldn’t you have told us this? This is important. She’s withheld evidence and tried to manipulate the trial by manipulating you.”

“I know. I mean, I thought I knew but I thought I was doing what was right. She was raped as well, by the head of the biker gang. The man that beat me, raped me, the one that died in prison was her son.”

“Jesus,” muttered Kat. “Are you alright, Jenna?”

“I’m fine. I mean, I don’t know. I’m angry at her. I’m angry that she asked this of me, I’m angry that she didn’t help me. I guess I’m just angry.”

“Rightfully so, honey. That woman should have helped you. The fact that she didn’t

says an awful lot about her. Plus, I think she may be struggling with some psychiatric issues if she honestly believes that she should, or could, have a relationship with this man.”

“I thought so, too but I’m not an expert in these things.”

“You don’t have to be an expert to know when something is wrong, honey. We no longer have to worry about Weaver, but we obviously have to worry about his father, and potentially his biological mother. That worries me,” said Kari.

“Maybe I should leave,” she whispered.

“No. No, you cannot leave,” said Kat. “Listen to us, Jenna. If you attempt to leave here he will find you and it will end worse than before. Do not expose yourself to this man.”

They sat quietly in the late afternoon breezes of the grove. Others walked around them, but didn’t listen to their conversation. Then they all turned at the very loud disruption.

“Stay away from me!” said Samantha.

“Sam, Samantha, honey, you have to listen to me. He’ll kill us both if we don’t help him,” said her father.

“You’re sick! You make me sick!” she yelled. “Go. You go and see what happens to you. He doesn’t give a damn about you and neither do I. You would sell your own daughter. Again! To a maniac rapist psychopath. You know what? You guys make a great team. Go. But leave me the hell alone.”

Samantha walked swiftly past the grove and toward the offices. When Sam tried to

follow his daughter, four men stopped him in his tracks.

“I believe the lady said to leave her alone,” said Gabe.

“She’s my daughter!”

“You damn sure never treated her like one,” said Antoine. “I don’t think you deserve a girl like that. You’re so caught up in your own greed you’re willing to sell her again to that maniac.”

“None of you understand what this is going to turn into. You don’t get it.”

“Then enlighten us,” said Angel. “Tell us what we’re not seeing. After all, you called Clayton to generously offer your help.”

He jerked his head upward, staring at the faces around him.

“How? How would you know that? Phone tapping is illegal!”

“That’s what you’re hanging your defense on?” smirked Miller. “I doubt that will hold much water in a court of law. You called him, begging for help to get out of wherever you are.”

He just stared at them, unsure of what they’d heard or not heard.

“You guys are really screwed,” said Angel. “Offering women, motorcycles, and cash to Ferdinand. He’s not a guy you should fuck around with.”

“And yet, they did,” smirked Gabe.

“Do you know how long I’ve been an attorney in this God-forsaken state? Thirty

years. Thirty damn years and I can barely keep up with my mortgage and credit card bills.”

“You should learn to live within your means,” said Angel.

“Very funny. Men like Clayton and Ferdinand break every law in the books and never get caught, never go to jail, and accumulate more wealth than you could possibly imagine. I love my daughter, but she’s an ungrateful little bitch most days. Nothing I do is enough, or good enough. When Clayton offered me two-hundred thousand for her, I jumped at the shot of finally having some money and some peace.”

Angel stared at him with hatred, while the other men opened and closed their fists. Bolchek turned to see his daughter standing there, no tears, no words, just staring.

“Jesus. You have to admit, Samantha, you’re a fucking demanding young woman. It’s never enough for you. Private schools, designer handbags, your own damn credit card.”

“You gave me that. I didn’t ask for it,” she said calmly. He just shook his head. Samantha looked at the men standing around her father. “I don’t ever want to see him again. I don’t want to know what happens to him. The only place I might see you is in the courtroom because I will testify against you.”

She walked away and he just stared at the back of his daughter. It wouldn’t matter, when he left here he was going to see Killer and everything would be back on track.

“I’m leaving,” he said trying to shove through the wall of testosterone.

“Oh, you’re leaving alright. But we get to decide how.”

It was nearly midnight when Sam Bolchek rolled over and found himself staring at a pile of bison shit. He moved in the other direction and rolled into the pile of elephant shit.

His head was pounding, splitting in two as he looked around the space.

“No. No, where am I,” he frowned.

“What the hell are you doing here?” asked Killer. “I should fucking gut you right here.”

“No! No, I can help. They have Samantha and the others. They even have the nun.”

“Who?”

“Those men. The ones that attacked you.”

“Where are they?” Sam looked up and down the road, back and forth, pointing, then pulling back and pointing again. “Where the fuck are they?”

“I-I don’t know. I mean, I know but I didn’t get to see where they took us and where I came from. I don’t know. It was like a small subdivision with lots of houses.”

“A subdivision? You’ve lost your fucking mind, Sam and I don’t need that right now.” He lifted his weapon, pointing the gun at his head.

“No! I can help.”

“No you can’t. Only one person can help me.”

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“Hey, Jenna?” called Sly walking into the cafeteria. “You’ve had a couple of voicemails on your cell phone from a Sister Frances. She says she needs to speak with you.”

“I don’t really want to speak with her,” she said shaking her head.

“Then you don’t have to,” said Nash.

“Just knowing what she did, what she was trying to do to me makes me feel terrible. Although,” she hesitated, “she could be calling to apologize.”

“I’d like to believe that’s the truth, honey, but I’m not sure that’s why she’s calling. It could be but she didn’t really seem remorseful for what she’d done,” said Matthew.

“Can I think about calling her back?” asked Jenna.

“Of course you can,” said Nash. “When you want to return her call, we can all be there to hear what she has to say. Just to be certain she’s not trying to do anything strange.”

“Strange?”

“Well, she could be trying to locate you,” said Nine. “If she knew where you were staying, she could attempt to come here.”

“I don’t want to see her. I’m going to pray on this for a while,” she said standing from the table where the group was seated. They all nodded at her as she moved toward

Bree and Ashley, obviously needing to speak with them.

“Matthew, I know you’re a praying man,” said Nash, “but that woman means nothing good by calling her. I can feel it in my bones.”

“I’m afraid I would agree with you. She’s truly hoping for that man to turn out to be a good person and to come back for her. Poor woman is delusional and eventually might harm herself or others,” said Matthew.

“Should we let the convent know?” asked Nine.

“I feel as if they might already know. From what I heard, she’s not allowed to leave the convent grounds any longer.”

Alec, Taylor, Angel, and Gabe walked in, nodding at the table. They took their seats, grabbing pieces of cornbread from the basket on the table.

“They found Bolchek’s body in a ditch,” said Gabe. “He was shot twice in the head. My guess is that Killer didn’t like what he had to say to him when he asked where we were located.”

“He’s got no one and that’s going to make him desperate and dangerous,” said Gaspar. “Where is he now?”

“That, we don’t know,” said Alec. “The building was vacant, nothing left inside except some elephant and bison shit. Other than that, nothing. It looks like all of the men have left. No one that was Abilene continued this way. They all went their separate ways. Whatever Valentina did to them, worked.”

“She’s good at what she does,” smiled Nash.

“And what is it exactly that she does?” asked Tailor.

“She can feel peoples hate and love and manipulate it. She has the ability to turn hate into love and love to hate. It’s been very handy on occasion forcing in-fighting with groups that were coming for us. Her only challenge is that she has to be much closer than most of the rest of us.”

“Let’s keep a tight hold on that,” said Gaspar. “I don’t want her risking her neck for anyone. We’ve dealt with a lot of hate in our time. It’s not going away any time soon.”

“I know he’ll come for me,” she whispered to herself. “I’ve paid my penance for my sins and God will look after me. He’ll be here. He loves me, I know he loves me.”

“Sister Frances? Are you alright?” asked the Novice.

“Yes. Yes, I’m fine child. Just talking to myself,” she laughed. The young woman smiled, nodding at her and continued to walk toward her own rooms. The gates were locked, the church closed for the night but for some reason she wasn’t able to sleep.

“Psst! Hey, over here,” said the voice.

Frances stared off into the darkness trying to see if there was anyone there or if she were imagining things.

“Sweetheart, it’s me. I know you remember me,” he smiled from the fence.

Frances stood and started to walk toward him, not believing her eyes. The last time he was here was to ensure that she helped him to prevent Jenna from speaking to the police. He was angry when she couldn’t do it.

“Harry? Harry is that you?” she cried. He cringed at the use of his Christian name but nodded at her.

“Yeah, yeah, it’s me baby,” he cooed.

“I knew you would come for me,” she said. The sounds of the young novices walking along the covered path toward their rooms made her turn and crouch down so as to not be seen.

“Who are they?” he asked.

“They’re all young women about to become nuns.”

“Is that right?” he smiled. “How many do you have here?”

“Twenty-three right now. Sometimes we have more. Why do you ask that? Aren’t you here for me?” she asked with big sad eyes.

“Of course I am, sweetheart,” he said reaching through the bars, stroking her face. “Frances, our son was murdered.”

“I know,” she said nodding her head.

“How did you find out?” he frowned.

“A man, a very strange man came to tell me. He seemed to know everything even that I was his mother.”

“What did you tell him?” he growled gripping her wrist.

“I didn’t tell him anything! I swear,” she cried out. “He knew it all. He knew

everything about us, me and you and our son.”

Killer stared at the woman, shaking his head. She was nothing really to look at. Plain, slightly plump, obviously no make-up and nothing done to her hair. He’d enjoyed her body but he never intended it to go any further than that.

“Where is she, Frances? Where did Sister Agatha go?” he asked.

“She doesn’t go by that any longer. She left the convent and the order like you wanted. She’s with some people somewhere else, but I don’t know where. I’ve tried calling her but she doesn’t return my calls.”

“I get it. I’ve been trying to find her and not having much luck.” Three more novices walked toward their rooms and Killer felt his dick stir. These women were perfect for what he needed to present to Ferdinand. More than what he’d promised, all virgins. Truly fresh meat.

“Where’s the Mother Superior?” he asked.

“She isn’t here. She had to visit another convent further north. She’ll be back in a few days.”

He looked behind her once again, then turned to ensure that no one was watching him. Taking her hand, he held it to his chest, then kissed the back of her fingers.

“I’ve missed you so much, Frances. We should have married,” he smiled.

“We should have,” she gasped nodding at him with tears in her eyes.

“I think we should run away. We should make a family of our own somewhere else.”

“I-I’m not sure I can have children any longer,” she said in a sad, child-like voice.

“We can always find children, baby. Do you trust me?”

She stared at him, for the first time unsure of how she should respond to that. Did she trust him? She thought she did but he’d always let her down.

“Frances?”

“Y-yes. I trust you.”

“Good girl. Because I’ve got a plan that’s going to make both of us very, very happy and quite possibly very rich.”

“Will I have to hurt anyone?” she asked.

“Baby, I would never ask you to hurt anyone. That’s what I’m for. Are you with me, Frances?”

“Yes. I’m with you.”

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The following morning, Code and Sly were running around like crazy, gathering documents to give to the team. Ace stood at the end of the conference table frowning at them.

“What the fuck now?” muttered Ian.

“We have a huge problem. Two in fact. Late yesterday afternoon Rijo Ferdinand arrived in the port of New Orleans to inspect a few of his cargo ships. Or at least that’s what he told everyone. He’s staying at the Ritz downtown.”

“Alright, get a few guys to watch him,” said Gaspar.

“Already done. Antoine, Vince and Otto are there now. He’s got seven men with him. That doesn’t sound like a ship inspection to me.”

“No. It damn sure doesn’t,” said Nine. “You said you had two things. What’s the other one?”

“A little after midnight last night the fire alarms went off at the convent. The dormitory was evacuated but when the fire department got there, everyone was gone.”

“What? What the hell are you talking about?” asked Ghost.

“The novices, Sister Frances, they’re all gone. The Mother Superior was visiting another convent, so she wasn’t there. There’s a scrap yard behind the church and ironically they have the best cameras of every business around them.

“You can see the footage, everyone walking calmly out of the buildings in their nightgowns, most with shawls or sweaters around their shoulders. Sister Frances is guiding them toward the gate. Then we see this,” he said pointing to the footage. “A large moving truck pulls up, the doors open and there’s our friend Killer with a rifle pointed at the women. He orders them inside the back of the truck, closes it, locks it and puts Frances up front with him.”

“Fuck me. He’s going to sell those women to Ferdinand,” said Ian.

“It looks that way.”

“No,” said Jenna standing in the doorway.

“Does no one close a fucking door around here,” frowned Gaspar. She only stared at him and he had to admit he was embarrassed by his comment.

“I won’t let those poor young women become his victims. Let me call her. Let me find out what she wants, what he wants.”

“Honey, we know what they want. They want you dead so that you don’t testify against him and the rest of the club,” said Ghost.

“Then, then I’ll promise I won’t do that. I won’t testify but I won’t let those young women die because of me.” Code poked his head around the corner looking at the group.

“You might have another option.”

“I must admit that I was intrigued when I received your call,” smiled the devilishly handsome man. “I’m here on business. Not to cause trouble.”

“Bullshit,” said Ghost. “You’re here to get women and motorcycles from the Flaming Skulls. Who, by the way, are no longer in business. Only their leader is still working off fumes and delusions.”

Ferdinand’s face showed his disappointment and displeasure.

“I see. I wondered why all the delays for our business meeting. Nevertheless, he has some inventory that he owes me and I will be leaving with that.”

Ghost chuckled, shaking his head as the seven men with him casually showed their weapons at their sides.

“You find this funny?” asked Ferdinand.

“I find those seven idiots funny. Look around you, Ferdinand. I’ve got twenty men in this restaurant. The waiters, the chefs, the busboys, they’re all my men. Did you really think I’d walk in here without back-up? Anything happens to me, your cargo ship will find that the Mississippi is much deeper than you think. She will be sunk, albeit tragically, due to a massive amount of explosives that she was hiding in her hull. Terrible scene. Terrible.”

Now Ferdinand was listening, chewing on his bottom lip as his own men were smart enough to step back.

“My beef isn’t with you. I’m here to give a bit of information and a bit of warning both. For free,” smirked Ghost. “See how nice I am?”

“Yes, you’re a true gentlemen. Very well. What do you want me to know?”

Ghost leaned forward, his elbows on his knees as he began to tell the story of what happened to Jenna. He began by telling the story of Killer and Sister Frances and how

the poor woman's mental state was fragile and delusional. He then followed it up with what had occurred last night.

“I see. So what is it you want from me.”

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“The women are hungry and scared, Harry,” said Frances.

“Stop calling me that!”

“B-but that’s your name,” she said in a shaky voice. “I won’t call you Killer. That’s not who you are.”

He laughed so hard she thought perhaps he’d lost his sanity. When he stopped laughing, he gripped her face, turning her toward him.

“That is exactly who I am. I am a killer.” He turned her face left and right, staring at her. He needed a woman but there was nothing that appealed to him about this woman.

Opening the door, he left the cab of the truck and she heard him opening the door to the back. He was yelling at one of the girls and then she heard him close the door again. Almost afraid to get out, she walked around to the back and saw what he was doing.

The young woman’s nightdress was torn from her body and he had her lying in the dirt, punching her face as he unzipped his jeans.

“Wh-what are you doing? No! No, you can’t do that to her!” she yelled trying to pull him off of her. He shoved her down, kicking her.

“You don’t fucking tell me what I can and can’t do! Do you hear me? I am in charge here. Not you.”

“But I thought you and I would be together. Finally.”

“Oh, we will. But you will do what I tell you when I tell you. I will fuck as many women as I want and you will watch me.”

“No,” she said shaking her head. “No. We’re to be married. We’re to start a family.”

“Are you fucking daft? Did you fall on your head? We’re not doing any of that.”

Frances grabbed the arm of the young woman pulling her from beneath him. Just as he was about to reach for her and punch her again, the headlights of a limousine pulled into the vacant lot.

“You’re fucking lucky they just pulled up. Don’t move. So help me if you say one damn thing I will kill you.”

Frances didn’t understand what was happening. She tried to comfort the young girl but she was sobbing hysterically, holding tightly to the older woman.

He’d said that he loved her, that they’d start a family together. Why would he lie to her? She was helping him.

“Ferdinand, nice to see you,” he said zipping his jeans.

“Did you touch my merchandise?” asked Ferdinand looking around his shoulder.

“Just a little. Didn’t get to break her in yet.”

Ferdinand walked toward the young woman seeing her naked, bloodied body. He removed his coat and placed it over her shoulders. Killer stared at him wondering what the hell he was doing.

“Are you alright, child?” She shook her head and Frances stared at the man. “Did he harm you?”

The two women were so shocked by the conversation they couldn’t speak.

“I will not harm you,” he said. “Where did he find you?”

“We are Sisters, novices from the convent,” said the young girl.

Ferdinand nodded, then ordered his men to open the truck. The other young women squealed in fear, backing up in the truck. The men just raised their hands, shaking their heads.

“We won’t harm you,” said one of the men. “Come down from there and we’ll take you home.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” smirked Killer. “They’ll take you home to your daddy.”

Ferdinand turned to stare at him then took one step forward and backhanded him, sending him reeling to the ground. He jumped up, his fists balled ready to fight.

“You hit me again, I’ll kill you.” He wiped the blood from his lip, glaring at the man in front of him. For a moment, he doubted himself since he had no backup but at this point, he really didn’t care.

“No, you won’t,” said Ferdinand. “You’ve made many critical errors here. Many. You don’t have my motorcycles. That’s the number one issue I have. Those bikes were to be gifts for my men. No matter. I have placed an order for them.”

“What?” Killer frowned at the man wondering how he’d gotten away with placing an order for the bikes.

“Yes. I did it the correct way. Your other grave error is that you dared to touch children of God.”

“They’re just a bunch of virgin bitches. You’re going to break them in anyway.” Ferdinand shook his head, letting out a long sigh.

“You really should have done your homework on me. See, I was abandoned at a convent orphanage as a child. My mother, only fourteen, was raped by a guerilla fighter. The sisters raised me as their own. Treated me with kindness.

“Many years later, as I was establishing myself in business, a man dared to burn that convent down, killing many of the women who were my family. He lived to regret that choice.”

“So what? We all had rough childhoods. You sell bitches to other people. You sell drugs to other people. What the fuck does the source matter?”

“It matters a great deal,” he growled. “I will not touch women who choose to give their life to God. It may seem odd to you, but I am a man of faith and religion. I pray every day. I go to church. I give money. I help the poor. You may think we are the same, but we are not.”

There was a deafening silence in the empty lot as Killer was clearly trying to assess his options. He noticed that Frances was still staring at him, unsure of what to make of it all.

“Harry? Harry let’s just leave together,” she said.

“Are you fucking crazy? I’m not leaving with you now or ever. If I leave, I leave with the bitches in the truck.”

“No,” said the small voice behind Ferdinand’s men. “You can leave with me. But let them go.”

“Well, well, well,” he smirked. “Sister Agatha. Or should I call you something else now?”

“You and your son took my vocation from me by raping and beating me. I won’t allow my Christian name to pass over your lips.”

“So, what? I give you all these virgins and you come with me?”

“That’s the deal,” she said nodding.

“Naw. Naw, that ain’t how this works. I take all of you.”

“You missed the part where me and my men won’t allow this to happen,” said Ferdinand.

“Harry? Harry we can leave,” said Frances.

“Stop! For fuck’s sake, stop!” he screamed gripping the sides of his head. “You’re fucking crazy! I’m not going anywhere with you. I used you. Like I did thirty years ago. That’s all.”

“No,” she whispered. “You love me. That’s why you came back for me.”

“Sister Frances, he doesn’t love you or anyone. He doesn’t even love himself,” said Jenna.

“Bitch, you’re gonna die,” he growled.

“Come through me first,” said Nash. Killer scoffed, shaking his head and then noticed a few other shadowy figures.

“And me,” said Tailor.

“Don’t forget me,” smirked Alec. Then a chorus of ‘me’s was heard, Gabe, Antoine, Angel, Miller, and a dozen others showing up.

“You’re in with them?” he said staring at Ferdinand. “I’m sure your business associates would love to hear that you’re working with the very men that try to put you all away. You sure got strange friends.”

“We are in agreement on this one issue,” said Ferdinand. “You will not harm these young nuns. And, you will not live to see another day.”

“No! Don’t kill him,” said Frances stepping in front of him. Killer just laughed, pointing at her, mocking her behind her back.

“Sister Frances,” said Jenna softly, “he’s using you. He’s using your emotions against you. He was going to rape all of these women. Young, virgin novices. They are to be nuns, Sister Frances. He is not a good man. He raped you. He raped me!”

“No,” she said shaking her head. “No, he loves me. He’s always loved me. I just had to wait until it was a good time for both of us.”

“He won’t take you with him,” said Ghost. “He can’t.”

“B-but you will, right?” said Frances turning to look at him. “I mean, you love me. You’re going to marry me and we’ll have a family.”

“Bitch, I’m not marryin’ anyone,” he laughed. Frances turned full to face him and

stared at his expression. She slapped him and then gasped. “No bitch will slap me.”

Her body slid to the ground, blood seeping from her dress. Jenna pushed the young women out of the way and knelt beside the Sister.

“I-I’m so sorry, Jenna. I’m so very sorry.” She shook her head.

“It’s alright. We’re going to get you some help.” Sister Frances smiled up at her and then shook her head.

“It’s alright, he’s taking me home.” She stared at the bright light above her, the kind face of the elderly man who’d spoken with her in the gardens of the convent.

She should have known he would be there.

She should have known he would give her peace.

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“Why didn’t you just come to us directly about the motorcycles?” asked Ghost.

“I was foolish enough to believe that he had a relationship with you. He said he could get me a deal,” he said shaking his head. “I believed him and should not have. I appreciate that you are allowing my men to have such fine motorcycles.”

“I wish we could convince you to change your business,” said Ian. “We’ve done it before.” Ferdinand laughed, nodding his head.

“Yes. I know of all the men that you have reformed. I wish I could tell that I would be one of those men. I didn’t lie. I give money to the church, a lot of money.”

“Buying your way to heaven?” asked Gaspar.

“Maybe,” he nodded sadly. “Maybe.”

“When the bikes are ready, we’ll let you know and find a way to deliver them on neutral ground,” said Skull.

“What do we do about him?” asked Ferdinand pointing to the body of Harry Clayton.

“The gators are hungry,” said Trak.

Ferdinand smirked at the mysterious man, then realized that he was not kidding. Nodding, he turned toward the young women.

“I give you my word, we will get them home,” said Ferdinand.

“It’s alright,” said Ian. “We’ve got this. We’ll get them home and make sure that they’re safe. They’ll need help. Counseling. And someone will need to tell the Mother Superior what happened. I think we should do that.”

“I suppose you’re right.” Ferdinand looked at Jenna who was still standing protectively around the young novices. “You were very brave tonight. Perhaps you should reconsider your life as a nun.”

“I think I’m past that now but thank you.”

With Ferdinand gone, Killer giving the gators something to chew on for breakfast, and Sister Frances carried home for a proper burial, the world seemed to be righting itself somewhat.

Unsure of what her next move would be, Jenna seemed to be lost at Belle Fleur. The place that had given her great comfort these past few weeks now felt as if it were a prison.

“She’s going to leave,” said Nash.

“Maybe,” said Ghost, standing with Kane.

“No. She is. She told me this morning that she wanted to go back to Arizona for a while. She needed to visit the graves of her family and remember who she was.”

“You could go with her, Nash,” said Kane. “We’d provide whatever you need to go. You’ve got the trackers on you, the comms devices. You’d be safe.”

“I don’t think she wants me to go with her,” he said.

“Have you asked her?” smirked Ghost.

“No.”

“Ask her stupid,” laughed Kane. “You never know what she might say. You’d at least know how she feels.”

“She only sees me as a friend and protector,” he frowned.

“Right now. Right now she sees you as a friend and protector, Nash. Give her some time to figure out her new normal. That woman has been through a helluva lot in the last few months. Brutally attacked, raped, and beaten. She reevaluates her life only to realize that being a nun wasn’t what she wanted at all. That’s a lot for anyone to take in, then realizing that another nun was placing you in danger.”

“I’ll see,” he said nodding.

People were running around, racing toward vehicles as they started to leave the property.

“What’s wrong?” asked Ghost as AJ and Hiro ran by them.

“Stephanie. She’s been in a car wreck but we don’t know how bad yet.”

“Shit. We gotta go,” said Ghost looking at Kane. He nodded, then turned back to Nash.

“We support you no matter what, Nash. Figure it out.”

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“I’m worried about you traveling by yourself,” said Nash looking at Jenna as she packed her bags. “The drive from here to Arizona isn’t safe. You’ll be traveling through some pretty remote areas.”

“Nash, I know. I’m from there, remember?” she smiled.

“Yeah. I remember,” he said calmly.

“Listen, I’m not happy about this either. I’m scared to death that I’ll get lost or break down out there. I’m terrified that any friends I once had are gone, except for you.” She turned to look at him, leaving the packing for a moment. “So, yes. I’m terrified and I don’t know what to do about it because I have to do this.”

“I could go with you,” he said in a barely audible voice.

“What?”

“I said,” he said raising his voice and clearing his throat, “I could go with you. We could share a hotel room, two beds obviously but I’ll be there to protect you. If you need time alone, I’ll be happy to give that to you but I won’t be far away. I’d be there to protect you, Jenna.”

“Why? Why would you do that? Why would you leave your friends and family for me?” she asked.

Because I love you! Because you’re the woman I’ve always waited for! Because you’re amazing!

“Because we’re friends and that’s what friends do.”