



The Secrets We Keep (Sovereign Sons MC: North Carolina #1)

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Category: Romance

Description: I ran from this town seven years ago.

I didnt think Id ever return, but my fathers death is the one thing that could bring me back.

He ran me out of this town, his town, so I wouldnt ruin his plans.

The Sovereign Sons Motorcycle Club rules over everything in Silver Springs, North Carolina, and now my ex-boyfriend is the clubs new president. I didnt leave town of my own free will, but that doesnt matter to Grayson Williams. He hates me for leaving our town, for leaving him, for changing our plans. What will he think when he learns the secrets Ive been keeping?

I see her familiar blue eyes through the crowd of mourners and know that Im fucked.

Sophie Parker has returned home. Shes returned to me.

The last seven years have been monotonous. One day bleeding into the next. When she left town, it was like all the color was stripped from my life. But she didnt come home alone, and now Im questioning everything about our time together, and the club that Ive loved my entire life.

The only thing Im sure of, is that shes not leaving again.

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SOPHIE

The cool morning air blows through the window of my car as I stare straight ahead.

After five and a half hours on the road, the pavement starts to blur in front of me, so I open the window to wake myself up.

Asher and I left Atlanta as soon as I heard the news.

I woke him up at four in the morning after packing our bags and loading the vehicle.

He was confused, rightfully so, but fell asleep as soon as I started driving.

Asher has never been to Silver Springs, North Carolina, and I was hoping that his first time there would be for a better reason. Instead, we're going to my father's funeral.

I glance in my rearview mirror and find Asher fast asleep, his black curly hair wild, the epitome of bedhead.

I smile, knowing that he's the best thing that came out of my time in Silver Springs.

When I was younger, I thought my entire life would be spent in the quaint, southern town.

I thought that I would marry my high school sweetheart and have a bunch of his babies.

My plan was to go to culinary school and open my own restaurant, but everything changed seven years ago.

I wasn't welcome in this town back then, I'm probably still not. When the president of the Sovereign Sons Motorcycle Club tells you to leave town, you do it. Even if he's your father.

Asher and I aren't going back to Silver Springs to start over, we're going back to make sure my father is dead.

I know that sounds awful, but if you knew the man, you would understand.

My mom died during childbirth, and my father blamed me for it.

I don't know how many times over the years he told me that I killed the love of his life.

Every time he drank too much or was angry at me, that was his favorite jab.

Normal fathers loved and cared for their children. Mine treated me like I was a burden .

I didn't grow up in a loving home, I grew up in a motorcycle clubhouse.

My father didn't shield me from the drunk men, the sex, or the drugs.

I saw everything. Not all the members were bad, though.

My father's vice president was always kind to me.

Kurt Williams was the perfect depiction of the father I wish my own was.

Most nights, Kurt and his wife, Lisa, would invite me to dinner and make sure my homework was done.

They shielded me from the things I shouldn't have seen and made me feel like a part of their family.

Because of them, I met the love of my life, and because of my father, I lost him. I shake my head to clear my thoughts as I take the exit for Silver Springs. I drive down the familiar streets, noticing the small changes to buildings over the last seven years.

I pull into the gas station off main street and park the car, turning around to gently nudge Asher awake.

"Hey buddy, we're here," I tell him softly. "We need to head inside and get changed, okay?"

His bright blues eyes find mine as he blinks the sleep away and takes in his surroundings.

Sometimes I forget how much he looks like his father, but his curly black hair and sleepy face reminds me every time.

The only thing he got from me is the color of his eyes and his smile, everything else is all him .

"Are we there, mama?" He asks eagerly.

"We are," I say with a small smile. "But we need to change so we can go to the service, okay?"

Asher nods his head in agreement and unbuckles himself, hopping out of his seat and

pulling open his door. I move to his side of the vehicle, clasping his hand in mine and leading him toward the gas station bathroom.

The town is quieter than I remember it, which is probably because of my father's funeral today.

Everyone in Silver Springs respects the Sovereign Sons.

Not only does the club do charity events for the town, but they keep it safe.

Which is part of the reason that the town hasn't changed much since the last time I was here.

People don't come to town hoping to change things because they know that it's a pointless endeavor.

That may make Silver Springs sound like a town stuck in the past, but it's not.

The citizens just don't like the big city energy.

Big companies have tried to set up shop in town before but have been shot down by the city council.

After I hand Asher his clothes and let him change, I slip into a stall and get dressed myself.

I change into a black wrap dress and some simple black heels.

I put my other clothes in my bag and step out of the stall, grabbing Asher's clothes from him and stuffing them in the bag before looking at myself in the mirror.

My blue eyes look glassy from driving so long.

I grab my brush from the bag and run it through my errant blonde hair, taming the long locks.

My cheeks are flushed, and my normally light pink lips are a darker shade, like I chewed on them the entire ride here.

Which I did because I'm nervous as hell.

I walked away from this life seven years ago.

I had only recently found out I was pregnant with Asher, and I was terrified.

I left without a backwards glance, and I haven't had contact with anyone since.

The only reason I found out about my father's funeral was because of the alerts I had set up for his name .

I needed to know where my father was, so we could be far away from him.

I smile at Asher in the mirror and turn around, taking his hand in mine and leading him back to the car.

My old Toyota Corola has been a good vehicle for me.

I bought it used seven years ago, and besides some dents from people's doors, it's in pretty decent shape.

Even if it's pushing two hundred thousand miles.

I open Asher's door for him and then hurry around to the driver's side, hopping in and starting the car. It's ten minutes before the funeral starts. I tried to time it perfectly so I wouldn't have to make small talk with anyone before the service or run into anyone from the club.

I pull out of the lot and down the road, driving into the parking lot of the church and stopping in a spot toward the back, surprised I even found a space. It's like the entire town came out for this. Like my father was some kind of royalty and not the menacing asshole he was.

I take a steadying breath and turn off the car, telling Asher that we're here and waiting for him to unbuckle himself before I drag myself out of my seat. I stop in front of him, adjusting the buttons on his black shirt and helping him tuck it in.

He scrunches his nose up making me laugh and helping to ease my nerves. I tousle his curly hair and pull him in for a hug. I tug him in the direction of the crowd of people, stopping in the last row and taking two empty seats.

I glance around nervously, seeing familiar faces in the crowd and hoping they don't recognize me and cause a scene. Everywhere I look, I don't see a single member of the club, though .

The roar of motorcycles permeates the air as chills run down my spine. I turn to look, like everyone else does, and see hundreds of bikes coming toward us. When they get close, I recognize the man leading the club instantly.

Grayson Williams rides in the front, in the position of the club president. My blood turns to ice. I never thought I'd see Grayson in a president patch. I honestly never thought I'd see him again. I turn back around and pull Asher close to me, taking deep breaths to steel my nerves.

The roar of the bikes dies out and the club moves through the crowd, their cuts proudly in place with the skull and crown emblem covering their backs, taking their place at the front.

After the pastor says his opening address and I hear my father's name, I tune out the rest of the service, a sense of calm washing over me.

John Parker is dead. The man who has tormented my dreams and had me looking over my shoulder the last seven years is gone.

Asher resting his head on my shoulder draws me back to the here and now as the pastor finishes the service.

I watch on as eight of the club members stand and move to the coffin, acting as pallbearers.

My heart climbs into my throat as they make their way down the aisle, toward us.

I try to look away but it's like a pull that forces me to look up and into hazel eyes.

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GRAYSON

Bright blue eyes that have haunted me for the last seven years meet mine as I carry John Parker's coffin down the aisle of onlookers. I grind my teeth as I pass Sophie Parker, tearing my eyes from her fear-soaked gaze. Sophie is back in town.

I narrow my eyes on the hearse and ignore the rest of my surroundings.

I can't show any form of weakness as the Sovereign Sons' new President.

Every member from every other charter is watching my every move today.

They want to see if I can handle the pressure of the club, like I wasn't born into it.

The Sovereign Sons Motorcycle Club is my life.

My father was the Vice President to John Parker for twenty-eight years.

When my father stepped aside last year, I took his place as vice president, much to the chagrin of our older members who thought they were more deserving of the position.

John had other plans, though. My dad told me that John wanted me to take the position if my dad retired before John did, that he had spoken to my dad about it when I was still in high school.

John only had one kid. Sophie. He couldn't pass the club down to her, not that he

would have wanted to. Sophie bailed on us seven years ago and she hasn't looked back, since.

When we reach the hearse, I nod toward my men to slide the coffin into the hearse and step back, bowing our heads in honor of our fallen man.

When I lift my head, my gaze locks with a small boy beside Sophie, who has her back to us.

The boy has the same piercing blue eyes that she does.

Bile rises in my throat when I realize that he's clinging to her.

Sophie has a kid. The thought alone drives a knife through my chest. I always thought we had a future together, that we would get married after she went to culinary school and have a bunch of kids.

It seems that she went off and fulfilled that dream with someone else.

I grit my teeth as I shut down my emotions, leading my men back to their bikes.

I hop on and my men follow suit, putting on our helmets and sunglasses and start our engines.

I let the sound surround me like a coat of arms before pulling into the street and waiting for the hearse to pull in behind the Silver Springs club members, then we head to the club, where John will be laid to rest with the rest of our members.

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The dancing women in front of me blur as I knock back the rest of my tequila on the

rocks. We're sending John out in true Sovereign Sons fashion, with a huge party. Every charter is in attendance and most of my men are trashed, including me.

The men all think that I'm mourning the passing of our president, my brother Rowan and best friend Axel, know better.

They saw Sophie at the funeral and haven't left my side since.

Luckily, this won't look strange to any club members because Rowan is my Vice President and Axel is my Seargent at Arms, meant to protect me with his life. Not that I would ever let him do that.

"How about Candy takes care of you?" Axel suggests with a smirk. "She can suck those thoughts right out of your head."

He's not lying. If what all the guys say is true, Candy knows how to suck a dick. She is a nice enough girl; she just has a problem with attaching herself to every brother who shows her the slightest attention. Right now, though, my Sophie-riddled brain needs the distraction. Fuck the consequences.

"Candy," I shout, drawing her attention.

Her eyes are wide in shock as she turns to face me.

Who can blame her for being shocked? I'm known as the brother who doesn't mess with club sluts.

No offense to my brothers, but I'm not trying to pick up any STDs, and most of them don't wrap their shit.

"Come over here," I slur with an uncoordinated wave in my direction.

Candy licks her lips and hops off the stool she was sitting on before striding over to where we're sitting.

She's a beautiful woman, I won't deny that.

She has chocolate brown hair and eyes, a petite figure, with fake boobs that look a little too big for her frame.

Her real name is Alice, and her father was a member until he died five years ago.

Chris would probably hate to see his little girl like this.

Good thing he's not around to watch her suck me off.

"Show your new president some appreciation, sweetheart," Rowan murmurs, nudging Candy to the floor.

She slides to the space between my knees and looks up at me with hooded eyes. She's excited for this, and all I see when she looks at me, are the icy blue eyes of the one woman I can't have.

I shake my head and reach down, releasing my cock from my jeans and then reaching out to pull Candy's eager mouth down to it.

The first touch of her mouth on my cock has me rocking my head back on my shoulders.

I know that to normal people, it would be weird to be getting your dick sucked in the middle of a party, but to our club; it's normal.

I groan as Candy takes me to the back of her mouth before swirling her tongue

around the tip of my cock.

I thrust my hand into her hair, grasping it hard and moving her up and down my length.

I open my eyes when I hear her gag, reveling in the tears that stream down her face as she tries to take me fully into her throat.

Her image flashes in and out, sharing the space with memories of Sophie doing the same thing.

With Sophie in my mind, I erupt, pouring down Candy's throat.

I groan in frustration. When I open my eyes, Candy is licking her lips and moving to remove her top.

I hold my hand up to stop her and wince at the immediate look of disappointment on her face.

"Thanks, sweetheart," I murmur. "I needed that," I lie, trying to soften the blow.

Her face brightens with a smile. "No problem, pres. I'm here any time you need me," she adds with a wink before striding back toward the heart of the party.

I tuck my cock back into my pants and push out of my chair, turning in the direction of the apartments.

Every member of our club is welcome to stay on club property.

Over the years, the club has become more like a compound than a hangout spot.

We have a commercial sized kitchen to feed everyone, ten apartments for the officers of our charter, and fifteen bedrooms available for our members and guests.

I climb the steps to the second level where all our apartments are.

My apartment is at the end of the hall now, having just moved into John's vacated space.

It wasn't a difficult move since the vice president's suite is right next to mine, along with the sergeant at arms. The president's suite is larger than all of them with an open concept kitchen and living area, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms. I even have my own laundry room.

It's nice to have a space to escape to when I need a little time away from the club.

I do have my own house just outside of town, but most of the time, I can't be too far away from the club.

Even when I was vice president, I still needed to be readily available.

Who wants to stay in a house that you built in the hopes that the only woman you ever loved will come back to you, anyways?

I punch in the code to my door and slam it closed behind me, not bothering to turn on the lights as I walk directly to my room.

I stumble as I strip my clothes off and walk into the bathroom, hitting the light.

I catch sight of myself in the mirror and wince.

I'm way too drunk for this and I know I'll regret Candy sucking my cock in the

morning .

Hell, I regret it now. I swipe my hand over my face and turn the shower on, the water heats up instantly, so I step inside, eager to scrub the regret from my body.

After scrubbing myself raw, I brush my teeth and walk back into my bedroom, flopping onto the bed and closing my eyes, only to be met with dreams of Sophie.

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SOPHIE

I roll over on the thin hotel mattress and groan as I pull myself into a sitting position. I think I got the worst night of sleep of my life last night. I knew that I didn't have much to spend on a hotel, but the only room I could afford was in the shittiest hotel in town.

Luckily, the sheets were clean, and the bed was free of bedbugs.

I hate that I can't afford somewhere better for me and Asher to stay.

I wipe the sleep from my eyes and turn around to check on him, finding him sprawled across the mattress, sleeping soundly.

I bite back a laugh at the image of my son. He could fall asleep anywhere.

I quietly grab my bag and head into the bathroom to freshen up. The bathroom isn't the cleanest, but I manage to take a shower and brush my teeth without touching anything too grimy.

I walk back into the bedroom and find Asher watching cartoons on the small television. He smiles sleepily at me .

"I need you to get your teeth brushed and get dressed so we can head out, okay?" I tell him softly as I sit on the bed beside him and brush back his wild hair from his forehead.

“Okay, mama,” he murmurs as he rests his head on my shoulder.

I don’t rush the moment because I know that as he gets older, these moments will be fewer and fewer. After a few minutes, I gently nudge him with a laugh.

“This isn’t brushing your teeth,” I scold him playfully.

“I’m going, I’m going,” he grumbles as he rises from the bed and heads into the bathroom.

I already got him to take a shower last night before we went to bed, so he doesn’t need to deal with that dirty thing again.

I turn off the television and the lights in the room after searching around for any of our belongings before we leave the room.

This isn’t a place where I would feel comfortable leaving anything out, and since we’re only here for the night, I want to make sure we don’t forget anything.

I need to go by my father’s lawyer’s office today to see if the asshole left anything for me. Other than debt. If I end up responsible for any of his debt, I don’t know how I’ll pay it.

I take a deep breath and turn toward the bathroom door when I hear the toilet flush.

Asher appears a moment later with his pajamas in one hand and his toothbrush and toothpaste in the other.

He walks over and hands them to me so I can put them in our bag and then sits down to put his tennis shoes on.

When he's done, we walk out of the room and down to the reception area. If you can call it that. There's one man sitting behind glass and two lawn chairs beside a vending machine. Like I said, it's not the classiest place I've ever stayed.

I clasp Asher's hand in mine while I check us out and then hurry toward my car. When we climb inside, I feel like I take my first full breath since we got here. I can go figure things out with John's lawyer and then get us back on the road. Out of Silver Springs.

I make sure that Asher is buckled in and then head toward Lenny Thompson's office. Lenny has been the lawyer for the club since I was ten years old. He was always kind to me.

It takes us a few minutes to get there as we navigate the little bit of church traffic. It's a beautiful summer day in Silver Springs, the kind of days I used to love growing up here.

"It's so pretty here, mama," Asher says from the back seat as he gazes out the window.

"Yeah, it is," I say through the tightening of my throat.

I didn't think that being here for my father's funeral would make me miss this place even more, but it has. Seeing Asher where I thought I would raise all of my kids just makes me even more homesick.

I pull into the parking lot of Lenny's office and turn off the car. Asher and I hop out and he walks to the front of the vehicle to walk beside me. I hold the door open for him and usher him inside, following closely behind him.

"Good morning! I'll be with you in a second!" A sweet voice calls out. Beautiful

green eyes widen when she takes me in. “Sophie!” Wren Dixon squeals before she barrels into me, engulfing me in her sweet scent. “You’re back!”

We pull back from our embrace and I give her my first genuine smile since I arrived back in Silver Springs.

Wren was my best friend in high school. Her dad was a member of the club, so we basically grew up together.

She is even more stunning than the last time I saw her.

Her chocolate brown hair hangs down her back in waves.

Her green eyes are even more piercing. She has curves for days and a killer style in a black pencil skirt and gray silk blouse, along with six-inch black heels that make her a little taller than me.

“Only for John’s funeral,” I tell her with a wince. “We’ll be heading out after we speak to Lenny,” I say as I pull Asher closer to my side.

She blanches at that. “I’m so sorry, Soph,” she murmurs softly. “Who is this cutie?” She changes the subject as she sets her sights on Asher.

“This is my son Asher,” I tell her with a smile. “Asher, this is my friend Wren. ”

He gives her a shy smile with a little wave.

“It’s nice to meet you Asher,” she says as she returns his smile. “Would you like to sit out here with me while your mom talks to Lenny?” Asher looks to me for permission and then follows Wren into the waiting area. “He’s ready for you, Sophie. You can head on in,” she calls over her shoulder.

I take one more look at Wren and Asher before knocking on Lenny's door and opening it.

He stands before me in a gray suit, the jacket abandoned on his chair, and the same warm smile he always wore.

His dark grey hair is cut short on the sides and longer up top, like a pompadour.

He's a handsome man, even at sixty-five.

"Sophie! How are you doing, sweetheart?" He asks as he walks over to give me a hug.

"I'm good, Lenny," I murmur into his shoulder. "How are you?"

"Same as always," he chuckles as he pulls back. "You're here about your dad?" He asks in a more serious tone.

"Yeah," I clear my throat. "I highly doubt he left me anything of worth, but I'm sure he stuck me with all of his debt," I grumble as I take a seat in one of his oversized leather chairs.

His office looks just like I remembered it. Warm toned leather chairs, mahogany desk and bookshelves. I was surprisingly here a lot when I was younger, but that was more to deal with my mom's estate, than things for my father.

Lenny grimaces as he walks around his desk and takes a seat, opening up his laptop to pull up John's information. "I'm afraid you're pretty accurate," he says making my stomach drop. "But John didn't leave you a thing, not even his debt."

My eyebrows raise at that. "What?"

Lenny's eyes soften. "The club has been doing really well and paid off all your father's debts before he died. About a year ago, actually. Everything that he had has been left to the club, specifically to Grayson Williams, which is pretty standard for the club."

My eyes widen. John left everything to my ex-boyfriend. "I saw that Gray is the new president," I hedge softly.

"He is," Lenny murmurs. "He was named vice president when his dad stepped down from the club and John has been prepping him to take over as president one day. Although, I doubt your dad thought it would be this soon."

I sigh and shake my head. "So, I don't have any bills I have to pay? Nothing that's going to come back and bite me in the ass?"

"No, sweetheart," Lenny smiles. "You're free and clear of him."

Lenny always knew what a piece of shit my dad was. With the amount of time he spent around the club, he couldn't deny it. He's also close friends with Kurt Williams and knew that I spent a lot of time at their house, even before I dated Gray.

"Good," I say around the lump in my throat. "Well, it was good to see you, Lenny," I tell him as I raise from my seat and head toward the door.

"You too, Sophie," he murmurs softly. "Good luck."

I don't look back because I know I'll end up crying. I just push through the hall and into the waiting area, finding Asher and Wren there.

"You ready to head home, buddy?" I ask as I get closer.

He looks up and nods his head eagerly, standing up and striding over to me. He turns back to Wren with an easier smile than before.

“Heading out so soon?” She asks as she stands up, smoothing out her skirt.

“Yeah,” I grimace. “I got what I needed and now I have to get back to my job. I didn’t exactly tell them I was taking the day off today.”

She strides over and wraps me in her embrace, almost pulling a sob from me. “You’re always welcome here, Soph,” she murmurs into my ear. “Be happy.”

I swallow the lump in my throat and nod, knowing that she feels the action. We pull apart and I wipe away the errant tear that escapes. “It was good to see you, Wren. ”

“You too,” she says with a weak smile.

“Bye!” Asher calls out as we walk out of the door.

We get in the car and head down the main road toward the interstate. My phone rings so I pull over and take it out of my purse, wincing when I see it’s my work.

“Hello?”

“Sophie, where the hell are you?” Craig yells down the line. “You were supposed to open today and now we’re two hours behind!”

“I’m sorry,” I wince. “I had a family emergency and had to leave town.”

“Well, don’t bother coming back. You’re fired!” He growls.

“What? You can’t do that. I’ve never missed a day of work!” I rush out.

“I don’t have time to deal with this,” he hisses down the line. “You’re replaceable and I can’t rely on you. You’re fired.”

That’s all he says before the line goes dead and I’m thrust into the silence in the car.

I blink back the tears in my eyes as cars drive by us.

What the hell am I going to do? Asher and I were already living paycheck to paycheck as is, this is going to ruin me.

I can’t afford the apartment we rent week to week without my job.

All the furniture was included in my rent, so it’s not like I’m leaving anything of ours behind .

“Are you okay, mama?” Asher asks softly from the back seat.

“Yeah, baby,” I choke out. “How about we get some lunch?”

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GRAYSON

Rowan, Axel and I walk into the cozy, fifties inspired diner we have in town and over to the counter.

Betsy's Diner has been open since the fifties, and they decided to keep the aesthetic the same through the years.

The waitresses all wear fifties inspired uniforms, and you can see into the kitchen where the cooks are preparing food.

The rounded bar is made of metal and has barstools with red cushions on them.

There are large booths that circle the entire restaurant that are also metal with red cushions.

We've been coming here since we were teenagers.

Betsy doesn't run the diner anymore, but her daughter Florence does.

Flo is the epitome of small but mighty. She stands at four foot eleven and is as petite as they come.

She has salt and pepper hair cut into a pixie and she wears black framed glasses.

If you know Flo, you know that you don't mess with her.

She's a bullshitter and she still loves to rile us up when we come in.

"Hey boys!" Flo calls out when she sees us. "What can I get for you?"

"Hey, Flo," I smile in her direction. "We'll take a booth and the usual." I tell her.

She nods her head and points us in the direction of an open booth. "The usual, coming right up!" She chirps before heading over to the window to tell the cooks our order.

Rowan leads us over to the open booth and we slide into our seats. The diner is always busy at lunch time. Hell, it's busy at every time of day. The food here hasn't really changed in the years that it's been open, and that's what keeps the people coming back.

I relax into the booth, letting the cool leather and familiar atmosphere soothe my nerves. My relaxation is short lived, though, because as my eyes skate over the patrons, they land on Sophie.

She's sitting in a booth toward the back of the diner, facing me. Across from her is the same little boy that was with her at John's funeral yesterday. Rowan and Axel follow my gaze and tense when they see her.

"I guess she's planning on sticking around for a while," Rowan murmurs as Flo walks over with our drinks.

"Ahh, I see that you boys saw Sophie?" She asks as she sets them down.

"I can't believe she came back to town; I've missed that girl.

" I scoff, making Flo pin me with a look.

“You may be the new president of the Sovereign Sons, but in here, I rule the roost, buddy. You play nice,” she adds with a playful swat on my shoulder.

Flo has always had a soft spot for Sophie. When Sophie left town, she was always the one saying that there had to be a reason. To me, it didn’t matter what the reason was, she still left without a word.

I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn’t even realize that Flo had walked away until she was back and placing plates down in front of us. I shake my head and dig into my double cheeseburger and fries, devouring everything on my plate in a matter of minutes.

“Do you actually think that she’s going to stick around?” Axel asks as he wipes his face and then leans back in the booth.

I sigh. “It doesn’t really matter,” I tell him, tossing my napkin onto my plate. “She’s nobody to us, or the club, anymore.”

Rowan shoots me an unimpressed look at that, because he knows that I’m full of shit. “Whatever you say, brother,” he says as he rolls his eyes.

If there’s one thing to know about Rowan, it’s that he can read me like a book. He’s always been able to. We’re only a year apart in age, so I don’t remember a time before him. We grew up as best friends. So, he knows how I really feel about the Sophie situation.

I let my eyes roam back to her. She empties the contents of her wallet onto the table and my eyes focus on the dismal amount of money sitting there.

She grabs what she needs and puts the rest back into her wallet before she urges the little boy out of the booth.

I duck my head, not eager to make eye contact.

“Are you guys hiring by chance?” I hear her soft voice ask.

I whip my head in the direction of the register where she’s paying Flo, who smiles warmly at her. “For you, hunny? Always.”

Sophie’s shoulders sag immediately, the tension there easing a bit. “Thanks, Flo. I really appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem,” Flo assures her. “Fill this out and bring it back to me tomorrow. I’ll get you on the schedule right away.”

I feel myself being watched, and when I look down at Sophie’s side, I realize why. The little boy with her is watching me with the same eyes that his mother has. He gives me a small smile and then turns back shyly to face Flo.

“And who is this?” Flo asks as she beams down at the small boy.

“My son Asher,” Sophie says with the first genuine smile I’ve seen cross her face since she’s been back. “Asher, this is Ms. Flo.”

“Hi, Ms. Flo,” Asher says with a wave.

“It’s nice to meet you Asher,” Flo says with a wave back. “You’re welcome to come in anytime that your mama has to work, okay?”

Asher nods his head eagerly.

“Thank you, Flo,” Sophie murmurs so softly that I almost don’t hear it.

Flo waves her off. “It’s my pleasure. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Sophie nods and ushers Asher toward the door, but not before he looks back and waves at me.

Axel’s whistle draws me back to reality. “When did Soph have a kid?”

“We don’t know that he’s hers,” I grumble, even though there’s no denying that he is.

Rowan snorts as he tosses enough money to pay our bill on the table. “He has her eyes, and she literally said he is. I guess Soph has been up to a lot since she left Silver Springs.”

My jaw clenches at the thought of Sophie sleeping with someone else. Having their child. Things that were only supposed to happen with me.

“Sounds like she’s staying in town for a while, now,” Axel says as he pulls out cash to pay for our bill.

My mind wanders back to the little bit of money that Sophie had in her wallet. She must be hurting pretty bad financially if her cash is that low, not to mention she’s getting a job at the diner.

I pull my phone from my pocket and bring up one of our prospect’s numbers.

Grayson: I need you to run a check on someone for me. Sophie Parker; twenty-five years old.

Noah: No problem, pres .

I slip my phone back into my pocket and then climb out of the booth. We wave to Flo

as we walk out and then hop on our bikes and head back to the club. I don't know what is going on in Sophie's life or why she's staying in Silver Springs, but I'm going to find out.

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GRAYSON

That night, I still can't get Sophie out of my mind. We came back to the clubhouse for church, and we've been hanging out in the common area ever since.

There are still a few other charters hanging around, not eager to leave John's celebration too soon. It's still a big party around here. Which is how I find myself a little tipsy and with Candy giving me a lap dance.

My cock is rock hard and angry. He's mad that he can't fuck the one person he really wants to.

Normally, I wouldn't show any of the club girls this kind of attention, I've never been that guy with them.

But right now, I need the release that Candy can offer me, no matter how much I don't want it to be her.

I grab Candy's hand as I rise from the chair, tugging her after me and toward one of our guest rooms. Some of the members from the other charters cheer me on and I can practically feel Candy preening behind me.

I know that this is going to be a mistake, I just don't really care right now . I need to blow off some steam .

I walk down the hallway in search of an empty room, pushing the door open wide when I find one. I haven't brought any woman into my space at the club and I'm not

going to start with one of the club girls, it will only lead to an issue with her.

“We’re not going to your room?” Candy pouts as she sits back on the bed, spreading her legs and showing me her barely concealed pussy.

“It’s off limits,” I mutter, reaching for my belt and whipping it off.

Candy takes the hint and immediately undresses, licking her lips as she lies back on the bed again before I’ve even got my pants unzipped. I’m not getting naked with this woman.

I walk over to the bedside table and open the drawer, finding a box of condoms inside. We stock them in each of the rooms even though most of the men refuse to wear them. Fucking dumbasses.

I stride back over to the end of the bed, pushing my jeans and briefs down just enough to free my aching cock.

Candy’s eyes widen at the size, and I won’t lie and say that doesn’t help boost my ego.

I pull the condom to my teeth and tear open the wrapper before pinching the tip and rolling it down my length.

I grab Candy’s leg and pull her closer, enough that I can feel the heat of her pussy on the head of my cock.

Just before I push inside, someone pounds on the door.

“Gray, I need to talk to you,” Rowan calls through the door .

My head falls back as I groan, pulling the condom from my cock and tucking it back into my pants. I leave Candy on the bed as I open the door and head down the hallway with Rowan.

He gives me a knowing look and shakes his head but doesn't say anything else until we reach my office.

"Noah was looking for you," he tells me as he takes a seat on my couch. "He had a report on Sophie. I told him I'd give it to you since you were indisposed," he adds with annoyance before pulling his phone out and offering it to me.

My eyes scan the document. I read that Sophie has been living in Atlanta since she left Silver Springs and that there is no significant other in her life, there's not even mention of one from her past. I relax after reading that.

The report says that she and her son, Asher, live in a small, furnished apartment in a not-so-great part of town.

She worked at a restaurant for the last five years but was fired yesterday.

That explains why she's looking for a job.

As I read on, the report has details of where she's been using her credit cards the last few days and there's a record of her staying at the shittiest hotel in town.

My hackles rise when I realize that she didn't just stay there last night, she checked in again a few hours ago, too.

I grind my teeth as I toss Rowan his phone and walk out the door with him hot on my heels. "Where are you going?" He asks.

“Fucking Sunrise Inn,” I growl .

“Fuck,” he grunts.

We make our way through the clubhouse and to our bikes in the large garage. Rowan hops on his bike at the same time I hop on mine, and we take off an instant later. We tear off the gravel road and onto the highway, flying through town and to the pit that Sophie decided to stay in.

Multiple creeps scatter as we pull into the parking lot of the Sunrise Inn, the sight of our bikes and patches warning them away.

In this town, everyone respects the skull and crown patch, even the lowlifes.

We park our bikes and walk into the so-called waiting area.

The front desk worker’s face pales when he sees us.

“Uh, what can I do for you?” He squeaks.

“Where is Sophie Parker staying?” I growl.

He quickly looks at the logs, his hands shaking as he searches for Sophie’s name. “R-room 217,” he stutters.

I’m moving before he even finishes his sentence, heading toward the stairs and taking them two at a time. I hear Rowan behind me but don’t slow down, following the signs until I find her room. I step up to it and pound on the door until it flies open.

Sophie is standing there in an oversized t-shirt; her blonde hair is wild around her shoulders and her eyes are wide in shock. “What the hell do you want?” She asks

breathlessly .

“You’re not staying in this dump, get your shit and let’s go,” I bark out as I push past her and into the room, finding her son frowning at me from the bed.

“You can’t just barge into this room, Grayson!” Sophie growls as she follows after me.

“I can and I did. Get your shit together,” I tell her as I turn around to face her.

She stops in front of me, scowling up at me and trying to look intimidating, but failing miserably since she’s only five foot two and I’m six foot four.

“We’re not going anywhere with you,” she mutters.

I turn my attention on her son. “How would you like to ride on the back of a motorcycle?” I ask him with a smile plastered on my face.

“Can we mom?” He asks as he jumps from the bed and rushes to put on his jacket and shoes.

Sophie glares at me even harder, if that’s even possible. “No, Ash, we’re going to stay here.”

“No, you’re not,” I tell her. “You’re going to pack your things and go back to the clubhouse with Rowan and me.

You’re not staying in this dump.” I step even closer to her, causing her to back up a step.

“You can come willingly, or I’ll carry you out myself.

What's it going to be Soph?" I ask her with a maniacal smile.

She chose option number two .

After Rowan and I packed up everything in the hotel room, along with the help of Asher, he carried the bags down to the waiting SUV that Noah drove over while Asher followed behind him.

I stalk toward Sophie as she backs up toward the bathroom shaking her head.

"No," she whispers.

"Oh yeah, Soph," I murmur before I lunge for her, grabbing her by the hips and throwing her over my shoulder. She starts to flail, so I slap her on the ass, making her stiffen in surprise. "I'll do it again," I warn her.

She doesn't move again as I take her from the room and down the stairs. Nor when I give the front desk worker cash to cover her room and walk out to our bikes. Noah had the smart idea to bring us helmets and we find Asher sitting on the back of Rowan's bike with a wide smile on his face.

"Mama! Look how cool I look," he calls to Sophie.

She lifts herself up enough to see and immediately starts pounding on my back. "He's not riding on a motorcycle! He's too little!"

I swat her on the ass again. "He's bigger than I was the first time I rode on a bike and Rowan will take it easy on the drive back.

He'll be completely fine. I'm going to put you down and you're going to climb on the back of my bike.

A prospect already took all of your things back to the clubhouse, and that's where I'm taking you. ”

I put her on the ground and can't help but chuckle at her appearance. Her struggle has only made her look even sexier. Her hair is mussed, her face is flushed, her nipples are poking through the thin material of her t-shirt. Her breathing is ragged, and each breath pushes her breasts up and out.

“What about my car?” She asks as she nods in its direction.

I look at the piece of shit Camry in front of me. It's old and rusting. It doesn't look like it has much life left in it. “I'll have a prospect come pick it up and have the guys take a look at it in the morning,” I tell her as I usher her onto the back of my bike.

She begrudgingly gets on and lets me strap the helmet onto her head. When I get on, she sits further back, trying to avoid all contact with my body.

“That's not how this works, Soph,” I chide her before taking her arms and wrapping them tightly around my waist. “Don't let go,” I whisper to her as I turn on the engine and peel out of the parking lot.

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SOPHIE

My hands tighten around Grayson's waist as he pulls his bike out of the parking lot.

I press my head into his back and take a deep breath of the familiar leather cut while I try to reign in my anger.

I cannot believe that Grayson had the nerve to show up at the hotel and barge into our room, demanding that we come to the clubhouse with him. Who the hell does he think that he is?

Not that I wanted to stay there a minute longer, but I didn't need Grayson telling me what to do. Especially with the new title he holds. Seeing the president patch on Grayson's cut felt like a blow to the gut, only fueling my frustration with him.

I turn my head to the right and find Asher on the back of Rowan's bike, smiling wide as he holds on tight. Rowan isn't going fast, but seeing my kid on a motorcycle terrifies me. Even if I grew up on them, he's never even been around one. Hell, I haven't been around one for seven years.

Grayson's muscles flex beneath my fingers as he moves the powerful bike down the street.

It's dark out, so the streets are pretty empty, most of the town having already called it a night.

Grayson and Rowan weave through the streets until we're pulling onto a familiar

street.

My stomach clenches as the Sovereign Sons' compound comes into view.

The building looks just as daunting in the dark as I remember it.

The two-story building is spread along the horizon.

I can tell that they've done some remodeling since the last time I saw it, the once light gray siding has been replaced by something darker, and every inch of the compound is illuminated.

We pull up to a gate, stopping long enough for someone to open it from the other side, and then pull up to the front of the building. I don't move as Grayson pulls the motorcycle to a stop or even as he climbs off. I stay rooted in my seat as I look around, so many memories flooding me.

Not all the times I had here were bad. Most of them were good, even. I had friends here. Not just Grayson and Rowan. Most of the club members had kids around my age. We all grew up together. Most of them stayed in town. I didn't.

A small hand clasps my own. I look down and find Asher beside me with a huge smile on his face. I can't help but return it.

"That was so much fun, mama!" He tells me, squeezing my hand. "I want to do it again."

I snort. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves, all right? "

He nods his head eagerly and then looks up at the large building. "What is this place?"

“This is our compound,” Grayson says, stepping up next to us. “You and your mama will be much safer here.”

I roll my eyes as I climb off the bike, allowing myself a moment to let my legs adjust to being on solid ground again. “We would have been fine,” I grumble.

Grayson pins me with a look. I swallow the lump in my throat and pull Asher into my side.

“Come with me,” he orders as he strides toward the building.

I don’t immediately follow. I turn to look for an escape but only find Rowan smirking at me. “Don’t think about it, Soph,” he murmurs. “He wouldn’t let it slide.” He motions for me to follow Grayson.

I sigh but pull Asher along with me, my bare feet soaking in the last of the day’s warmth left in the concrete. Grayson holds the metal door open wide for us and waits for us to enter. I step into the building with my heart in my stomach.

The main room is bustling with activity.

There’s loud music and laughter, with people scattered around the room.

A quick scan tells me I don’t need to cover Asher’s eyes from anything nefarious.

Grayson and Rowan enter the room after me and when the metal door slams closed, the entire room turns to face us.

All noise dies out when their eyes fall on me and I’m suddenly aware that I’m standing here in just a threadbare t-shirt. I push my shoulders back and hold my head high, determined not to let them see my nerves.

“What the hell is she doing here?” A familiar voice calls out.

I look toward the sound and find Cane staring at me. He definitely doesn't look happy to see me. I pull Asher closer to me.

“For those of you who don't know,” Grayson calls out, his voice echoing in the silent room, “This is Sophie Parker, John's daughter.

” The room erupts in whispers, mainly from the people I don't recognize.

“Her and her son will be staying here for the foreseeable future. They are off limits. She is off limits. Do not cause problems or you'll be answering to me. Am I clear?”

Answers erupt in the form of, “yes, pres,” and “sure, pres.”

“Good,” Grayson says. “The main area is off limits for all extracurricular activities while there are kids present.” Groans sound around the room.

“Mama, what are extracircular activities?” Asher whisper shouts from my side. I wince as I shake my head at him, but Rowan's chuckle from behind me lets me know that everyone heard him .

Grayson turns to face me. “Follow me, Noah already has your bags in the room.”

He waits for Asher and me to be beside him before he puts his hand at the small of my back and leads us out of the main area. The sound filters back into the room as we exit and my shoulders slump in relief. Grayson leads us through the familiar hallways until we get to a new one.

“We added on a few years ago,” he says as if reading my mind. He always could do that, sense what I'm thinking.

I nod my head.

He leads us upstairs and down a long hallway, stopping in front of the last room to punch in a code. After the screen lights up green, he opens the door and motions for us to enter.

We step inside and I'm surprised by how nice the space is.

It's nothing like how I remember the club rooms growing up.

This is nicer than my apartment back in Atlanta.

Before us is an open concept living area and kitchen.

There are rooms off to the side that let me believe there are at least three bedrooms and a main bathroom.

The room is part exposed brick and part drywall.

It's masculine, but not too masculine. The kitchen has wood cabinets with black hardware and black appliances.

Instead of a dining room, the kitchen has an island that seats four people.

The living area has two worn leather couches that overlook a large television. It's a beautiful space .

"Wow," I murmur as I take it all in.

"You guys can stay in here," Grayson says, basically ignoring my shock. "You can each take a room. No one will bother you in here. I was serious about the off limits,

comment. If anyone gives you shit, you tell me,” he says as he pins me with a look.

“That’s a bad word,” Asher hisses, making me bite my lip to hide my smile.

“What?” Grayson asks with a furrowed brow.

“You have to put a dollar in the swear jar,” Asher tells him as he puffs out his chest.

Grayson turns his questioning gaze on me.

I shrug my shoulders. “Swear jar.”

Grayson pulls out his wallet and gives Asher a five-dollar bill.

“This should get me by for a day,” he grumbles.

“Kid is going to make a killing here.” He turns and walks toward the door.

“No one can get inside without a code and Rowan, Axel and I are the only ones who know it. Breakfast is at eight, don’t be late. ”

With that, he strides out of the room, and I take my first full breath in an hour.

I wake up enveloped in Grayson’s scent. I turn over and grab my phone, shutting off the alarm before flopping back onto the bed.

Grayson’s bed. It didn’t take me long to figure it out last night.

Grayson is letting us stay in his suite .

The president's suite . For a moment, I didn't feel comfortable sleeping in a space that was my father's, but a quick inventory of the space made me realize that none of this stuff was his, it was all Grayson's.

My dad would have never had anything this nice in his space. I slept like the dead in Grayson's king-sized bed. His bed sheets are the softest I've ever felt. I am choosing to ignore how much comfort his scent gave me, though.

I set my alarm for a half hour early this morning so I could get ready before going down for breakfast. There was no way in hell that I was facing my past without looking my best this morning.

Especially after showing up in just my sleep shirt last night.

My makeup and hair give me a sense of protection like armor.

I roll out of bed and walk into the ensuite bathroom to get ready. This is another nice space. It's definitely more masculine, with terracotta and black tiles, a wood vanity with black countertops, and black fixtures.

Noah, the prospect who collected our bags from the motel, chose rooms for us. He gave me Grayson's room and Asher the bedroom next door. I appreciated that he knew I would want to keep Asher close.

I walk over to the vanity and pull out my cosmetics bag, quickly applying foundation, concealer, bronzer, blush, and a little mascara.

I finish it off with setting spray and then brush my teeth.

When I'm done, I put lip oil on and set to taming my wild hair.

I brush it until it falls in soft waves down my back, thankful that it was already curled the day before.

I use the restroom and then head back into Grayson's bedroom to get dressed.

I pull my duffle bag onto his bed and search through its contents.

I didn't bring all my clothes with me, but I did bring enough to get by.

Just in case I had to stick around to deal with my father's estate.

It'll take a long time for me to restock my clothes and Asher's, but I couldn't afford to go back to Atlanta to get our belongings, and my landlord would clear everything out if I wasn't back in two days to pay the next month's rent.

I've seen it happen to other tenants before.

I sigh as I pull out a pair of distressed black jeans, an off the shoulder Nirvana t-shirt, and a pair of matching underwear and bra. I have a weird thing where I can't wear a set that doesn't match. Not that anyone's taking a peek at my bra or underwear lately . Not in the last seven years.

I quickly strip out of my pajamas and get dressed, pulling a pair of socks from my bag before sliding them on and grabbing my combat boots. When I'm tying up the laces, I hear Asher.

"Mama? Can we get breakfast? I'm starving."

I smile at his sleepy voice. He walks into the room with some crazy bedhead, making my smile spread across my entire face. "Sure thing, buddy. Let's just tackle that bedhead first," I tell him as I reach out and ruffle his head.

He giggles before walking into the bathroom to let me do just that. I get Asher ready the rest of the way and then lead him downstairs to the kitchen.

The club is quiet this morning, only soft music is playing from the great room. When I enter, I find familiar faces at the large table.

Grayson and Rowan's dad, Kurt, greets me with a smile.

"Hey, sweetheart. I didn't believe Ro when he told me you were back, I had to come see it for myself," he says as he rises from his seat and walks over to hug me.

I wrap my arms around him and try to hold back my tears.

"It's so good to see you," he murmurs into my hair.

I almost forgot how much Grayson and Rowan look like him. They share his height, his broad build, and his smile. Looking at Kurt Williams is like looking at his sons' futures.

"It's good to see you, too," I say, my words muffled by his chest.

This man was always like a father to me, so not seeing him for the last seven years has been an unimaginable loss. I was prepared for him to hate me, just like Grayson does. So, it feels good to know he's happy I'm here. At least until he knows the truth .

"Can I get one of those hugs?" A craggly voice says from behind us.

I turn to find Chef waiting with open arms. He looks just like I remember. He's just a few inches shorter than Grayson with a pot belly, short grey hair, and bright smile with a few gold teeth peeking out. I smile and walk over to him, careful not to hug him too tight.

“I’m old, but I’m not going to break from a hug,” he chides as he squeezes me tight.

I laugh and squeeze him tighter.

Chef has been just that since I was little. He’s the chef of the club. He’s also one of the best men I’ve ever met. He’s probably in his eighties now but still looks like he gets around well. This is the man who gave me my love of cooking. We share a special bond.

“Are you still working, old man?” I ask him playfully.

“You’ve been calling me that for years and I just keep getting older,” he laughs. “What else am I gonna do? Retire?”

I pull back and see the unimpressed look he’s giving me. I quickly introduce Chef and Kurt to Asher, not missing the look that they share, or the way that Kurt’s gaze lingers on him.

I look around the room to ease my discomfort and take in the rest of the club members.

They’ve thinned out since last night, so I guess this is the just the Silver Springs chapter.

Most of them are eating quietly at the long table.

My eyes land on Grayson at the head of the table, with Rowan on his right, and who I’m assuming is Axel on his left.

It’s not them that catch my eyes though, it’s my old friend Alice, who is hanging off Grayson’s arm like she’s his.

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GRAYSON

I called for church an hour ago, so when I walk in the room, I'm glad to see everyone in their seats. Church is what we call our meetings. It's where we decide how to earn our money, how to spend it, and what to do about any and every situation that can arise.

Patched members are the only ones allowed to vote in church.

We have a vote on everything, and they have earned their right to have their voices heard.

We sometimes bring in the prospects, but only on less important issues, not ones that can change the club or anything that could be held against us in a court of law.

We don't look to break the law, but sometimes it happens.

Today, I'm calling church for my first official time as president of our club. I walk to the head of our large table and take my seat. Rowan falls in alongside me on my right and Axel takes the seat to my left.

The hierarchy of our club is pretty simple.

You have club officials, patched members, and prospects.

Club officials hold the titles of president, vice president, sergeant at arms, and secretary.

Our vice president is my brother Rowan, he's my second in command.

If I have to leave town, he'll hold down the club in my place.

My sergeant at arms is Axel, my best friend.

His job is to protect me. No matter where I go on club business, he's with me.

Cane, the broody bastard, is our secretary.

He's basically our club's money man. He supervises all our accounts and investments.

We currently have nine patched members in our club, including club officers. Trace, Atlas, Cole, Nash, and Luke sit around the table in their usual seats. Our four prospects, Noah, Theo, Ace and Levi, stand against the wall.

I grab the gavel from the table and bring it down on the block to start our meeting. Everyone looks at me expectantly.

"I know that most of you probably have questions," I start. "I don't know that I have answers for you."

That makes them all chuckle.

"Why is she really here?" Nash asks.

I sigh and run a hand through my hair. "She's in a bad spot," I tell them.

"She was staying at the Sunrise Inn, and I couldn't let that fly.

” Murmurs of agreement rise. I raise my hand to silence them.

“She has a son, and whether we all want her here or not, it’s what John would want, his grandson safe.

It doesn’t matter what Sophie’s relationship with her father was, she’s here and while she’s here, she’s under our protection.

All our protection,” I add a little more forcefully while I pin them with a look.

“In case you missed it last night, she’s off limits. ”

Atlas groans, “Can you make an exception, pres? She’s smoking hot.”

I grind my teeth as Trace leans over to swat the back of Atlas’ head.

Atlas wasn’t in Silver Springs when Sophie lived here, so he has no idea that I have a past with her, he’s only heard the horrible things that John had to say about her over the last few years.

Apparently, that doesn’t skew his opinion of how hot she is.

“What?” Atlas asks. “Don’t act like you guys aren’t thinking it!”

I look around the table and see Nash and Luke hide their grins. They also weren’t around when Sophie lived here. Trace, Cane, and Cole grew up around the club. They know our history. All of it.

“No exceptions,” I say to the table. “Sophie’s son is named Asher, he’s not to be messed with either.

I shouldn't even have to say that since the kid is like six years old.

You jackasses should know better." They all laugh.

"I'm serious about not fucking around in the main room, too," I continue while I'm met with groans.

I roll my eyes. "Keep your dick in your pants unless you're in a room with a door that locks.

You wouldn't want to have to explain to a little kid what the hell you freaks are doing.

" And I wouldn't want to have to explain it to his mother.

"We've had a few reports that the Devil's Knights are trying to weasel their way into Silver Springs.

I want everyone to keep their eyes out for anything suspicious with them.

We don't want a rookie crew coming in here and thinking they can rule over our town. "

The Devil's Knights are a small-time motorcycle club that has been slowly moving toward our territory from Charlotte.

When I say small-time, I mean it. The last we checked; they had five members.

But I've seen other clubs have a jump in numbers and start to cause trouble.

We don't need that in our town. Odds are that they left Charlotte because they

couldn't handle a big town, though.

"Other than that, it's business as usual around here. I need someone to look at Sophie's vehicle, it's already in our shop and on the lift. Personally, it looks like a total loss to me."

"I'll do it, pres," Cane offers.

I nod. "If it's really bad let me know and we'll junk it.

" Sophie would be pissed, but it would be another reason to keep her around.

To keep an eye on her. "Things are going to be quiet around here for a while, so just keep your heads down and do your jobs. I think we could all use a little quiet after the last few days."

"Damn right," Rowan mutters beside me.

"Is no one going to mention how weird it is that Sophie has a kid?" Cole asks.

The room goes silent and everyone who knows that Sophie and I have a past, cast glances my way. My jaw clenches.

"Why does it matter?" Atlas asks, looking around the room and then following everyone's eyes to me.

"It doesn't," I grind out before bringing the gavel down again, signaling the end of the meeting.

I don't acknowledge anyone as I stand up and exit the room, eager to get away from everyone.

I quicken my steps as I walk down the hallway, coming into the common area in a rush.

My eyes immediately find her. She's sitting at the table with her son, both of them eating a sandwich and laughing. My chest aches at the sight of them.

The truth is it does matter that Sophie has a kid by another man.

It matters more than it should. You can't spend your life planning a future with someone and then be perfectly fine when you see them, having that future with someone else.

Even if they're not in the picture. Not that I know that Asher's father isn't in the picture, I'm just assuming since Sophie is hurting for money and Noah's background check didn't show any involvement.

I swipe my hand over my face and back out of the room.

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SOPHIE

Bang. Bang. Bang.

I roll over and sigh, breathing in Grayson's scent and trying to go back to sleep.

Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang.

I sit up and look around the room, frowning at the still dark space. I wince as I look at my phone, the brightness temporarily blinding me. 2:00 am. It's two in the morning. Who the hell is knocking on the door?

I drag myself out of bed and stomp toward the door. I swing it open with a growl. "What the fuck do you want?"

Alice is standing there, drunk as fuck, a shocked expression on her face. "Where is Gray?" She slurs, trying to look past me into his suite.

I move to block her. "Not here, Alice. Why the fuck are you knocking on the door at two in the morning?"

"It's Candy now. Why are you in Gray's room?" She asks haughtily .

"Because this is where Grayson wants me and my son to be," I smirk at her. "Now go away and don't fucking knock again. If you wake my kid up, I'll kick your ass, Candy ."

I don't give her a chance to answer before I slam the door in her face and stomp back to my bedroom.

That next morning, I'm livid when Asher and I walk down for breakfast. I didn't fall back to sleep after Candy decided to bang on the door, so I'm crabby as hell.

Asher can tell I'm in a mood and he watches me warily as we walk into the main area.

My glare falls on Candy as she nurses a coffee on one of the couches. She looks away when she sees me.

"Mama, are you okay?" Asher tugs my hand to get my attention.

I deflate a little. "I'm okay, buddy," I tell him. "I just didn't sleep much. Why don't we get something to eat?"

He nods his head eagerly and pulls me into the kitchen where Chef is hard at work. He looks up from his pot as we come inside.

"What can I get for my favorite people this morning?" He asks, abandoning his task.

Asher giggles. "Can I have pancakes and eggs?"

"You sure can!" Chef cheers before turning to me. "How about you?"

"I'll take the same, please."

"Coming right up!" Chef says before setting to work.

I don't know how this man manages to keep track of all the food he's cooking, but he does. He checks on the food he's already started while he gets the pancake batter made, and cracks eggs and scrambles them. In about five minutes, he has an amazing meal made for us.

I thank him and grab both plates, letting Asher lead us back into the common area. He takes a seat at the end of the table, and we dig in. We're finishing up when I see Grayson.

My jaw clenches when Candy rushes up to him, she slides her hand up Grayson's arm and around his neck, pulling herself close. Grayson pushes her hand off him and backs away from her, his eyes finding mine.

He starts to walk away but I jump from my seat, telling Asher to follow me. Before Grayson walks out of the room I call out.

"Grayson! Don't you dare walk out of this room."

He stops in his tracks but doesn't turn around. The rest of the room goes eerily silent. They're all probably in shock that I yelled at their precious president.

"Asher, go outside and play on the swing set, okay?" I say, softening my tone for him

.

He nods his head and goes in that direction, glancing back at us with wide eyes before he goes through the door. I nod in thanks to Axel who follows him outside. When the door closes, I turn my anger on Grayson again.

"So, tell me. Is it a common occurrence for club sluts to be knocking on your door at two in the morning?" I growl.

I hear a few hoots and hollers. Grayson's shoulders stiffen.

"Maybe I should make it clear that the only people in that room are me and my son," I call out, loud enough that everyone can hear.

"You can tell your whores where to find you."

I gasp when Grayson spins around and advances on me. I try to back away, but I'm not fast enough. He reaches me in a few strides, his shoulder rams into my hips as he swings me over his shoulder, smacking my ass hard.

Cheers erupt in the quiet space as Grayson takes me in the direction of his room. My room. Whatever it is now.

I pound on his back as I yell for him to put me down, but it's to no avail. He trudges up the stairs and to the room, punching in the code and moving us inside. He marches into the bedroom and tosses me onto the bed, watching me bounce with a smirk.

"What the hell is your problem?" I growl as I hop off the bed and stride toward him.

"You," he barks. "You have been gone for seven fucking years, and you think that you can come into this clubhouse and run things? That's not how this fucking works.

I brought you here so that you wouldn't have to sleep in that slimy ass fucking motel.

I am the president of this club, and what I say goes. "

He advances on me, pushing me back against a wall. His smell envelops me. It's so much more potent than his lingering scent on the bed. I'm panting, my chest brushing his abdomen with every inhale.

He reaches out and brushes the hair from my face with his rough fingers and I gasp at the contact. “What’s the real problem, Sophie?” He rasps. “Are you mad that Candy was knocking on my door too late last night? Or are you mad that she was knocking on my door at all?”

“I’m not jealous,” I huff, putting my hands on his abs and attempting to push him away.

“I didn’t mention jealousy,” Grayson laughs as he leans down closer, letting our lips brush. My stomach dips and heat pools in my core at the slight contact. “She won’t knock on the door again.”

“What?” I ask breathlessly.

“Candy won’t knock on the door again,” Grayson says as he steps back and walks toward the door.

I stand there in shock. I thought that he was going to kiss me, and he was just trying to get a rise out of me. I groan after I hear the door to the suite close. Grayson still affects me more than I’d like him to.

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GRAYSON

I adjust my hard cock as I walk out of my suite and down the hallway. I almost kissed Sophie. I came so close to doing it and the desire was evident on her face. She wanted me to. I couldn't do it, though. She chose to leave. She chose this.

I walk down the hallway and descend the stairs, ignoring the main room and walking outside for some fresh air.

I find Axel and Asher there. We put in a swing set for Cane's daughter a few years back, his ex left and he needed us all to rally behind him.

We wanted him to know that there would always be a safe place for his kid at the club.

Now, Sophie's kid is enjoying the space too.

Axel looks up at my approach. "You good?"

"Yeah," I grunt. "You can go in, I've got him."

Axel shoots me a questioning look like he's not sure if I'm serious and I give him a nod that I am. He turns around and goes inside, leaving me with Sophie's son.

"You like the swings?" I ask, unsure of what to say to him.

"Yeah," he says with a grin. "I like going high up."

I smile. “Me too.”

I take a seat on the empty swing next to him, and we sit in silence for a while, just enjoying the swings. When Asher stops, I do too. He looks over at me with the same blue eyes his mother has, and it makes my heart stop for a minute.

He catches sight of something behind me, and I turn around to see what he’s looking at. “You like football?” I ask as my eyes land on the discarded ball.

“Yeah,” he says. “I love to watch football. Mama lets me watch it every Sunday when it’s on.”

I chuckle. “Your mama always did like football.”

“How do you know her?” He asks.

I face him. “I’ve known your mama my entire life. We grew up in this club together. Our dads were both members. Sophie wasn’t just my friend; she was friends with my siblings as well. She was more like family, really.”

Ashers face falls. “I wish I had that,” he admits softly.

“Is it just you and your mama?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry. But now that you’re here, I think you’re going to make a lot of friends,” I tell him .

“You think so?” He asks hopefully.

I nod and give him a smile. “I know so. Do you want to throw the ball around?” I ask him, gesturing toward the football.

“Yeah!” He cheers, jumping from his seat and running over to the ball.

I spend the next few minutes showing him how to hold the ball and how to throw it properly. He’s a quick study and has a pretty good spiral going.

“How did you get so good at football?” He asks me when I throw the ball to him.

“I used to play in high school. I actually had a scholarship offer to play in Alabama, but I didn’t take it.”

“Why not?” He asks, but I don’t miss the snick of the door closing or the way his gaze lands on someone behind me. I know it’s Sophie without even turning around.

“Well, sometimes in life there are things bigger than your dreams. I loved football but there were other things that I loved more. I couldn’t see myself moving a few states away.

I couldn’t choose football. Football could have only led me to a career that lasted a decade if I was lucky enough not to be injured.

My future was here. My future was supposed to be a lifetime,” I say as I lock eyes with Sophie.

“What happened to your future?” Asher asks softly.

“It left me in the dust.”

SOPHIE

My heart is in my throat when Grayson brushes by me to walk inside. Not just from hearing Grayson's words, but from seeing Grayson and Asher together. They have never looked more alike than in that moment.

The same dark hair and tanned skin, the same smirk. Asher is Grayson's spitting image. The only trait he got from me was my blue eyes. I need to tell Grayson. I need to come clean.

The thought truly terrifies me, though. What if he hates me? What if he doesn't believe me? What if he doesn't care about Asher? I'm more worried about what this will mean for Asher than I am for myself.

If Grayson hates me, that doesn't change a thing. If he hates Asher, it would crush him. And me.

"Mama, Grayson is so cool!" Asher cheers as he runs over to me, tossing himself into my arms.

I catch him with a grunt and squeeze him tight. "Oh yeah?" I rasp .

"Yeah! He played catch with me and showed me how to throw the football. Did you know that he was supposed to go to college on a scholarship? He gave it up, mama!"

My heart clenches. I know deep down that Grayson could never hate Asher. He was playing catch with him and got us out of harm's way. He's already doing things that

my father never did, and he doesn't even know the truth.

"That is cool," I tell him. "How about we go inside, and you can watch a little tv while I work on getting you signed up for school?"

He rolls his eyes and sighs dramatically. "Do I have to go back to school?"

"You do," I deadpan. "Let's go."

I motion him inside and lead him through the clubhouse, ignoring the curious glances as we go.

Besides Candy, no one has been rude to me, but I know that some of them have questions.

I know that they're curious as to why I'm back in town and why I left in the first place.

But Grayson deserves those answers before anyone else.

When we get back to our room, I set Asher up in the living room with one of his favorite shows.

He's content while I get online and sign him up for school.

One thing I know is that the Silver Springs school system is great.

Asher will get more one on one education here than he ever would have gotten in Atlanta .

Surprisingly, it doesn't take long to get Asher enrolled in school.

Something inside me knew that I wouldn't be returning to Georgia, because I packed everything important.

Maybe it was intuition, maybe I just knew that my landlord was an asshole and would pull something when I left.

Either way, I'm glad. The process would have been a lot longer if I didn't have the documents I needed.

"You're all set to start school next week, buddy," I tell Asher as I close my laptop.

He groans and flops back on the couch. "Do I have to?"

I laugh as I walk over to the couch, staring down at my dramatic son. "Yes, you have to. But you're going to like Silver Springs Elementary. I went there and made lots of friends."

"I could just stay home with you. You could teach me, and I could learn to cook from you and Chef," he says with pleading eyes.

"Sorry, bud. Teaching is out of my depth. But I promise you're going to like it there," I say as I tousle his hair. "Speaking of Chef, I need to go speak to him. You want to come with?"

He nods his head eagerly and jumps from the couch.

Chef has quickly become one of his favorite people here.

Probably because Chef doesn't say no to any of the foods Asher requests.

I practically have to run to keep up with Asher as he takes off out of our room and

through the halls of the clubhouse, eager to get to his friend.

The kitchen is busy, but that doesn't stop Chef from wrapping Asher in a big hug when he sees him. I smile when I see both of their faces light up in joy.

"What can I get two of my favorite people?" Chef asks when their hug breaks apart.

"French fries!" Asher cheers, jumping up and down.

I shake my head and chuckle. "We're not here for food. I actually wanted to ask you something," I tell him as I shift from foot to foot.

"Sure, sweetheart," he says, wiping his hands on a towel.

"I start my new job tomorrow and I need someone to watch Asher," I say with a wince. "I don't really trust anyone here yet, so I was wondering if you could do it?"

Chef's face breaks into a big smile. "I'd love to have a sous chef for the day. What do you say, Asher? Want to hang out with me tomorrow?"

"Yes!" Asher cheers. "I can help you make french fries!"

Chef chuckles. "The boy loves his french fries."

I smile. "That he does. Thank you, Chef. It means a lot."

"No problem, sweetheart."

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GRAYSON

On Saturday morning I walk into the main room of the clubhouse and find it full of members.

It's a late start for me, but sleep doesn't seem to find me anymore.

I just keep thinking of Sophie and how she's created this whole other life without me.

When I do find sleep, she invades my dreams. Not just her, her son, too.

I felt a connection to him quicker than I've ever felt to anyone else before. Probably because he's half Sophie.

I almost stop in my tracks when I find Candy sitting next to my seat at the table, like the spot belongs to her.

I'm going to have to put a stop to this nonsense before it goes any further.

I shouldn't have even entertained hooking up with her.

I knew that it would cause problems and that she would think more into it, even though I told her it didn't mean anything.

I shake my head and internally groan at my drunken self.

This is why I have never showed any of the club whores any attention, it always leads

to drama.

I ignore Candy's excited gaze and walk straight into the kitchen, coming to a halt when I find Asher beside Chef wearing a matching apron and a huge grin.

"Hey pres," Chef calls over his shoulder when he sees me. "What can we get you?"

Asher giggles as he helps Chef roll out dough for cinnamon rolls.

"Uh, where is Sophie?" I ask, looking around the room like she's about to walk in.

"She had to go to work!" Asher replies cheerfully. "I get to be Chef's souie chef."

Chef barks out a laugh and I chuckle. "Oh yeah?" I ask. "How's that going?"

"Awesome! Chef is teaching me how to make cinnamon rolls. I love cinnamon rolls," he adds with a wistful look.

"Me too, buddy. Me too," I murmur. "How long is Soph at work?" I ask Chef.

"Until four," Chef replies.

I hum in response and grab a plate to dish up some scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast that is already precooked and in warmers.

Chef honestly spoils us. He's been with the club for my entire life and hardly ever takes time off.

Hell, he should be retired by now, but he can't seem to leave us behind.

Not that I mind, though. It would be hell to try and find a replacement because there

is no replacement for Chef .

Before I walk out of the kitchen I turn to face the duo. “If either of you need me, I’ll be in my office all day, okay?”

“You got it, pres,” Chef says.

“You got it!” Asher parrots.

I give him a smile before turning and walking back into the main room and over to the table.

My smile immediately drops when I find Candy still sitting there.

I don’t let my steps falter, even though I don’t want to deal with her right now.

I sigh as I fall into my seat, setting my plate on the table in front of me.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Gray,” Candy croons as she stands from her chair and moves toward me.

I raise my hand to stop her. “Candy, don’t,” I mutter.

Her eyes widen in hurt, but she sits back down.

“I’m not trying to hurt your feelings,” I soften my tone, “But we’ve talked about this.

I’m not looking for anything. I was just looking to get off.

I know that it sounds horrible, but it’s the truth. You knew that going into it.”

“I just thought that you would change your mind,” she mutters as she twists her fingers in her lap, avoiding my gaze.

I swipe my fingers through my hair, pushing it off my forehead. “I’m not going to change my mind.”

“Is this about her?” Candy snaps. “Everything was fine before she moved in.”

I furrow my brow. “Sophie? No. ”

She huffs a laugh. “She still has you wrapped around her finger. It’s just a matter of time before she’s leaving your ass without an explanation again.”

“Excuse me?” I growl. “Don’t put your inability to understand a hookup for what it is on me.

I was very fucking clear that hooking up would lead to nothing further for us.

If you can’t take a hint and back off, I’ll be forced to ban you from the club,” I sit up straighter, angry that she’s doing this.

She looks at me in shock and I hold up my hand to stop her from speaking.

“I don’t want to have to do that, Candy, but I will.

I don’t know what kind of vendetta you have against Sophie, but she has nothing to do with my decision on this.

If you try to fight with her again, it will, though.

Your dad was a long-time member of this club, that’s why you’ve been welcome

here, but those decisions come down to me.

You know what club whores are here for. If you don't feel comfortable in the position any longer, you are more than welcome to leave, no one will stop you.

But you can't expect relationships with the men you're hooking up with.

That's not how it works, and you know it. You grew up here."

Candy's jaw clenches as she fights back tears. "You would still do anything for her, wouldn't you?"

I sigh. "Candy, I'm not going to keep having this conversation if it's only running us around in circles.

Like I said, if you can't back off from me, you won't be welcome at the club.

If you pick another fight with Soph, you won't be welcome at the club.

If you try to force a relationship on any of the other members, you won't be welcome at the club. Am. I. Clear?"

She nods her head and then rises from her seat.

She rushes out of the room, and I sit back in my seat.

Everyone in the room is looking at me, letting me know that they heard every part of the conversation.

It doesn't matter, though. I was telling the truth .

If Candy can't back off, she's out of here.

After a moment, I pull my plate closer to me and start to eat. Axel sits down beside me with a smirk firmly in place. "Don't start," I warn him.

He raises his hands as if to say, "I didn't say anything," and I just glare at him. He laughs. "Just wanted to let you know that a few of the Tennessee members are swinging by for a few days."

I nod my head and finish chewing. "Any particular reason for their visit?" It isn't odd for members from other charters to stop in occasionally. Sometimes they are in the area for business, sometimes for pleasure. When it's business, we like to know what it is and if it will affect us.

"Eric has to sign some paperwork for his baby mama," he mutters with an eyeroll.

Eric was once a member of our charter, but after causing enough problems, John told him to choose a charter to patch over to or leave the club for good. Eric chose our Tennessee charter, where things are a bit more lenient. The prick left his child and ex in North Carolina, though .

"Hopefully Charolette is having him sign over his parental rights," I mutter.

"If she's smart, she is," he mutters.

"Tell the prospects to set up rooms for them and to order enough pizzas for everyone tonight," I tell him.

"No problem, pres," Axel murmurs before leaving me to my breakfast. And my thoughts of Sophie.

SOPHIE

I pull myself closer to Grayson's back, my cheek pressing firmly into the Sovereign Sons emblem on his cut. He's been a member of the club since he got his driver's license, but he promised me that he has no desire to be a ranking member of the club. This is enough for him.

His football scholarship wouldn't let him, anyways. He'll be heading for Alabama in the fall, and I'm desperate to follow him there. I've applied to three culinary schools near Tuscaloosa, but I haven't heard anything back yet . I know that he won't be leaving me behind, though.

We pull into the clubhouse parking lot and Grayson helps me off his bike.

The second I'm standing, he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me close, he leans down, and his mouth collides with mine.

Grayson's kiss is slow and sensual, making me forget every last thought in my head.

When we break apart, we breathe each other in, our noses pressed together.

Raucous laughter draws our attention to the club garage.

My father stands there with a few of the members, but my attention slides to the man beside him.

James is the new president of the Tennessee charter of Sovereign Sons.

He and my father are close. Usually, that would already make me uneasy.

But the way he's looking at me makes my stomach sour.

Grayson feels my body tense. He pulls me close and wraps a protective arm around me. He follows my line of sight and sees the way that James is looking at me. I feel his body stiffen beside me.

"Let's go inside, baby," he murmurs softly. "I don't fucking like that guy."

A pan falling to the floor in the kitchen draws me out of my daydream. I find myself thinking of Grayson more and more these days. Not only in my sleep, but all day.

My first shift at Betsy's Diner has been pretty damn great.

I've waitressed before, but none of the restaurants have been like this one.

Every customer has been kind and considerate.

The tips have been great and so has Flo, not that I'm surprised.

She's a godsend. I wish everyone was like her.

Even though I wasn't excited about waitressing again, I think I'm going to like this job.

I'm busy clearing the tables from our lunch rush when the door dings.

I don't bother looking up since Flo is standing at the front counter but can feel the air change.

When I look up, I find three Sovereign Sons members walking over to one of my booths.

Their patches say that they're from the Tennessee chapter, but I don't see any of their faces so I'm not sure if I know any of them.

I take a steadying breath and take the dirty dishes back to the kitchen, dropping them off with our dishwasher, Saul, before heading back out to wipe down the tables. When I'm done, I head over to the booth to take their orders.

"Hi guys, what can I get for you?" I ask without making eye contact.

"Three coffees, darlin'," one of the men answers.

"Great," I reply while setting down three menus. "I'll be right back."

I walk over to the countertop where Flo is waiting with a fresh pot of coffee and three mugs.

I smile gratefully at her and grab the tray to take to the men.

When I set it down, I avoid eye contact still, hoping the men won't recognize me.

They order their food, and I slink away to the kitchen to wait for it to be ready.

When Richard dings the bell, I put their plates on a tray and sigh before heading out to face them.

"Here we go, guys," I say as I put their plates in front of them, eager to step away again. "Anything else I can get you?"

“Actually, we could use some more coffee.”

I nod and grab the pot, taking the tray back to Saul and then waiting at the front counter until Flo hands me a new pot. I smile at her in thanks and then walk back over to their booth.

“Fresh coffee,” I call out. “Careful, it’s hot.”

I set the pot down, but before I can turn around, a hand reaches out and grabs my arm, yanking me back. I frown down at the man, finding familiar dark eyes watching me.

“I thought that was you, Sophie,” Eric sneers. “Daddy died so now you think you’re welcome in this town?” He twists my arm painfully making me whimper.

“Hey! Don’t be grabbing her!” Flo hollers as she moves around the counter, she’s not fast enough, though.

Eric grabs the fresh pot of coffee and pours it over my arm.

I scream as the hot liquid burns my skin.

He releases my arm only to shove me to the floor, all while his two buddies watch on.

They rise from their seats as Flo rushes to my side, yelling for Richard and Saul to help.

I hear the door ding as they exit, but the pain is excruciating as Richard brings ice water out to submerge my arm in.

The next thirty minutes are a blur. The paramedics show up and so do the police. I

hear Flo speaking with them while the paramedics load me onto the bus, saying that I need to get checked out at the hospital.

The ride to the hospital is short, but all I think about is how am I going to pay for this? I just started this job. I don't have health insurance. I don't have any money saved. How am I going to work with a burnt arm?

The hospital is quiet when we get there, which isn't odd for a small town like Silver Springs. The emergency room doctor asks me what happened and winces when I tell him. He lifts the loose bandaging from the wound and tells the nurse about what he needs.

They give me something for the pain and then clean the burn before applying an ointment and bandaging it.

"I'll print out your care instructions, just make sure you keep the burn clean and wrapped for now," the nurse tells me softly. "I'll be right back with your prescription and instructions."

She walks out of the room and not even a second later, Grayson and Rowan barge inside. Grayson's eyes are wide as they land on me and skate over me from head to toe. His jaw clenches when he sees the bandage around my arm and he's next to my bed in the next second.

"What the hell happened?" He growls, fisting his hands at his sides.

I look between the two of them and then scoff. "Like you care, you probably rejoiced when they told you what they did to me." I look down at my hands, not wanting to even look at them.

Grayson's rough hand clasps mine. "What the hell are you talking about? Who did

this? Flo just called me and told me to get my ass to the hospital because you had been hurt, she didn't say what happened."

I look up into familiar blue eyes and can see the truth in his words.

He squeezes my hand encouragingly. I sigh.

"Eric Tapper showed up at the diner. I didn't know that it was him, I just thought it was three members of the Tennessee charter.

I tried to avoid eye contact with them because I was hoping none of them would recognize me.

One of them asked for more coffee, when I came back with it, Eric grabbed my arm and poured the fresh coffee on my arm.

He pushed me to the ground and then took off," I trail off.

"Oh my gosh," I sit up straight. "They didn't pay!

Flo is going to be pissed. What if she fires me? "

Grayson's other hand squeezes my shoulder. "Calm down. Flo isn't going to be mad at you over that, you've been gone too long if you've forgotten how she is."

I can hear the tension in his voice. He's furious. He didn't get along with Eric back in the day. Eric caused a lot of unnecessary drama for the club.

"Did Eric say anything?" Rowan asks, his brow furrowed.

"He said something about me coming back now that my dad is dead, I don't

remember it word for word,” I mutter.

“Fucking prick,” Rowan growls .

The nurse walks back into the room and slows her steps when she sees Grayson and Rowan. “Are you okay, Sophie?”

“I’m fine,” I murmur softly. I don’t blame her for being skeptical. Grayson and Rowan are huge and bikers.

She nods her head and walks over to my bedside, handing me a paper.

“These are your aftercare instructions, and your prescription has been sent over to your pharmacy. The doctor doesn’t want you to work for a week, so make sure you follow through.

The skin on your arm will make a full recovery as long as you follow these instructions,” she looks at me pointedly.

“She’ll follow the instructions,” Grayson says. I glare in his direction. “I’ll make sure of it.”

“Perfect,” the nurse says with a smile. “Best of luck, Sophie. If you notice any signs of infection, don’t hesitate to come back. You guys are free to leave.”

With that, she turns and exits the room, leaving me with the two brooding men beside me.

“Let’s get you home,” Grayson murmurs softly, giving me a gentle tug on my hand.

I sigh but let him help me from the bed. Rowan grabs the discharge papers and

Grayson leads me down the hallway. We exit the hospital, and I see their bikes parked right outside the door.

“Couldn’t find an actual spot to park in?” I ask dryly .

“I was in a rush,” Grayson grumbles before stopping in front of his bike and letting me hop on. He hands me a helmet and then climbs on in front of me, starting his engine and waiting for me to wrap my arms around him. When I do, he gently adjusts them to hold on tighter and then we’re off.

Something about being back on Grayson’s bike feels right to me. My arms tight around his waist, my face to his back, the smell of his leather cut engulfing me. Something about how he rushed to me when I was hurt. It feels like home.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:55 am

GRAYSON

I revel in the feeling of Sophie's arms around my waist. I can't deny how right it feels to have her on the back of my bike with her arms wrapped around me. It feels like she never left. Like we never parted.

Her presence almost calms the anger brewing inside me. Almost. The rage that I feel towards Eric is boiling inside me, eager to escape.

The ride to the clubhouse is too short, and too long, all at once. I'm desperate to keep Sophie close to me but also chomping at the bit to beat the shit out of Eric.

I pull past the clubhouse gates and park beside the door.

Rowan parks beside me, looking just as pissed off as I am.

I climb off my bike and turn around to help Sophie.

My jaw tightens as I take in the bandage covering her arm.

How anyone feels comfortable hurting a woman is beyond me.

Sophie didn't deserve this shit and I'm going to make sure that Eric pays for it.

I reach up and unbuckle her helmet, gently pulling it from her head and smoothing her blonde hair away from her face.

I place the helmet on one of my handlebars and then clasp Sophie's hand in mine, leading her into the clubhouse, avoiding the main room at all costs.

I know that I'll go straight after Eric, and I don't want Sophie anywhere near the fighting.

When we get to my suite, I punch in the code and find Chef and Asher inside. I turn around to grab the papers from my brother who followed me knowing that I was about to blow up on Eric. I usher Sophie inside and step in after her.

Asher turns when he hears us. "Mama! Grayson!" He cheers as he runs over to us. He halts in his steps when he sees Sophie's arm. "What happened mama?"

"I just got hurt at work," Sophie grimaces. "I'm okay."

Asher closes the distance between them and wraps his arms around her, making my heart clench. "I'm glad you're okay, mama."

"Me too, buddy," she murmurs into his hair as she returns his hug.

Chef looks at me questioningly and my grim expression must give him all the answers he needs. He nods his head before I turn and storm from the room.

Rowan falls into step beside me as I rush down the stairs and into the main room.

Laughter fills the space as everyone jokes with the three assholes from Tennessee.

I don't say a word as I approach, but my men know that something is about to go down from my demeanor.

They clear the way. Eric doesn't know what's happening until he turns in my

direction.

The smile doesn't even fully fall from his face before my fist connects with it.

I knock him to the ground and my knees follow, hitting the hardwood floor as I rain down punches. I hear arguing behind me and know that my men are holding back the other two assholes, but I don't care about that. All I care about is serving justice.

"You think that you can touch what's mine?" I yell as I land another punch to his jaw.

He makes a feeble attempt to punch me, but my anger and surprise work to my advantage. I land one final blow and the fight leaves him. The asshole slumps to the floor, knocked out.

SOPHIE

I release Asher from my hold when I hear the door click shut behind me. I glance in that direction and I'm disappointed when I see that Grayson left. My heart sinks a little. I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't him walking away after how he reacted to my injury.

"Why don't you go take a shower and get your pj's on? Maybe we can watch a movie before bedtime tonight," I tell Asher.

"Heck yeah!" He cheers, rushing out of the room to do as I say.

"That man still loves you," Chef says when Asher is out of earshot.

"What?" I ask nervously.

He chuckles. "Grayson still loves you. I could tell something happened the second you both walked into the room. He's always been protective of you. I just hope he's not going to land himself in jail for taking care of it," he trails off .

"What do you mean?" I ask, my eyes wide.

"I mean that he walked out of here to go take care of whatever it is that happened."

"Oh my gosh," I groan as I rush toward the door. "Please, stay with Asher. I need to go stop him."

I push open the door and rush down the hallway, not waiting for a response from Chef. As I run down the stairs my feet barely hit the floor. I hear the commotion from the main room before I get there. It's different from the laughter that filled the clubhouse when we entered. Fuck.

I reach the main room when everything gets quiet, the only sound in the room is heavy breathing. My eyes find Grayson. He's hovering over an unconscious Eric. Rowan and Axel are holding back the other two members from Tennessee.

I push my way through the crowd and stop beside Grayson.

"Are you okay?" I ask as I drop to my knees beside him.

He looks at me with wild eyes and nods his head once.

I look down at his hands and see his busted knuckles.

I stand and offer him my hand. He looks at it cautiously before grabbing it and pulling himself to stand.

I walk him out of the room, ignoring everyone's stares.

I tug him through the clubhouse, up the stairs, and down the hall to his suite, not letting go of his hand until we're inside.

We find Chef and Asher watching the first Jurassic Park movie.

Asher is so into the movie that he doesn't hear us enter, which is for the best since I won't have to explain what happened to Grayson.

When we walk into the bedroom, I close the door behind us and urge Grayson into

the bathroom.

He's silent the entire time that I search for a first aid kit, finding one under the sink.

I open the kit and nod for Grayson to sit on the toilet.

When he does, I pull out the alcohol and pour it on gauze before cleaning his knuckles.

He doesn't complain, but he does suck in a breath.

"What were you thinking?" I admonish softly as I toss the gauze into the trash bin.

"He hurt you," Grayson rasps.

My heart clenches. "That doesn't mean you go out and fight him."

"He didn't put up much of a fight," he mutters.

I snort, making Grayson look up at me. His lips twitch when he sees my face. "I could see that," I choke out. "Did you even give him a chance to?"

"Nope," he smirks. "I didn't think he deserved one."

"Fair enough," I shrug before going back to cleaning him up. His knuckles aren't bad now that they're clean, so I put a little antiseptic ointment on them. "All better."

"All better," he repeats hoarsely.

"Do you want to have dinner and watch a movie with us?" I ask before I think better of it .

“What?” He asks, shock lacing his voice.

“Uh, I just thought you might want to hang out with me and Asher for a bit. He has this current obsession with the Jurassic Park movies, so I hope that you like them. Anyways, I thought you might like to avoid everything downstairs for a bit. I understand if you don’t want to.

I’m rambling, so I’ll stop now,” I groan as I start to pull away.

Grayson gently grabs my uninjured arm, stopping me. “I’d like that,” he murmurs, his beautiful hazel eyes finding mine.

I lick my lips and nod. “I’ll ask Chef if he can bring us up some food. Any requests?”

“I’m fine with whatever.”

I nod my head and then point over my shoulder. “I’ll go ask then.”

He chuckles as I back out of the bathroom, eager to put some space between us. I walk back into the great room of the suite and take a seat on the couch next to Asher.

“Do you two need anything?” Chef asks.

I look over at him and frown at the smirk on his face. “Could you please, bring something up for the three of us? We’re going to eat dinner and watch a movie.”

“No problem, sweetheart,” Chef murmurs as he pats Asher’s leg and gets up from the couch. “I’ll bring something right up. ”

Asher waves at him without even looking away from the screen. I shake my head at my kid. He has a serious obsession with dinosaurs.

I hear Grayson exit the bedroom and I hold my breath until he takes the seat that Chef vacated. “I hear we’re watching Jurassic Park tonight,” he murmurs as his arm spreads over the back of the couch, his fingers skimming my shoulder.

Asher’s head whips in his direction and he launches himself at Grayson. It’s funny that he ignored me and Chef talking, but the second Grayson says something, he doesn’t care about the movie anymore. My heart squeezes at the sight of them. Grayson wraps his arms around Asher with a laugh.

“Is it okay that I join you and your mom for dinner and a movie?” Grayson asks him.

Asher beams up at him. “Heck yeah, it is!”

I open my eyes and stretch, taking in the great room of the apartment.

It’s dark and the credits are rolling on the second Jurassic Park movie.

I couldn’t say no to Asher since it’s technically the last true night of summer for him.

Tomorrow night he’ll be going to bed early so he can get in a routine and be ready for school bright and early on Wednesday morning.

I turn my head to the right and suck in a breath at what I see. Asher and Grayson are both asleep. Asher’s head is on Grayson’s chest and Grayson’s arm is wrapped tightly around Asher. That’s it . I have to tell him. I can’t keep this secret any longer.

I don’t want to destroy this moment, but Asher needs to go to sleep, and Grayson and I need to talk, so I gently shake them both awake. They look around with the same sleepy eyes and give me the same sleepy smile.

“It’s time for bed, buddy,” I murmur softly as I reach out and brush the soft, dark curls off Asher’s forehead.

“Okay, mama,” he whispers as he sits up. “Thanks for watching movies with us, Grayson,” he says as he gives Grayson another hug.

“Anytime, Ash,” Grayson murmurs.

Asher gives me a hug and a kiss and then goes to his room and closes the door.

“Can I stay here tonight?” Grayson asks, making my heart jump. He must see the surprise on my face because he continues, “I just need to know that you’re both safe.” I bite my lip and nod before standing and pulling him toward the bedroom. “I can stay on the couch,” he offers.

“It’s not comfortable. Besides, we’ve shared a bed on lots of occasions. I trust you,” I tell him. It’s the truth. I do trust Grayson. It didn’t take long for him to weasel his way back into my life, into my heart.

I leave Grayson in the bedroom as I go into the bathroom to try and steel my nerves. I shower and brush my teeth. I don’t really have anything nice to wear for bed, so I settle for an oversized t-shirt from Grayson’s closet.

When I step back into the bedroom, Grayson is already in bed, his shirtless, tanned torso on display.

My eyes track over the familiar and new ink covering his arms and chest and the hard muscles of his abdomen.

His chest rises and falls softly as he sleeps.

He fell asleep again. I sigh as I walk to my side of the bed and climb inside.

Grayson reaches for me as soon as I'm laying down, like he's drawn to me.

"We need to talk, Gray," I chastise.

"Tomorrow," he murmurs softly before kissing my temple.

My eyes close at the sweet touch and then I'm blinking back the tears that form. I sink further into his embrace. Tomorrow. I'll tell him tomorrow.

GRAYSON

I wake up engulfed in warmth. I breathe deeply and devour the familiar scent of berries and vanilla that surrounds me. Sophie.

I couldn't leave Sophie and Asher last night. Not after feeling like a family, not after what happened to her. I didn't plan on sleeping in her bed, but I'm not going to complain about waking up with her draped over my chest.

I slowly slide out from under her, careful not to wake her up.

I know she wants to talk, but I'm nervous about what she could want to talk about.

I'm just not ready. So, I'm taking the coward's way out and leaving the room before she wakes up.

We can talk later when I've had coffee. After I've dealt with Eric.

I climb off the bed and slip into the bathroom, relieving myself and then quickly brushing my teeth. I grab a t-shirt and jeans out of my closet and dress quickly, slipping on my cut, socks and a pair of boots. I creep out of the bedroom and sneak a peek at Asher next door.

He's sprawled out on the mattress and breathing deeply. His face is so peaceful that it actually makes my chest ache. I gently close his door and walk out of my suite. He's such a cool kid and he deserves the world.

It's still early, but I texted Rowan and Axel last night to set up church for this morning.

We have to deal with the guys from Tennessee.

Especially Eric. I know that I'll have to bring in the Nashville Charter's President, James, on the issue.

Even if I don't like the asshole. He will get the chance to punish his members the way he sees fit.

Eric, on the other hand, will get two rounds of justice. As is the Sovereign Sons' way.

Rowan and Axel are waiting for me outside of church with grim expressions on their faces. I arch a brow in question.

"He's running his mouth," Axel grumbles. "Just warning you."

"Let him," I scoff. "He's just going to make it worse."

I walk into the room with Rowan and Axel flanking me and everyone falls silent as we take our seats. Everyone but Eric. Someone had the good sense to shove something in the asshole's mouth, though. So, really, it's just a lot angry mumbling.

I ignore him and slam down the gavel, bringing our meeting to a start.

"We're here this morning to shell out justice," I begin, taking a moment to make eye contact with each of my brothers.

"Eric Tapper, Chris James, and Jack Adams came into our territory and hurt someone under my protection. Chris and Jack, even though I think you deserve the same damn

punishment as Eric, that's not how this club works.

I will let James decide your punishment, but you will be leaving my territory as soon as this meeting is over," I growl, staring them down.

They both look away but nod. I turn my attention to Eric.

"Before I give you a chance to defend your actions, even though they are completely reprehensible, you should know that after church, you are no longer welcome in my territory. You will be fully banned from Silver Springs." Someone whistles through their teeth and murmurs break out in the room.

The highest discipline that a charter can dish out to a non-member is banishment. All other punishments fall on their own charter to decide. Usually, I'm fine with that, but this doesn't feel like enough for what he did.

"The fact that you would hurt a woman is abhorrent to me," I continue, my voice strained.

"You knew Sophie. She never did a damn thing to you, but you decided to dump fresh coffee on her because you were upset with her?" I growl.

"But burning her wasn't enough. You shoved her to the ground and left the diner without paying.

What could you possibly have to say for yourself? "

I nod at Axel to remove the gag .

Eric immediately spits on the table, his furious gaze finding mine.

“She comes back to this town after betraying our leader and we’re just supposed to accept it?

John is rolling in his grave because of you.

He would be fucking proud of what I did.

She’s probably just trying to weasel her way into his accounts.

The whore deserved what I gave her. I should have done more,” he sneers at me.

I’m out of my chair in an instant, but Axel beats me to it.

He slams Eric’s head into the table. “We don’t hurt women,” he growls.

“And John isn’t the leader of this club anymore.

He sent your ass away because you couldn’t stop causing problems. If he’s rolling over in his grave, it’s because you’re still a fucking idiot. ”

“I’m a fucking idiot?” Eric chuckles as blood leaks out of his mouth. “Your so-called leader can’t even recognize his own flesh and blood! He doesn’t even realize that Sophie had his kid and left town! He’s the fucking idiot!” He laughs maniacally.

My stomach drops. I take in my men’s faces and it doesn’t make me feel any better. They all look guilty, but guilty of what? Sophie wasn’t pregnant when she left. Asher couldn’t be my kid. Could he?

“See! He just figured it out!”

“Get the three of them out of here!” I bark.

Axel and Cane escort them out of church and the rest of us sit in shocked silence. “Why are you all looking at me like that?” I ask after a moment .

“Sorry pres,” Nash grimaces. “We thought you saw it. He looks just like you but with Sophie’s eyes.”

I see a few of them nod their heads in agreement, but my brother looks just as confused as me.

“There’s no way that Sophie would do that,” Rowan mutters.

“Maybe she had a good reason,” Luke offers softly.

“What possible reason could she have for keeping Grayson from his son?” Cole asks.

My mind whirls. I have a son that I didn’t know about. A son whose existence has been kept from me for seven years. I have a son with Sophie. She left town while she was pregnant.

“I have a son,” I rasp.

“We don’t know that,” Rowan replies. “You need to talk to Sophie.”

I nod and jump from my seat, barreling through the doors of church and rushing through the clubhouse. Everything around me is a blur as I run to my suite and punch in the code. When I enter the bedroom, Sophie jolts awake, her eyes wide in fear.

“What’s wrong?” She asks breathlessly.

I stare at her silently for a moment, unable to form the words with my tongue. I clear my throat. “Is Asher my son?”

SOPHIE

“Is Asher my son?” Grayson rasps.

My blood turns to ice. He knows. I don’t know how he found out, but he did. I had every intention of telling him last night, but he lulled me to sleep before I could. I was going to tell him this morning, but apparently, he took off and found out for himself before I could.

“What did you just say?” I whisper.

“Is. Asher. My. Son?” He grits out.

“Yes,” I whimper. His hands thrust into his hair and his shoulders droop.

All the color leaves his face. “I wanted to tell you,” I continue in a rush.

“I wanted to tell you last night. I wanted you to know from the start, but it wasn’t that simple,” I tell him as I scramble off the bed and stop in front of him.

He backs away from my touch like I repulse him. I don’t even try to hide my wince. “You wanted to tell me? What the hell stopped you?” He whisper hisses, careful to not wake up Asher even in his anger.

Tears fill my eyes. I walk backwards until my knees hit the mattress, then I sink onto it, my eyes never leaving his.

“I tried to talk to you last night, but you told me it could wait until the morning,” I begin.

“I found out that I was pregnant the week before I left Silver Springs. I was terrified at first. I knew that we had planned this incredible life together and that we would eventually want kids, but I wasn’t sure how you would react to it happening so soon.

You were on a run with your dad and Rowan and there was no way in hell that I was going to tell you over the phone, so I had to wait for you to come back,” I take a deep breath and continue with a sad smile on my face.

“I had this cute plan on how to tell you. I found a baby sized leather cut and had it embroidered. It said, “daddy’s little biker.” The day before you got home, my dad confronted me.

I don’t know how he found out, but he did.

I took so many pregnancy tests that he probably found one,” I shake my head in disbelief. “He threatened me.”

“What?” Grayson rasps.

“He told me that if I didn’t leave Silver Springs he would ruin me.

He told me that he wanted you to take over as the club president and that a baby would change your mind.

He said that if I didn’t leave, he would tell you that the baby wasn’t yours and that I had cheated on you.

He told me that if I didn’t leave, he would kill the baby himself,” I choke on a sob.

“I didn’t even know if the baby was a boy or a girl and he was threatening them.

I had only just found out I was pregnant, but I loved our baby more than myself.

So, I packed my bag and left. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.

My dad was always horrible to me. He blamed me for my mother not being alive.

He hated how much I took him away from the club.

But I never thought that my dad was so far gone that he’d threaten my child.

I knew that if he threatened them, he’d have no problem threatening you,” I tell him with tears tracking down my cheeks.

“I couldn’t risk it. I left and drove until I got to Atlanta.

I got a job in a restaurant and worked through my pregnancy. I gave birth to Asher by myself.”

Tears are spilling from Grayson’s eyes now.

“When I saw him for the first time, all I could think of was you. He was your spitting image, except for his eyes. He’s the only reason I survived being away from you.

I see you in him every single day. When he was one, I thought about coming back to Silver Springs, I thought that my dad would have gotten over everything and that I could risk it to come back to you.

The day I was set to leave, a note was left on my car.

It was from my dad. It was then I realized that he had someone watching me.

Every few months from then on, I would get reminders of that.

The longer that time went on, the less safe I felt,” I admit as I wipe the tears from my face.

“Two years ago, I decided to monitor the news for any word of my father, and low and behold two years later, his name popped up in an obituary. Seeing his name wasn’t enough, though.

I had to see for myself that he was gone.

That he couldn’t hurt us anymore. That he couldn’t hurt Asher or you,” I sniffle.

“I swear that I wanted to tell you last night, Grayson. I saw the two of you asleep on the couch and I knew that I couldn’t wait any longer.

I’ll understand if you hate me, but please don’t take it out on Asher.

He adores you and he deserves to have you in his life. ”

“I don’t know what to say,” Grayson says numbly.

“I’m so sorry, Grayson,” I choke out.

He nods his head once. “I need time.”

My eyes widen as he walks through the bedroom door. I hear the door to the apartment close and then let my tears fall unabashed as I crumble to the bed.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:55 am

GRAYSON

I'm numb as I leave the suite and walk through the clubhouse, oblivious to everything and everyone around me.

I go straight to the bar, reaching over the wooden surface and pulling a bottle of whiskey from behind.

I pop the top off and press the bottle to my lips, letting the warm amber liquid pour down my throat.

The burn from the whiskey draws me back to reality, at least partially.

The sound from the bar filters in, my eyes see people again.

A few of the members are giving me wary looks. I can't blame them after the shit that just went down. Hell, I'm worried about myself. I would have never guessed that today would have ended up like this.

I have a son. I have a son with Sophie; a son I didn't know about. My anger spikes and I take another swig of whiskey before plopping my ass in one of the barstools. Two people sit down beside me, and I don't even have to look to know that it's Rowan and Axel .

Rowan's hand clamps over my shoulder giving it a gentle squeeze. "So, it's true?"

I take a deep breath and nod. "It's true."

“Damn,” Rowan groans. “Are you okay?”

“I really don’t know right now,” I tell him honestly.

“That’s fair,” Axel murmurs. “It’s a lot to take in.”

I think back on Sophie’s words, contemplating if John could really do something like she said he did. I know that John could be a piece of shit when he wanted to get his way. What was stopping him from doing that to his own daughter?

“She said that John told her to leave town, that he threatened her, the baby, and me,” I tell the guys as I sit back in my seat. Both of their eyes flare in surprise for a moment and then they share a look. “What was that look?”

Rowan grimaces. “It’s just that you sometimes had rose colored glasses when it came to John.”

“What? No, I didn’t,” I bark.

“You did,” Axel says. “Not before Sophie left, but after. I think her leaving fucked you up more than you wanted to admit, and John hated her. He was eager to trash talk her when she left. He manipulated you, brother.”

I take another pull of whiskey as I think about his words. John was right there when I found out that Sophie left town. He was the first one to talk about it with me. He was happy to tell me how awful Sophie was and that it would end up being what’s best for me.

“Well, fuck,” I mutter.

Axel slaps me on the back. “It’ll all work itself out.”

“After this bottle,” I grumble.

The guys just laugh and grab a bottle for themselves.

I’m fucking drunk.

My fingers are tingling, and my face is numb. The worst part is none of this helped me get over what I found out. None of it changes the situation.

I push myself from the barstool and grab hold of the bar top to gain my balance. When the room stops swirling so much, I stagger out of the main area and toward my suite, desperate to see Sophie.

I’m almost on the stairs when an arm wraps around me, helping to hold me up. I smile at the feminine arm thinking that Sophie came to find me, but when I look up and find Candy smiling at me, the smile falls off my face.

“Let me help you to your room,” she murmurs as she turns me toward the guest room I’ve been staying in.

“No,” I grumble, unable to put up much of a fight since I’m so drunk. “My room.”

Candy shushes me and continues toward the guest bedroom. She opens the door and leads me to the bed, depositing me there before kneeling in front of me. I try to sit up, but my head swims. Candy unbuckles my belt and unzips my jeans pulling them from my hips and taking my briefs with them.

“Candy no,” I mumble, smacking her hand out of the way.

“It’s okay,” she replies huskily. “I just want to suck your dick, baby.”

“I believe my son said no,” my dad’s voice fills the small room.

I roll my head to the right and find him standing in the doorway to the room, his eyes angry and trained on Candy.

She stumbles to her feet and looks down at the floor. “I was just helping him to bed,” she says innocently.

My dad steps further into the room, advancing on her. He’s still intimidating, even in his fifties. “I saw you guide him this way and have been standing by the door. I heard what you said, and I heard him tell you no. What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Candy winces but before she can speak in her own defense, my dad starts again.

“Get the fuck out of this clubhouse. Grayson can decide your punishment in the morning, when he’s not fucking trashed and you’re not trying to take advantage of him.

” Candy scoffs and my dad steps closer. “I said. Get. The. Fuck. Out.” He barks.

Candy jumps and rushes from the room leaving me with me cock out. My dad shakes his head in disappointment and walks over to the bed. He helps me get my clothes back on and sits me up. He leaves me just for a few minutes to get water and coffee for me, hoping to sober me up a bit.

“Your brother messaged me saying that you probably needed to talk to me,” he says in explanation for being at the clubhouse this late.

It’s only then that I realize I drank the entire day away.

It's dark out. "I'm glad I came, otherwise you'd be having something big to explain to Sophie."

You really need to kick Candy out of here.

She's been pushing you since you became president and she's not taking the hint. Everyone sees it."

"I know," I grumble. "I didn't want that, though."

"I know. This is why you can't let alcohol rule your life, son. It causes fucked up things to happen, things that can be avoided when you're sober. Things that would devastate your woman."

My dad was never a partier when it came to the club. He would drink a few beers, but he never got drunk. Club sluts are notorious for pushing up on drunk club members, and my dad never wanted to disrespect my mother. He was probably one of the only faithful club members of his generation .

"So, what happened that Ro thought you needed me?"

I sigh and take a drink of the coffee he brought me.

"Eric attacked Sophie while she was at work, he poured fresh coffee on her arm and shoved her to the ground. Rowan and I went to the hospital to check on her and I brought her back to the clubhouse. Eric was here laughing it up with everyone. I confronted him and the other two assholes from Tennessee and then spent the evening with Sophie and Asher. We had church this morning to dish out the punishment for the guys. When I told Eric that he wasn't welcome in Silver Springs ever again, he flew off the handle," I continue as I swipe my hand over my face and take another few drinks of my coffee.

“He made a comment about me being so stupid that I don’t even realize that my kid is right in front of me. ”

My dad whistles through his teeth and sits beside me on the bed. “What the fuck? Asher?”

I nod. “The guys in church all got quiet and when I asked them why they told me that they thought I saw how much he looks like me. I crashed out. I confronted Sophie and she told me it’s true. Asher is my son,” I croak.

My dad wraps an arm around me and pulls me into his side. “That’s huge news,” he says softly.

“She said that John forced her out of town. That he threatened her, the baby and me if she didn’t go.”

My dad hums. “Listen Gray, John could be an asshole. He treated Sophie like shit, even before she left. He blamed her for her mother dying. He was obsessed with Sophie’s mom.

He also was dead set on having a son. He wanted someone to leave his legacy to.

He couldn’t leave it to Sophie. She wouldn’t have wanted it, anyways. ”

“She could have told me. I would have left with her.”

“Hey, I’m sure she knew you would, but she had to have been terrified.

She was eighteen and pregnant, her own father was threatening her.

Do you think she wanted to even chance it?

John had a far reach in this club. He knew members from every charter.

It didn't matter where you went in the states, he would have been able to keep tabs on you," he says as he gives my shoulder a squeeze.

"John had wanted you to take over this club from when you were little. He tried to knock up multiple club sluts to have an heir for the club, but it never happened. He must have been shooting blanks. He was desperate to pass this club onto someone, and he chose you. It sounds like he was willing to do anything necessary to keep you and Sophie and Asher would have pulled you away."

My mind whirls with all this information. Most of it isn't really new information to me, besides John trying to knock up club sluts. My dad is right, though. John would have been able to keep tabs on me anywhere I went, which I'm sure he did to Sophie and Asher. Asher. My son .

"I can't believe I missed out on the first six years of my son's life," I croak.

"Let's just make sure we don't miss out on any more of Asher's life. Or Sophie's. Make this right, son."

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:55 am

SOPHIE

I smile to myself as I put the small leather cut into the gift bag along with one of the positive pregnancy tests.

I took eight, just to be sure. This wasn't in mine and Grayson's plans, but after thinking about it, I know he's going to be happy.

At first, it's going to be a shock, but when the shock wears off, Grayson is going to be excited.

He's going to be such an amazing dad because he learned from the best.

I put the giftbag on my desk and turn toward my closet, trying to figure out what to wear.

It's the beginning of summer and the humidity is already kicking up, so I pull out a pair of denim shorts and a black ribbed tank top.

I get dressed quickly and am putting the last of my makeup on when my bedroom door flies open.

I whirl around and find my father standing in the door frame. He looks pissed, more pissed than normal, and that's saying something because my father is always angry with me. My breathing picks up while I wait for him to speak .

“What the fuck are these?” He growls as he thrusts two pregnancy tests in my

direction.

I gasp. I know that I threw them in the garbage outside. I didn't put them in the trash inside because I knew that he would find them. It wouldn't be the first time he went through my garbage.

"I said what the fuck are these?" He yells as he tosses the tests to the side and rushes me. He grabs me by the throat and presses me against the wall. "Are you fucking pregnant?"

I whimper but nod my head. My father has always had anger issues, but he's never actually hurt me before. At least not physically.

"You stupid fucking bitch!" He yells in my face before pushing me back into the wall and turning around. "You're not fucking up my plans."

"What are you talking about?" I rasp, rubbing my throat.

He spins around and snaps out so fast that I don't have a chance to react. He smacks me. My head whips to the right and stars dance in my vision. I look at him with tears in my eyes. He looks manic.

"Get the fuck out of my house. Get the fuck out of my town. Take that bastard child far away from here. Don't tell anyone what you're doing or where you're going. Just. Leave."

"What? No, I can't leave Grayson. He's going to be a dad. He deserves to be a dad," I plead .

"I don't fucking care! You're going to leave and not come back.

If you even attempt to tell Grayson or anyone else, I'll fucking kill you and your bastard.

Then I'll kill Grayson for the hell of it.

Your stupid ass isn't going to fuck with my plans!

” He yells as he paces the room. “I will fucking ruin you. You think that Grayson will want a baby that's not his?

” He scoffs when he sees the confused look on my face.

“You don't think he'll believe me when I tell him that you cheated and the baby isn't his?

He won't want either of you. Do yourself a favor and get the fuck out before I kill you both! ”

I don't move from that spot, horrified of the threats that just left my father's mouth. A man who is supposed to love you and protect you, not threaten your life. Not threaten the life of your unborn child or the man that you love.

“Fucking move!”

I jump and start packing my bags, shaking the entire time.

Tears spill down my cheeks as I put the giftbag into my duffle and zip it shut.

How can I leave without Grayson knowing I'm pregnant?

How can I leave my home? It's the last thing I want, but I'll do whatever I have to do

to protect my child and the man I love more than anything.

My arm is yanked back, and my father's hot breath tickles my cheek. "I have eyes everywhere, bitch. I'll know if you contact him. I'll know if you try to come back. I'll know if you try to plot against me. If you fuck up, I'll cut that baby out myself."

I shoot up in my bed, gasping for air, only to jump when I feel someone's arms wrap around me.

"It's okay, Soph," Grayson murmurs. "It's just me. You were having a nightmare."

I sag into his embrace, willing the feel of him to wash away the lingering effects of my nightmare. Every time I have that nightmare it feels like I'm right there in that moment. Terrified. Alone.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Grayson asks sleepily.

I shake my head. "What are you doing here?"

He sighs. "I shouldn't have run out like I did earlier. I'm sorry."

My chest aches at his words. "I'm sorry I left," I whisper.

Grayson pulls me closer. "We'll talk about it in the morning, let's just get some sleep for now."

I curl further into his warmth and revel in it. I was terrified that Grayson would never forgive me for leaving town while I was pregnant, but surely this is a good sign. I don't get to worry for long, though, because Grayson's warmth lulls me to sleep.

GRAYSON

I wake up with Sophie lying across my chest, just like she always did. I smile as I take in her features, her delicate nose, the dark lashes that fan her cheeks, her parted, full, rosy lips. She's always been stunning, but the last seven years have been especially good for her.

Sophie always had a great body, but it's filled in more. Her hips and thighs are fuller; her breasts are larger. I don't know if it's from her pregnancy or just from being older. Either way, I love it. She's a woman now, not the girl I fell in love with.

Sophie's eyes slowly blink open, and she pulls back from my chest, settling on the bed and facing me. "Morning."

"Morning," I tell her softly. "Any more nightmares?"

She shakes her head. "Are you still angry with me?"

I sigh and swipe my hand over my face. "I won't lie and tell you no, but I think I understand why you left better now," I tell her. "I wish it didn't have to be that way, but I can't fault you for protecting yourself. For protecting our son."

Her eyes soften. "I wasn't just protecting myself and Asher. I was terrified for you, too. My dad was the worst I'd ever seen him that day. He choked me and hit me. I knew right then and there that he would follow through with his threats."

I wrap an arm around her and pull her closer. "He can't hurt you anymore."

She gives me a small smile. “No, he can’t. How do you want to handle this with Asher?” She asks sheepishly.

I take a deep breath. “I don’t want to wait, Soph. I missed out on the first six years of his life and seven years with you. I don’t want to miss out on anything else.”

Tears fill her eyes. “I’m scared of how he’ll react. What if it’s too much for him?”

I kiss her forehead. “We’ll be there for him every step of the way. I think it’s best for him to know. I don’t want him to think we’re keeping anything from him.”

She’s quiet for a moment, letting my words sink in. “Okay,” she murmurs softly. “We’ll tell him today.”

I sag in relief and pull her half on top of me again, eager to have her body touching mine. I press my lips to hers in a soft, lingering kiss. We’re both breathless when we part.

“Wow,” Sophie rasps .

“Perfect,” I murmur huskily.

The moment is shattered when the bedroom door flies open and Asher barges inside. His eyes go wide when he finds us snuggling in bed. I guess we’re doing this now.

Sophie jolts up, covering herself with the blanket. Which is funny because we’re not naked. I sit up and push myself back against the headboard.

“Asher! What’s going on?”

“I’m hungry. Why is Grayson in your bed?” He asks.

I chuckle and Sophie shoots a glare my way. “He came over to talk and we got really tired, so he decided to sleep over.”

Asher shrugs. “Okay. Can we have bacon?”

I smile. “You bet, bud. Why don’t you help me in the kitchen while your mom gets changed?”

He nods his head and leaves the room, heading toward the kitchen presumably.

Sophie flops back onto the mattress and covers her eyes with her hands as she groans. “What just happened?”

“He’s our kid, of course he has impeccable timing,” I tell her with a grin. She looks over at me with a worried expression. I lean over and kiss her gently. “Don’t panic. We’ll make breakfast and then we’ll tell him. Get ready and give me a little one on one time with my son. ”

She sighs and nods. I leave her in bed and walk into my closet to grab something to wear.

I slip on a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt and then go out into the kitchen to make breakfast. Asher is already waiting with the bacon on the countertop.

He helps me fry up the bacon, make scrambled eggs, toast, and pour juice for everyone.

We’re just finishing up when Sophie walks into the room.

She looks beautiful in a pair of leggings that hug her curves and a black Nirvana t-shirt.

Her face is still bare of makeup and her blonde hair falls in loose waves over her shoulders and to the middle of her back.

She looks nervous as she takes a seat at the island next to Asher. He decided he wanted to sit between the two of us and that's honestly probably the best spot for the conversation we're going to have after we eat.

"I helped Grayson make breakfast, mama!" Asher calls out when he sees her, a huge smile splitting his face.

She returns his smile. "You did?" She asks as she reaches out to ruffle his dark curly hair. Hair that looks so much like mine when I let it grow.

His eyes sparkle. "Yep! It's going to be delicious."

I chuckle. "Let's hope so, bud."

I take a seat on the other side of him, and I load his plate up with breakfast. We eat in relative silence, only Asher breaking in to tell us about the new friends he's going to make at school and how he thinks his teacher will be.

I listen raptly to my son, eager to retain all the information he's willing to give me.

When we finish eating, I clear the plates from the table and load the dishwasher. I turn around and find Sophie watching me. Her eyes are curious, as if asking if I'm ready for this. I give her a subtle nod and walk back over to the island, stopping in front of them on the other side of the island.

Sophie clears her throat. "We need to talk to you about something, Ash."

He looks between the two of us and furrows his brow. "Is everything okay?"

“Everything is more than okay,” I tell him with a small smile.

“Do you remember what I told you about your daddy?” Sophie asks and my heart clenches.

“Yeah, you said that my daddy loved me very much, but we had to stay away to keep everyone safe. That he wished he could be with me more than anything and that one day I’d be able to be with him.”

My vision blurs as tears fill my eyes. I didn’t realize that Sophie told him anything about me. I didn’t even think he would ask about me.

“Yeah,” Sophie continues softly. “A bad man said he would hurt us if we were with your daddy, so no matter how much it hurt me, we had to stay away. But the bad man isn’t around anymore and that’s why we came to Silver Springs.

This place was my home for eighteen years.

I fell in love with your daddy here and I brought us back so you could finally meet him.

” I don’t breathe while she finishes. “Grayson is your daddy.”

Asher stares at his mother for a moment and then he turns wide, blue eyes on me. The same eyes he shares with his mother. “You’re my dad?” He whispers in awe.

A tear spills down my cheek, but I don’t bother swiping it away. I just smile at him and choke out an answer. “Yeah, bud. I’m your dad.”

He jumps off his bar stool and runs around the island, throwing himself into my arms. I catch him and relish the affection he’s giving me so easily.

My eyes lock with Sophie's. She's smiling but tears are running down her cheeks.

Before I know it, she's rounding the island and joining in on our hug.

In this moment, I could die a happy man.

I have my entire world in my arms, and nothing is going to ruin this.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:55 am

SOPHIE

Telling Asher about Grayson went better than I could have expected. He is elated to have Grayson as his father. I was terrified that he would be mad at me for keeping Grayson from him, but in my son's true fashion, he is just happy.

I feel an immense sense of relief now that everyone knows the truth. The last thing I ever wanted was to keep Asher a secret from his father. I had no choice, but that doesn't mean it didn't eat away at me every single day.

After talking with Asher, he and Grayson go take showers and get ready for the day.

Luckily, it's Monday, so we didn't have to send Asher to his first day of school after the news we dropped on him.

I probably would have kept him home anyways, since it's a lot to take in, but at least now he has two days to sit with the news.

When the boys are getting ready, I take a look at the burns on my arm.

The last few days have been a whirlwind, so the pain has been a second thought.

Honestly, it looks so much better than it first did.

The burn cream is really helping it heal fast, and the pain has been at a minimum.

I'm just thankful that Flo is letting me keep my job, since I won't be able to work for

two weeks, thanks to Gray's orders.

Asher rushes out of his room as he's still zipping up his jeans, like he's scared he'll miss out on something if he doesn't hurry. I just smile and shake my head at him.

"Did you remember to brush your teeth?"

He rolls his eyes. "Mama, I can't be worried about my teeth right now. I just found my dad; I'm not missing anything."

My chest aches at his words.

"I'm not going anywhere, bud," Grayson tells him as he enters the room.

He's fresh from the shower and sporting a dark pair of jeans and a black t-shirt.

His feet are clad in black boots, and his dark hair is wavy and still damp from his shower.

He looks like sin. "But your teeth will be leaving your mouth if you don't take care of them.

Why don't you go brush your teeth and then all of us will go downstairs and tell everyone the good news? "

Asher's face breaks into a huge smile. "Yes!"

I watch as our son rushes back into the bathroom and hear the water start a moment later. It'll be nice to have someone to co-parent with. Asher is a great kid, but sometimes he just doesn't want to listen to his mom.

“Thank you for that,” I murmur as Grayson walks over to me and pulls me into his arms.

The move is unexpected. I know that my feelings for Grayson have never changed, but I didn’t think that he would want to be around me, let alone want to have me in his arms, after everything.

“I have a lot of parenting to make up for,” Grayson murmurs into my hair. “The least I can do is help you out.”

I sigh against his chest. He smells incredible. A perfect mix of woodsy and clean. “Do you think everyone is going to hate me? More than they already do, I should say.”

He squeezes me tighter. “It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks, but none of them hate you.

They didn’t know the truth behind why you left; they were upset for me.

I’ll tell them all the truth, though. They deserve to know what kind of man your father really was.

My dad already knows,” he whispers, making me draw back.

“I told him last night when I was upset. I think he’s going to be really happy to be a grandpa,” he adds with a smile.

My chest aches at the thought of Grayson’s family.

His brother and sister are going to be an amazing uncle and aunt.

His parents are going to be the best grandparents.

They're all people that Asher has been missing out on for the past six years, and I can't wait for him to get to spend time with them. For him to finally have his family.

Asher rushes back into the great room, wiping the toothpaste from the corner of his mouth. "I'm ready."

We break apart and chuckle at him as we make our way out of the suite. Asher doesn't leave Grayson's side as we make our way through the clubhouse, and it makes my heart swell in pride seeing them together. Asher is so much like his father. Not just in the way he looks, but in his mannerisms.

When we walk into the main room as a family, a hush falls over the room.

Then everyone erupts into cheers. My shoulders sag in relief and tears fill my eyes.

Rowan walks over and wraps me in a big hug and tears fall down my cheeks as I cry into his chest. Next is Axel and Chef who both whisper how happy they are.

Grayson's voice booms through the room drawing everyone's attention.

"I have an announcement to make!" The room falls silent.

"Some of you have already found out, but for those of you who don't know, this is my son Asher!"

"He calls out as he pulls Asher into his side.

I watch on with a smile as Asher beams at his dad.

Then Grayson's smile falls on me. "Sophie didn't have a choice in leaving," he continues making my breath stutter in my chest. "I think that you all deserve to know the truth about John Parker. He loathed his daughter for no fault of her own. He was desperate to have an heir for this club, and Sophie could never be that for him. We all know that John could be an asshole, but I don't think any of us knew the extent of his issues.

He found out that Sophie was pregnant before she was able to tell me.

He choked her. Hit her," he says through clenched teeth.

"He threatened her. He threatened our son. He threatened me. Sophie left because it was the only thing she could do to keep all of us safe. Not because she wanted to. John would have been able to keep tabs on her every move because of his connections with the club."

He reaches out a hand for me and pulls me toward him until his arm is wrapped around me and Asher is in front of us.

"Sophie was always mine and now that she's back, that's not going to change.

I'm claiming Sophie as my old lady." His proclamation is met with boisterous cheers . I'm left speechless.

"Old lady" is the title given to wives and serious girlfriends of a member.

Sometimes the men don't even claim their wives as their old lady.

It means that the woman is it for you. She's your person.

There will never be anyone else for them.

It's bigger than marriage or kids. It's forever in the MC world .

The cheers in the room finally die down and then laughter fills the room. "That's rich since you were with me last night," Candy's voice calls out.

My stomach plummets. Grayson doesn't owe me anything, we aren't together, or we weren't until he publicly announced it today. Hearing that he spent the night with Candy is like a knife in the chest. Until I remember that Grayson came to my room last night.

"Candy," Grayson's dad's voice booms through the room.

Kurt strides into the room and through the growing crowd.

He stops in front of us and turns to face her.

"Don't fucking lie. I saw you lead a very drunk Grayson away from the stairway and toward the guestrooms. I followed you because I saw how Grayson could hardly stand.

When you put him in the room and tossed him on the bed, I heard him say no.

I saw you lower his jeans and briefs after that.

If I hadn't been there, you would have sexually assaulted the president of this club. "

Murmurs break out amongst the crowd as Candy's face pales.

"You thought that you could lie about what happened and make my old lady feel like I betrayed her?" Grayson growls.

“It’s a good thing you’re here, though, because you already would have been being dealt a punishment after what you did last night.

My dad told you as much. Now, you’ll also be dealt a punishment for lying to Sophie.”

Candy’s anger is palpable as she strides forward. “You could have been a great president. John wanted that for you. He saw your potential. That’s why he set me up to be with you. He knew that I would lead you in the right direction. Away from her,” she spits in my direction.

My blood boils. My father wanted her to be with Gray? Abso-fucking-lutely not. I step forward to take care of her myself, but Grayson pulls me back.

“I told you that if you messed with Sophie again, you’d be out of here.

I told you that if you kept pursuing me, even though I was clearly uninterested, you’d be out of here.

You tried to assault me while I was intoxicated and trying to go home to my woman and child.

As president of this club, I have the power to ban you for life.

” Candy’s gasp rings out. “Candy. You are no longer welcome in this club, effective immediately. You will leave now. One of the guys will pack up your shit. This is a lifetime banishment. If you try to come around, I’ll actually let Sophie handle you. Now, get out of my fucking sight.”

With that, he turns us around and leads us toward the sitting area. We can hear Candy struggle as they take her out of the clubhouse. We take seats on the large sectional

and Rowan and Kurt join us.

“That lady was really mean,” Asher says after a moment.

Kurt chuckles. “Yeah, she was.”

“Asher, I want you to meet your Uncle Rowan and your Grandpa Kurt,” Grayson introduces them.

Asher turns a little shy at that moment and the guys sense it.

“It’s so nice to meet you, Asher. I know that your grandma is going to be so happy to meet you,” Kurt tells him softly. Asher gives him a small smile in return. “How would you guys feel about coming to dinner? We can have the whole family together.”

“Family,” Asher murmurs reverently.

“Yeah, bud,” Grayson rasps. “Family.”

SOPHIE

I'm fucking nervous .

I haven't seen Grayson's mom or sister in seven years, and I've only spent a few minutes with Kurt and Ro over the last few weeks. The family that I was so close to years ago are now like strangers to me.

I take a deep breath and look at myself in the mirror.

I put on a little bit of makeup and curled my hair, because makeup and hair feels like a safety net for me.

I brush my hands over the cornflower blue sundress I'm wearing, smoothing the lightweight fabric over my body. The color really brings out my eyes.

"You look beautiful, baby," Grayson murmurs from the doorway. "You don't need to be nervous."

I snort. "Is it that obvious? You only say that because you're not in my shoes."

He moves to stand behind me before wrapping his arms around my waist and resting his chin on my shoulder. Our eyes meet in the mirror. "They already love you. They aren't going to blame you for what happened."

This man sees right through me. He knows that the real reason I'm nervous is that I don't want his family to hate me for what happened. I bite my lip and nod.

Grayson pats me on the ass as he smirks at me. “This dress looks incredible on you,” he says before whispering in my ear, “I can’t wait to take it off you.”

Heat pools between my thighs and I shoot him an unimpressed look. He holds his hands up defensively and walks out of the room. I give myself one more once over and then walk out to join the boys.

Grayson is dressed in dark jeans, a white t-shirt, and black boots.

Asher wanted to dress like his dad, so he’s wearing a similar outfit, and it makes my heart swell in pride.

Asher is bouncing in excitement. After meeting his grandpa this morning, he asked Gray everything he could about his family.

Grayson’s answers took away his fear and turned it into excitement.

Grayson takes my hand and leads Asher and me out of the suite. The clubhouse is relatively quiet as we walk through, finding only a few of the members in the main room. They wave as we walk outside.

Grayson’s truck is waiting for us. He opens the door for me and then helps Asher into the brand-new booster seat in the back. I smile as Asher looks around the truck with wide eyes. He’s never been in a vehicle this new, so I don’t blame him .

Grayson hops into the driver’s seat and buckles himself in. He turns on the engine and it rumbles to life.

“Did you just buy this?” I ask as he pulls past the gate.

He gives me a wicked smile in answer. Ugh, this man.

I know that he bought this truck, so he'd have a safe vehicle for our son to travel in.

The thought makes me love him even more.

Because I do still love him . Seeing him with our son has only reaffirmed that fact for me.

My feelings for him haven't changed over the last seven years, but since I've been back in Silver Springs, those feelings have only grown.

Before I know it, we're pulling into the Williams' driveway.

The familiar ranch house looms before us.

The white siding and black shutters are classic and well kept, as is the beautiful landscaping that Lisa has spent years perfecting.

This is home. This house has always been more of a home to me than any house I lived in with my father.

Grayson hasn't even parked the truck when the front door opens and the whole family files out onto the wrap around porch. The truck rolls to a stop and I feel Grayson's hand squeeze my thigh. I turn to face him and find him smiling at me. I give him a watery smile in return.

"Can we get out now?" Asher asks impatiently.

"Yeah, bud," Gray chuckles. "Let me get your door. "

He hops out of the truck and rushes around to our side.

He opens the door for me and offers me his hand.

I take it and slide down from my seat, smoothing my dress out as he helps Asher from the back seat.

I take a deep breath and close the door, not taking my eyes off Grayson and Asher until they're ready to walk over to the porch.

Grayson takes both of our hands in his and leads us to the porch.

I nibble on my lip when we stop in front of everyone.

Grayson and Rowan look just like their dad and Ella looks just like Lisa.

Kurt has started to gray around his temples and Lisa's brown hair is a little lighter now, but otherwise, they look the same.

Ella has really grown into herself. She was two years younger than us in school, so she was only sixteen when I left.

Now, she's twenty-three and beautiful. Her dark brown hair is cut in a bob which shows off her slender neck.

She's petite but her body has filled in with curves over the years.

Her green eyes are alight as they take us in.

Grayson pulls Asher in front of him, placing his hands on both of his shoulders.

"Mom, this is my son, Asher," he says in a warm tone. "Asher, this is my mom, your grandma, Lisa."

Asher nervously waves at Lisa.

She gives him a beaming smile in return. “I’m so happy to meet you Asher.”

“And this is your Aunt Ella,” Grayson says as he turns Ash toward her .

Ella smiles and crouches down to Asher’s level. “Hey, buddy. I can’t wait to spoil you.”

Asher’s face breaks into a smile, making the ice officially break. Lisa turns her attention to me. She doesn’t say a word; she just moves forward and wraps me in a hug. I hug her back, reveling in her affection. Something I’ve missed so much over the years.

“I heard that you love french fries,” Ella says as her mom and I break apart.

Asher’s eyes widen and he nods his head excitedly.

We follow them inside where we find, steaks, french fries, and salad waiting for us.

We devour our dinners and spend the evening watching Asher get to know his family.

He answers all their questions, and they answer all his.

Ash makes best friends with their chocolate labrador retriever named Archie and plays with him all night.

As much as I want to talk to them, to explain what happened, this is Asher’s night. He deserves to know his family without any drama. I can wait.

When we get back to the clubhouse, we get Asher ready for bed. He's exhausted after playing with Archie all evening. I have a feeling we're going to have to talk about getting him a dog before too long. It's something I always wanted for him, but we were never in a stable enough place to have one .

Asher wants Gray to put him to bed, so after I give him a hug and a kiss goodnight, I leave them to it.

I put my hair up in a clip, remove my makeup, and then step out of my clothes, ready to get in the shower to wash away the day.

I turn the water to hot and step inside.

I shave my legs and underarms and then wash my body with my vanilla body wash.

After I towel off, I apply lotion to every inch of my body and then get dressed in one of Gray's t-shirts.

When I walk back into the bedroom, I stop dead in my tracks.

Grayson is near the bed. He's removed his shirt and jeans and stands there in just a pair of black briefs.

My eyes take in his powerful thighs, muscular arms, and ripped stomach.

Tattoos pepper his flesh, only enhancing his already enticing physique.

I meet his heated gaze, and I swear I'll combust on the spot.

He strides toward me, eating up the space between us easily.

He stops in front of me, towering over my much shorter frame.

“You didn’t let me peel that dress off you,” he chides as he reaches out and pulls the clip from my hair, placing it on the dresser as my hair falls in waves around me.

My breathing picks up as he leans down, his lips meeting mine in a slow, sensual kiss.

His tongue parts my lips and meets mine in a familiar dance. There’s been no one since Grayson. There’s only ever been Grayson.

My arms wrap around his neck as I pull him closer to me, desperate to feel every inch of him.

His powerful hands trail down my body, cupping my ass and lifting me up.

My legs wrap around his waist as he walks us toward the bed, never breaking our kiss.

His hard cock presses against my pussy and I moan into the kiss.

He kneels on the bed, gently laying me down and immediately filling the space between my thighs.

I break our kiss to flip our positions, climbing onto his lap and then pulling his shirt from my head.

His eyes go heavy lidded as they watch the material skate over my naked body.

His hands move to my breasts, cupping them before his fingers find my nipples.

He tweaks them, knowing how much nipple play turned me on, and apparently that hasn't changed.

“So fucking beautiful,” Grayson rasps.

I scoot back on his thighs and reach for the waistband of his briefs.

He lifts his hips and helps me lower them until his beautiful cock is on display.

It really is beautiful. It's long and thick with a vein running down the length of it.

It's been so long that I don't have time for foreplay, so I grab his cock and position it at my core, making eye contact with him before I slowly sink down his length.

We groan when he bottoms out inside me. We sit like that for a moment, just reveling in the feel of each other.

The familiar feeling of home. One that we never thought we would have again.

We lock eyes as I begin to move. He thrusts up into me as I grind down on him.

It's been a long time since we did this, but the way we move together is like it was just yesterday. He knows my body and I know his.

Grayson flips us and lifts my legs over his shoulders, sliding in even deeper. “You feel so fucking good, baby. So tight. So wet.”

His words make me clench around him. “So do you,” I pant.

He continues to thrust as he reaches out and massages my clit.

I know that I won't last long with him doing that, it's been too long for me.

Before I can even warn him, I'm coming. I clench around him like a vice.

I moan as my vision darkens. Grayson's thrusts become erratic.

He's trying so hard to hold on, but it's too much for him.

He spills inside me as he comes, collapsing on top of me.

We lay there for a moment as we catch our breath in bliss.

"I've missed this," I whisper as I run my fingers through his wavy hair.

"Me too, baby," he murmurs. "I love you. Please, don't leave me again."

My throat constricts. "I love you, too, and I'll never leave you again," I promise him.

And I mean it. I have no desire to leave Silver Springs and the home I'm making with my boys. I want Grayson and I to be how we were back then but only better. I want my son to experience what having a happy family is like . I want to experience that for myself.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:55 am

GRAYSON

I wake up with Sophie on top of me. Just like I have for the last few weeks. I don't think I could ever grow tired of it, though. Sophie has brought peace back to my life. Where my mind was restless, she's settled it . Her and my son.

My son. It's still such a weird concept to grasp. Asher is great, though. Perfect even. He's everything that I would have wished for in a son, and Sophie raised him all on her own.

Our relationship has only grown in the last few weeks.

We've tossed the football around a lot, gone fishing and to the arcade.

I've even taken him out on my bike, which Sophie wasn't too fond of.

She changed her mind when she saw how much he loved it, though.

It's all precious one-on-one time that I'm so grateful for.

Sophie burrows further into my chest, letting out a small moan. I smile and kiss the top of her head, wrapping my arms around her and enjoying the last few moments before our alarm is going to go off .

Today, Asher has a big day at school. I feel like I'm more nervous than he is, but I've never done this before. We're going to school with him for their "meet the family" day.

He's had a great first two weeks at school and has made quite a lot of friends.

He's especially fond of Cane's daughter, Paisley.

She's the same age as Asher and they're in the same class.

I'm glad that he made friends so easily, and I know that Paisley will make sure he has even more friends by the end of the year.

I frown when I hear rustling from Ash's room but settle after a moment when it stops. My fingers trail lightly up and down Sophie's spine, reveling in the feel of her tan, smooth skin. She moans softly before peeking up at me.

"Morning," she murmurs sleepily.

"Morning, beautiful." My lips meet hers in a slow and sensual kiss, like I'm learning every part of her again. Like I've been doing since I found out that Asher was mine. That she was always mine. But that moment is shattered when our bedroom door flies open.

We break our kiss and I pull the blanket up to cover Sophie. We find Asher standing at the foot of our bed, dressed with his backpack on. "Oh good," he says with a smile. "You're awake."

We burst into laughter. "Why are you up so early, bud?" I ask after my laughter subsides.

"I'm excited," he admits with a shrug.

Just then, the alarm sounds from our bedside table. I sigh before reaching over to turn it off and sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Why don’t you go into the living room and your dad, and I will meet you there in a minute? We’ll have breakfast before we head out. Maybe we can walk with Cane and Paisley?” Sophie offers.

“Okay!”

Asher shoots off in the direction of the kitchen, the door slamming behind him, and I stand from the bed with a smile on my face. “I love that kid,” I tell Sophie as I stretch and watch her rise from the bed.

She smiles. “When he’s excited, there’s no stopping him. Just like someone else I know.”

My heart warms at her suggestion. I love that Asher is like me, even though he hasn’t been around me for most of his life. The fact that my characteristics still won out is astonishing to me.

We quickly get ready for the day and find Asher in the kitchen with multiple boxes of cereal out and juice and milk out of the fridge. I guide Sophie to one of the stools and leave a seat between us for Ash. He already has a bowl of cereal sitting in front of his spot.

We eat and listen to Asher talk about how excited he is for everyone in his class to meet his family and how much he loves school.

He’s so much like Sophie in that respect.

I always hated the first day of school because it meant that summer was over, and I wanted summer to last forever.

I guess I know now why Sophie was so eager to get back to school, though. It kept

her farther away from John.

After breakfast, Sophie tells Asher to go brush his teeth and then we head down to the common area. We find Cane and Paisley there. Asher runs over to them and gives her a big hug. Cane's brow furrows as he takes them in, like he doesn't like what he sees.

I elbow his side as I come up next to him. "They're six, brother. I don't think you have to worry about that for at least another ten years."

He turns his scowl on me. "Why would you even say that?"

I smile and toss an arm around his shoulder. "I could see your protective father instincts kicking in."

Cane has been the only parent to Paisley for her entire life. Her mother left the day that she delivered her. It's left a permanent scar on Cane's life. It affects every relationship. It affects how he raises Paisley and how fiercely protective he is of her.

"I don't even want to think of her grown up, sending her off to first grade was hard enough," he groans as he swipes a hand down his face.

I chuckle because it's funny to see such a big, burly guy so emotional over sending his daughter to school. Not that I was much better. "Want to walk with us?"

He nods and we walk over to join Sophie and the kids.

I take Sophie's hand and lead them out of the clubhouse.

Normally, I'd tell the kids that there's no way we were walking to the school from here.

We're a little way out of town so it just isn't feasible most days.

Today, though, we leave early for the mile and a half walk to the school.

We're starting a new tradition; as a family.

The walk takes us about twenty-five minutes with the kids, so we're still a little early for school. We sign in at the front office and walk them down the hallway to their classroom. The kids are nearly jumping off the walls with excitement at this point.

We stop outside of Ms. Kincaid's room, and I open the door for the kids who run inside, eager to see their teacher.

We find Everly Kincaid inside at the dry erase board, writing her name and "Welcome family" in bright letters.

She's a little taller than Sophie with long black hair.

She turns around when she hears us and gives us a big smile, her hazel eyes shining.

"Welcome! Asher and Paisley, you look awfully happy today. Who did you bring with you?" She asks as she lowers herself to the kids' levels.

"This is my daddy, Cane!" Paisley says as she smiles up at her dad.

"This is my mama, Sophie and my daddy, Grayson!" Asher introduces us proudly. My heart aches. He's so proud to have us as his parents. It makes me feel like I'm doing something right.

"Well, Cane, Sophie, and Grayson, I'm Ms. Kincaid. I'm so happy to meet you all. You have wonderful children. Hey kids, how about you show your parents your desks

until everyone else shows up?" Everly offers.

The kids rush over to their desks, and we follow behind them.

We spend the next hour and a half eating donuts with the kids.

They introduce us to all their friends. By the time we're ready to leave, my heart couldn't be any fuller.

Paisley gives Cane a big hug and Asher does the same for Sophie and me.

We tell them that we'll pick them up after school and then start our walk back to the clubhouse.

Sophie catches me casting longing looks toward the school multiple times and Cane laughs at me.

"It's not so easy dropping them off, is it?" He smirks at me.

"Shut the fuck up," I grumble as I pull a smiling Sophie into my side.

"He'll be perfectly fine," she murmurs as she smiles up at me. I knew he would be because he was raised by the incredible woman in my arms, and she could handle anything that life threw at her.

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SOPHIE

When the weekend rolls around we throw a party with all the chapters of Sovereign Sons to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the original charter's founding in Silver Springs. This is my first big event as the old lady of the club president, so it's a little intimidating.

Luckily, since Candy was ousted from the club, most of the club sluts have come around to me.

Lacey, Ana, and Lucy have been helping me prepare all week.

We have cooked food, with the help of Chef, decorated, and cleaned every inch of the club.

Not that most of the men will even notice.

Most of them are just coming to get drunk and find someone to fuck.

Which is why the kids will be staying at Chef's place tonight when things take a turn in that direction.

They'll be here for dinner, though, because Grayson already warned everyone to keep it clean.

Grayson also told the club that he'll only be in attendance tonight and that he would leave the debauchery to them for the rest of the weekend.

Members are coming from every charter and even some of the sub charters.

The presidents and vice presidents of the New Orleans, Las Vegas, Portland, Detroit, and Boston charters will all be here.

From what Gray has told me, none of the presidents or vice presidents are the same as when I was younger, which is kind of refreshing. The past club officers were always just like my father, and that's the last thing this club needs.

When the girls and I are finished setting everything up for the evening, I head back to our suite to get ready.

I shower, wash and style my hair, and put on some makeup.

Grayson has been spoiling me since we got back together.

He took me to the store to buy any makeup I wanted and to the mall to buy clothes.

He even surprised me with clothes that he thought would look good on me, and he chose perfectly, because they do.

I look down at my arm, noticing the faint redness that remains. Thankfully it healed really well, and the new skin looks almost identical to the old, once the redness completely fades, it will look like nothing happened. I decide that it looks nice enough to wear something sleeveless tonight.

I walk into the closet and slip on a pair of figure-hugging jeans and a black tank top that dips low in my cleavage. I'm slipping on a pair of strappy sandals when a pair of arms wrap around my waist.

"You look incredible," Grayson murmurs huskily against my ear.

I chuckle as I spin in his arms to face him.

He's wearing dark jeans, a black t-shirt, and his leather cut.

The shirt hugs his muscular arms and is tight across his chest. "So do you," I tell him breathily as I lean up and plant a kiss on his lips.

He attempts to deepen the kiss, but I push him back and tsk.

"If we start that, we'll never make it downstairs. "

"That's fine with me," he rasps.

I laugh as I move out of his hold and walk toward the door. "Let's go, Gray. We have people to see."

He rushes to get to my side and wraps an arm around me, his fingers digging into my hip. We call for Asher to follow us and Grayson guides us out of the suite, locking it behind us.

"How many people are going to be here?" Ash asks excitedly as he grabs Grayson's free hand.

Gray doesn't speak for a moment, his emotions getting the best of him. The easy affection that Asher shows him now makes my heart swell. They both deserve it.

"There's going to be a lot of people. They'll all be excited to meet you, too," Grayson tells him with a wink.

As we get closer to the main room, chatter fills the air. Music is playing but it's soft, for now. We walk into the room as a family and are met with cheers.

Gray puts his hands up and everyone quiets down.

“ Alright, alright. Thank you all for coming to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of our club! This weekend is a big party, but you will keep it PG until the kids leave later,” he warns everyone and is met with a few chuckles.

“With that said, my old lady has spent most of the week getting this all ready, with the help of the girls and Chef. Let’s eat! ”

The men cheer and all get in line, eager to get some food.

“Thanks for all of your help, beautiful,” Grayson murmurs into my ear.

I pat his chest. “It’s no problem.”

It really isn’t a problem. Grayson hasn’t let me return to work.

He told me that it wasn’t safe to go back since Eric could retaliate, and in the same breath told me that I should do something I really want to do.

If I want to work at all. We had an argument about it because I didn’t want to rely on anyone to support me, but I thought about it, and I can use this time to find something I truly love for work.

Maybe even get back into culinary school.

“Well, the guys are always going to remember what you’re doing for us,” he tells me. “They’ve never had someone put this much care into the club.”

“Can we eat?” Asher asks jumping up and down.

“Yeah,” I tell him as I ruffle his hair. “Let’s get this starving boy some food.”

Chef really outdid himself with the food.

There are two types of pasta, crab legs, fried shrimp, oysters, fried chicken, a glazed ham, and steaks.

For sides we have mashed potatoes, corn, green beans, candied carrots, cheddar and broccoli rice, and salad.

We even have cake, brownies, cookies, and ice cream for dessert.

We move along the food line and then take our seats by Rowan and Axel. Asher talks through dinner and Rowan listens raptly. He loves being an uncle and Ash loves being his nephew.

We finish eating and I motion for the girls to help me and Chef get things cleaned up.

The music picks up and the club is filled with laughter.

There are more people here than I could possibly count and I lost track of Grayson after dinner, but I make small talk with a few members while Asher and Paisley stick close to my side.

Asher tugs on my shirt, drawing my attention to him. “Mama, we want to go to Chef’s house!”

I smile. “Okay, let’s go find him.”

I usher the kids toward the kitchen, where I’m sure to find Chef, but we’re stopped before we can get there. Candy stands in front of the door, her eyes are bloodshot,

and her hair is a mess. She looks like she's on a binder. But most importantly, she's not supposed to be here.

"Move," I order her while I push the kids behind me.

"I don't have to answer to you," she slurs .

"That's where you're wrong," I say through clenched teeth. "Grayson is the president of this club, and he banned you from the Silver Springs' charter."

"I don't know what he sees in you," she spits as she stumbles forward. "You left him before; you'll leave him again."

"You don't know anything about our relationship. You don't know anything about me. Leave now before I have to make a scene."

She laughs maniacally. "A scene? Listen here, cunt. When he's done using you, he'll look for someone who hasn't abandoned this club. He'll look for someone good to make his old lady. It'll be me. It's what your father wanted, bitch."

Asher moves in front of me and clenches his fists at his sides. "Don't talk about my mama that way!"

Candy sneers at him and before I can pull him behind me, she reaches out and slaps him. My vision blackens at the sight of this crazy woman putting her hands on my son. Asher cries out and I move. I push the kids behind me and tell them to get help, then I lay into her.

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GRAYSON

My son's scream splits the air and everything inside me stills. My eyes search him out as quiet fills the entire room. He runs to me and hurtles himself into my arms. I squeeze him tight and look around for a threat but find none.

"What happened?" I ask as I see Paisley throw herself into Cane's arms.

"The lady was saying mean things about mama, and I told her to stop," he chokes out through tears. "She slapped me and then mama pushed us out of the way and told us to get help."

My blood roars in my ears as I rush in the direction that Asher points.

As I get closer to the kitchen, I hear things being knocked over and women grunting.

Rowan and Axel are at my side in a second.

Rowan takes Asher from me, and I burst into the room, finding Sophie sitting on Candy's stomach, raining down punches on her.

My eyes widen at the sight. Sophie has always been able to handle her own, but she's only done it when absolutely necessary, which only proves that Candy fucking deserves this. Especially for hitting our son.

I let Sophie get a few more hits in before I walk over and grasp her around her stomach, pulling her away from Candy. She tries to fight me but stops when I

whisper in her ear. “It’s okay, he’s safe. He ran straight to me. Stop fighting and we’ll take it from here.”

The fight leaves her immediately. She goes limp in my arms and then she’s turning around and wrapping her arms around me as she cries into my chest. I pull her tightly to me and stroke up and down her back.

I know that the adrenaline is wearing off and she’s thinking about what happened.

She’s thinking about Candy hitting our son.

When she calms down a little bit, she looks around the room for Asher, so I call out for Rowan. He brings him to the doorway and lets Asher climb into his mom’s arms. Sophie tucks Asher’s head into the crook of her neck, sheltering him from the view behind me.

I take a deep breath and then turn around to face Candy, who is still splayed out on the floor.

Rowan, Axel and Cane come further into the room and stand beside me.

I can feel the anger radiating from Cane.

Not only did this woman hit my son, she did it in front of his daughter.

It’s something that both of them are going to be thinking of for a long time.

I walk closer and crouch in front of her, surveying the cuts and bruises on her face. Sophie really let into her and I’m glad. Honestly, she deserves worse. Hurting women and children is everything this club is against.

“Candy, Candy, Candy. What the hell are you doing here?” I mutter.

“I belong in this club,” she slurs. I’m not sure if it’s from the beating she took or if it’s from the alcohol she drank. She smells like a damn bar.

“No, you don’t. My son, though? He belongs in this club.

My old lady? She belongs in this club. Cane’s daughter.

She belongs in this club. You were banished from this club, yet you show up again?

You had the nerve to lay hands on my son?

!” I growl as I reach out and grab her nasty hair, lifting her by it.

“I don’t know what kind of pull you think you have here, but you have none.

Now you’re not just banished from my club, but from every Sovereign Sons charter.

It just so happens that all our presidents are here tonight, so I won’t even have to reach out to let them know the news. ”

Candy’s eyes try to widen in panic, but the swelling keeps them from doing that.

“You can’t do that!” She screeches.

“Yes, he can,” Rowan growls. “You’re lucky he didn’t let Sophie finish you off. I would have.”

“Get her the fuck out of my club,” I order as I release her hair and toss her back on the floor. “And make sure she leaves town this time. ”

Cane steps forward and hauls her out of the room as she attempts to fight him off. Axel follows behind him.

When I turn back toward the club, everyone is silent. “If you didn’t hear, Candy has been banned from all Sovereign Sons charters. If you have a problem with that, too fucking bad.”

I move towards Sophie and Asher and pull them into my embrace, more desperate than ever to be close to them.

“Pres, is it true that she hit your kid?” One of the men from the New Orleans charter asks.

“Yes,” I growl.

“Then she got what she deserved. Good looking out for your family, Sophie,” he tells her.

Everyone starts to clap, and it takes me by surprise. She had already started to win them over by throwing this party for everyone, but protecting her child, their president’s child, won them over. If I wasn’t already in love with this woman, I would be now.

“Why don’t we all go home and watch a movie? I don’t need to be here tonight,” I offer.

Asher lifts his head off Sophie’s shoulder and looks at me with tear filled eyes. “Okay, daddy,” he murmurs. “I love you.”

He holds his arms out for me, and I hoist him up, welcoming him into my embrace and fighting back tears. He’s never told me he loves me before. With my free arm, I

pull Sophie along with me and take my family home. “I love you, too, Ash. So much.”

We watch a few movies until Asher falls asleep. I carry him to his bed and tuck him in, kissing his forehead and making sure his night light is on before I walk out of his room and close the door behind me. Sophie isn’t in the living room anymore, so I go look for her in our room.

She isn’t in the bedroom, but I hear the shower running, so I walk into the bathroom to join her. Her beautiful, tanned skin is on display through the glass of the shower, and I stand there for a moment to appreciate it.

The water skates over every inch, every curve, as her head tips back to rinse out the conditioner in her hair.

I strip off my clothes and step in behind her, gently running my fingers over her skin, so I don’t scare her.

She still inhales a sharp breath, but she turns around with a soft smile when she realizes it’s just me.

She takes my hand and pulls me into her embrace.

When she wraps her arms around me, she sighs. “What is her problem?”

“I wish I knew, baby,” I murmur. “I promise you that I never was exclusive with her.”

Sophie pulls back with a frown. “Is that your sneaky way of telling me that you slept with her?”

“No,” I wince. “I did let her suck my cock once, though.”

Sophie’s expression turns unimpressed. “Of course, you did.”

“It was only once,” I argue. “I’m not going to lie to you, I almost had sex with her once, but Rowan swooped in at the right time. I had Noah doing a background check on you, and it came back right at that moment. Now, tell me that wasn’t fate?”

She playfully smacks my chest. “Well, thank goodness you ran a background check on me, otherwise you could be taking this shower with Candy, not me.”

I pull her closer, plastering her body to mine. “She could never take your place, baby. She has nothing on you.”

Sophie gets a wicked look on her face before she pushes me away again. I start to complain until she sinks to the shower floor in front of me. The water hits the back of her head as she smiles up at me.

She reaches out a slender hand and grabs my painfully hard cock.

This woman can just look at me and make me hard, but seeing her on her knees, naked, wet, and wanting me is a special kind of aphrodisiac.

She leans forward and runs her warm, pink tongue along the vein in my shaft from root to tip.

I groan as she flicks her tongue over my slit and then sucks the head into her mouth.

Her mouth stretches wide around my cock and my hand finds her hair, fisting the length in my grasp and guiding her up and down the length.

“That’s it baby,” I rasp. “You can take it all.”

She hums around my length, making my eyes roll back. She reaches out and cups my balls in her hand, gently massaging them as she sucks the head of my cock. I feel my orgasm start in my groin and shoot its way through my body. I hold her head to my pelvis as I empty inside her.

She doesn’t swallow, though. No, she slides her mouth off my cock and then shows me my release before making a show of swallowing it and licking her lips clean. “That’s my dirty girl,” I praise her as I help her to her feet and kiss her, tasting myself on her tongue.

“Was that better than Candy?” She asks huskily against my mouth.

I growl and lift her into my arms, turning the shower off and tracking water through the bathroom to our bed. I toss her on the bed and watch the way her tits bounce. She giggles at the look on my face.

“You’re better in every way, baby,” I murmur as I grab her ankle and pull her closer to me. “Let me repay the favor.”

She moans as my mouth meets her soaking wet pussy.

My girl loves to suck cock. It turns her on just as much as it does for me, and I’ll take any excuse I get to eat this pussy.

She’s sensitive like she always is, I can tell from the way her body jolts every time my nose skims her clit.

I flick my tongue against it, building her up as I sink two fingers inside her.

I watch the way her pussy stretches around my fingers and grow hard once again.

I moan at the taste of her and the way she pulses around my fingers and against my tongue. I find that spot deep inside her and massage it as I suck her clit into my mouth. Her legs begin to shake as she cries out. She comes as she arches off the bed and I lap up every drop of her arousal.

I climb onto the bed and drop down beside her, pulling her into my side as she comes down from her orgasm.

“Wow,” she murmurs when she catches her breath.

“Yeah,” I chuckle. “Don’t ever worry about Candy again.”

She looks up at me with heavy lidded blue eyes. “Okay,” she whispers. “Now, what are we going to do about that?” She asks as she points to my erection.

I just shoot her a wicked smile.

SOPHIE

The following weekend I take Asher to his grandparents' house.

It's still weird to say that. Grandparents.

I never thought that Asher would have that.

I never thought that my son would have his family, but I'm so grateful that things have turned out like they did.

I just can't help feeling that Gray's parents hate me for everything I put him through. For everything I put them through.

I pull my new SUV into the driveway and park behind the garage.

Grayson insisted on getting me a new vehicle, he said that no amount of work would make my vehicle safe enough for his woman and his child.

I won't lie; it made me swoon a little bit.

Getting used to a top-of-the-line vehicle when I had a basic model that was falling apart, is a whole new ballgame, though.

It took me thirty minutes to figure out the gear shift . I wish I was kidding.

After double checking that I actually have the vehicle in park, I hop out of the vehicle

and open Asher's door. He hops out, having already unbuckled himself, and dashes toward the door. His eagerness to spend time with his grandparents and his Aunt Ella makes my heart swell.

I take a deep breath and follow him onto the porch and to the front door. Before we even get a chance to knock, the door swings open and Lisa is standing there with a huge smile on her face.

"There's our boy!" She calls out, throwing her arms wide so Asher can run into them.

"Grandma!" He cheers, but his voice is muffled by her chest. "I'm so excited!" He says when he pulls back and smiles at her.

"We are too, buddy," she says as she ruffles her hair. "Come on in."

I follow them awkwardly, closing the door behind me. We walk into the living room and find Kurt sitting in his recliner, watching a baseball game.

"Grandpa!" Asher says as he rushes him.

Kurt lets out an oomph as Asher throws himself onto his lap. "Hey, little man," he chuckles. "Good to see you."

"We're going to have so much fun," Asher tells him as he beams up at him.

"You bet, buddy," Kurt murmurs with a smile before turning to me. "Hey Soph."

I give him a small smile back. "Hey."

Kurt must read my awkwardness, though, because he sends Asher on a mission. "Hey Ash, why don't you go find your Aunt Ella and let her know you're here?"

“Okay!” He cheers as he jumps from the chair and rushes down the hallway.

“What’s going on, Soph?” Kurt asks when Asher is out of earshot.

Lisa’s brow furrows as she takes a seat on the arm of Kurt’s chair. “Is everything okay?”

“Everything is fine,” I rush out. “Why would anything be wrong? Everything is perfect.”

Lisa holds her hand up to stop my rambling. “Sweetheart, we know you better than that,” she says. “Just tell us.”

I sigh and take a seat on the large sectional. “Do you guys hate me?” I mutter.

“What?” Kurt asks.

“Why would we hate you?” Lisa asks.

“Because I kept Asher from Grayson. Because I kept him from you,” I mutter.

“I left town and didn’t tell a soul that I was pregnant.

I stayed away for seven years. Grayson missed out on six years of his son’s life.

You guys missed out on six years with your grandson. How could you not be mad at me?”

Lisa rises from the arm of the recliner and sits beside me on the sectional. She takes my hand in hers as Kurt sits up and turns the television down.

“Sweetheart, we could never be mad at you for protecting our son and grandson. You were doing what was best for us all. As much as it hurts that we didn’t get to be a part of Asher’s first six years of life, it would hurt more to know that we would have never met him if you didn’t do what you did.

It’s not just him that we missed out on, it’s you. ”

I didn’t even realize tears were streaming down my face until Lisa reaches out to swipe the tears from my cheeks.

“You were already like a daughter to us before you started dating Grayson,” she continues.

“We were thrilled when you two got together because we knew that it would eventually mean that you became an official part of the family. It didn’t happen the way we wanted it to, but it’s still happening.

I know that you didn’t want to be away from Grayson because I could see how much you loved him.

It was undeniable. You wanted a life with him, and I know that it would have taken a lot to keep you away from him,” she tells me as she squeezes my hand.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t see what was happening with your dad,” Kurt speaks up.

My eyes shoot to his. “What?” I whisper.

“I should have seen what was happening. I knew how John was. I knew how he acted out. I knew how he acted toward you. I should have seen what was happening.”

“It’s not your fault, Kurt. He was excellent at hiding things. ”

He shakes his head. “I know, but I was his right-hand man. I should have seen it. I could have prevented all of this.”

I get up from the couch and walk over to him, giving his shoulder a reassuring squeeze. “All it would have done is put you at risk too. He didn’t care what he had to do, he was going to do it to keep the club.”

He reaches up and wraps his hand around mine. “You’re probably right. I’m just glad you’re both here now.”

“Me too,” I murmur. “Me too.”

GRAYSON

I walk into the garage and look around the large space for Cane, finding him in the bay that Sophie's old car is sitting in.

The car wasn't road worthy, so no matter what Cane did to it, it wasn't going anywhere.

Unless it was the scrap yard. Cane is the best mechanic I know, so when he tells me something is shit. It's shit.

"Finally ready to scrap that piece of shit?"

He chuckles from under the hood. "I'm just picking over the few good parts. They're coming to haul it out of here in a few minutes."

"Good," I mutter.

I won't lie. I'm eager to get everything out of Sophie's life that was there as a part of her struggle. I couldn't be there for them for the first six years of Ash's life, but that doesn't mean I can't go overboard now.

"I don't know how it was functioning to begin with," Cane mutters as he pulls a part from the car and puts it on the counter before wiping his hands off. "She had some DIY fixes in here. So, she obviously remembered a few tricks from her time here. She's a tough chick."

That was high praise coming from Cane. “Yeah, she is. I just came out here to let you know we’ve got church in an hour.”

“No problem, pres. I’ll be there.”

I nod and head back inside, finding my brother and Axel at the bar. Rowan has a shit eating grin on his face and Axel looks unimpressed. I walk up behind them and slap them both on the back. “What’s the problem, Ax?”

That just makes him scowl harder and Rowan laugh harder. “Wren is giving him hell again,” Ro gets out between laughs.

I smirk. Axel and Wren have been foes for as long as I can remember. They both love to give each other shit, but Wren is better at dishing it out than Axel is. “What did you do now?”

“What did I do?” He asks affronted. “Why do you always think it’s me?”

“Because it always is,” Rowan and I say at the same time.

He sighs and swipes his hand through his dark blonde beard. “She’s going on a date with one of the members of the Devil’s Knights, so I was giving her shit for it.”

“Ahh,” I reply .

“What do you mean, ‘ahh’?” He grumbles.

“Nothing,” I chuckle.

Anyone with eyes could see the sexual tension between the two of them. Well, anyone but them . Sometimes it’s hard being in the same room with them. If they

fucked and got it over with, things would probably be a lot easier for everyone. But I doubt that will ever happen.

“That club is full of wannabe punks,” Axel mutters. “They’re going to be a problem; I can feel it.”

A scream pierces the air, and we all run in its direction.

When we get to the front gate we find the tow truck inside the gate, a van with open doors outside the gate and Cane and two prospects holding three men on the ground.

My eyes scan the scene, and I see Sophie clutching Asher to her chest. I rush over to them and wrap my arms around them.

“What the hell happened?” I bark out.

“We were walking into the gate and a van pulled up,” Sophie rushes out. “Two men jumped out and grabbed us. Cane and the prospects stopped them.”

My blood boils but I bite back the urge to beat the shit out of the three men on the ground and usher my family inside, instead.

I lead them to the large sectional in the living area and make them sit down before I jog into the kitchen to get them both a bottle of water.

When I come back into the room, I hand Sophie her water and then sink to the floor in front of Asher.

His wide eyes meet mine and my heart sinks.

“I’m so sorry, buddy. Are you okay?” I rasp. “Are both of you, okay?” I turn to

Sophie whose wide eyes match Asher's.

"We're okay," she says softly.

"I'm okay," Asher whispers. "Why would they do that?"

"I don't know, buddy, but I'm going to find out," I grit out. "You guys stay right here, okay?" They nod. "Chef!" I bark. It only takes him a few seconds to appear.

"What's up, pres?" He asks, looking concerned.

"I need you to sit with my girl and my kid while I handle something, okay?"

"You got it," he says with a look of determination.

I pull Sophie and Asher into my arms and give them both a kiss. "I will be back in a little bit, okay? If you need me, you come to church and interrupt. I don't care how silly it may be, okay?"

"Okay," Sophie murmurs.

I nod and take a deep breath, rising to my feet but not leaving them for a moment. The last thing I want to do is leave them after someone just tried to take them, but I need to deal with it. To find out why. To see if there is still a threat.

"I've got them, pres," Chef murmurs, sensing my reluctance .

I nod and turn on my heel, heading toward church. When I walk through the door, the room is packed. We already had church planned, so most of the members were on their way to the clubhouse for that. We're three people deeper than we're supposed to be, though.

The men are maskless, now, but I only recognize one of them. Eric. The other two look like kids, maybe twenty years old at the most. I stop in front of them, my jaw clenched so tight that I feel like my teeth are going to break.

“Eric, it seems like you don’t take my lessons to heart,” I growl before I rear back and land a punch to his cheek, whipping his head to the right.

He spits out blood, but he doesn’t move thanks to Axel and Cane holding him in place. “You think it’s all about you,” he chuckles. “But it’s so much bigger than that.”

I pull out the seat in front of him and sit down, spreading my legs wide. “Enlighten me,” I grunt.

“What’s it get me in return?” He sneers.

“A quick death.”

His face leeches all its color and he visibly swallows. “I’m not the one you should be worried about.”

My brow furrows. “I don’t know, Eric. You’re the one who attacked my old lady and just tried to kidnap her and my kid. Who the hell else would I be worried about?”

“I would have left town when you wanted me to, but my president didn’t let me,” he confesses.

“James?” Axel asks.

James Black is the president of the Tennessee charter, the very charter that Eric defected to. He was one of John Parker’s closest friends, which is why he was chosen

to head up the Tennessee charter.

“Yes, James.”

“What the hell does James have to do with all of this?” I ask.

Eric sighs. “John owed him. From what James told me, after he started the Tennessee chapter, John came to him for help. He told him that the club was broke and that he needed to borrow against the Tennessee charter.”

“What do you mean the club was broke? When was this?” I press.

“It was about ten years ago. John was using club funds to support his lifestyle. He was paying for hookers constantly. He burned through almost everything and he made sure the old timer who was secretary hid it from the club.” That member passed away years ago, so there is no way to confirm that.

“He borrowed money from James and invested it. He was able to bring the club back into the green, but it was under one condition,” he says before he looks me in the eye.

“He was supposed to marry Sophie and take over the club, unless John could find another heir.”

The room was snuffed into silence. I sit up in my seat and run my tongue along my teeth. “So, you’re saying that James went after my son and old lady because he thinks he deserves my charter?” I ask, my tone deadly.

“Yes,” he admits. “He doesn’t think you’re worthy of the mother charter.”

I nod my head and turn to the two kids. “If you leave my town and never show your faces here again, I’ll let you go now.

Do you understand?" They both eagerly nod their heads.

"Good, get the fuck out of my sight and forget everything you've seen and heard here.

If we see you here again, you'll regret it.

Take them out of town and make sure they understand my order," I tell Cole and Nash.

They remove them from the room, and I turn back to the rest of my members.

"What do you want us to do with him?" Axel asks with a nod toward Eric.

"We're going to use him," I tell everyone before turning back to Eric. "You'll get your quick death if you lure James to us."

"You trust him to do that?" Rowan asks.

"I trust him to do whatever he can to cover his ass," I grunt. "He knows he's dead either way. He'll choose to have it happen fast."

SOPHIE

I pace back and forth as Grayson helps Asher get his pajamas on and tells him to brush his teeth. It's been such a long day, and I don't want to be having the conversation that Grayson and I are about to have.

I'm terrified . I'm not scared for myself; I'm scared of how Asher is going to react to what happened today. So far, he's taken it well, probably even better than I have.

Grayson's voice pulls my attention to him as he walks back into the room. "He's settling in. I put a show on for him to watch before bed." I stop in my tracks and nod my head. Grayson takes in my disheveled appearance and walks over to me, cupping my face. "Tell me what's on your mind, baby."

I swallow hard and then meet his eyes. "I'm worried about Asher."

He nods his head, his eyes softening. "He seems to be taking things okay."

"For now," I slump against him. His arms wrap around me, and he pulls me close. "What if this happens again?"

Grayson leans back and meets my gaze. "I won't let it."

"You can't promise me that, Grayson," I mutter as I pull away and walk back to the island.

"I know I can't, but I'll do everything in my power to make sure nothing like that

happens to you both ever again,” he tells me as he steps up to his side of the island.

“I’m worried about all of this, what if something like this does happen again?

” I hold up my hand to stop him when he moves to speak.

“I know that you’ll do everything you can to protect us, but what if it happens again?

You can’t be with both of us at every moment of the day.

You can’t stop every evil thing from happening.

I’m worried that this is going to change him.

That this is going to make him harder. I’m worried that he’s going to be hurt.

That he’s going to be taken from us,” I finish on a sob.

Grayson eats up the space between us and wraps me in his arms again and I cry into his chest. “Are you going to leave me?” He rasps.

I pull back, my mouth agape and tears streaming down my face, but I can’t respond before Asher bursts into the room. “No! We can’t leave! Don’t make me go!” He cries.

My heart sinks at the sight of his tears. “Buddy, I would never leave. I would never make you leave. This is our home. I would never take you from your dad. I would never leave your dad. I’m just worried about you.”

“I’m fine,” he says as he straightens to his full height, pushing his shoulders back.

“And I will be as long as we’re together. All of us,” he adds with a sniff.

I give him a watery smile and then walk over and kneel in front of him. “I promise that we’re not going anywhere. We’re a family and we’ll get through this together.”

“Okay,” he says before he wipes his eyes. “Do you promise, too?” He asks his dad.

Grayson comes over and kneels in front of him like me. “I promise that I will never leave you guys.” Asher nods his head and then throws himself into our arms. “How about I show you guys something that will prove how much you mean to me?”

I furrow my brow. What does that even mean? Asher nods his head eagerly.

“Okay, we have to be quick since it’s close to bedtime, but go put on some shoes, we’ll take a ride.”

A few minutes later we’re in Grayson’s truck and driving toward where his parents live. We stop a few blocks over in a fairly new subdivision. I look around curiously, not sure why we’re here, but the curiosity leaves my mind when we pull up in front of a house.

The ranch style house stretches out against the darkening sky, illuminated with outdoor lighting.

Its white siding is pristine, the wooden shutters and doors pop along with black accents and hanging baskets on the wooden porch.

All the wood on the house is stained with a beautiful warm tone.

What really pops are the lilies in the landscaping.

My favorite flower. Every variation of lilies fills the landscaping.

My eyes well with tears. This is the home I dreamed of.

The home Grayson and I always talked about having one day.

My eyes whip to Grayson who is watching me nervously.

“Where are we?” Asher asks from the back seat.

“Home,” I whisper, my eyes not leaving Gray’s.

“This is going to be our home,” Grayson rasps.

“Can we go inside?” Asher asks excitedly.

“Hell yeah, we can,” I rush out before turning to open my door.

I faintly hear Asher telling me I have to put money in the swear jar, but it’s worth it.

I rush up the steps of the wraparound porch and to the front door, waiting impatiently for Asher and Grayson to catch up.

Grayson’s eyes are lit with joy as he punches in the code on the front door and opens it for us.

He flicks the light on and then my breath is taken away.

We’re standing in a great room, in the living area to be exact.

A large warm leather sectional sits in front of a stone fireplace with a large television mounted on it.

There is a black and white area rug on the lightly stained wood floors.

My eyes move through the large room, landing on the kitchen next.

The cabinets are white with black counter tops and black hardware and there is a large island with stainless steel appliances.

There is a large dining room table that is surrounded by big windows.

This is exactly how I dreamed it would be.

I turn wide eyes to Grayson, and he smiles shyly at me. “You did all this?”

“It was what we talked about,” he says with a shrug. “I always knew that you would come back to me someday, and if you didn’t, at least I would have this part of you.”

Tears fill my eyes at his declaration of love. He swallows up the space between us and wraps me in his arms. I cry into his chest, and he just holds me, letting me feel it all.

Asher clears his throat after a few minutes. “Ugh, guys. Can I see my room?”

I laugh into Grayson’s chest. “Well, how about we let you choose your room, and you can decorate it however you want?” Grayson offers.

Asher jumps in the air with his fist raised. “Heck ya!”

We spend the next hour picking out Asher’s room and deciding what he wants to do with it. By the time we get back to the clubhouse, it’s well past Asher’s bedtime, but it’s well worth it.

GRAYSON

I lead Sophie further into the clubhouse. Further away from James' leering eyes.

I don't feel comfortable with how he's looking at her, and I could sense how uncomfortable Sophie felt. The asshole has always creeped me out. It's probably why he and John are so close. They're both perverts.

We walk into the main room of the clubhouse and take a seat by Rowan and his girlfriend Jennifer at the bar. We're not technically old enough to drink, but no one would say a word if we decided to. It's a perk of being the vice president's sons and members of the club.

"What's up?" Rowan asks.

"Just avoiding the creeps outside," I mutter as I take the stool next to his and pull Sophie onto my lap.

"Who?" Rowan grunts as he pulls Jennifer closer.

"James," I say with an unimpressed look.

"He's hot," Jennifer croons making Rowan pull his hand from her waist .

"What the fuck, Jenny?" He grumbles.

"What?" She asks, affronted. "He's hot for an old guy."

Jennifer is a cunt. I don't know what my brother sees in the girl.

She cheats on him. It's obvious to everyone but him, but he won't listen to our concerns.

She is his first love, and he thinks he can't find anyone better for himself.

I just hope that one day, he'll pull his head out of his ass and dump the bitch.

"Why would you say that?" Sophie spits as she glares at Jennifer. "You're with Ro."

Jennifer just brushes her off and heads out of the main room. Rowan doesn't follow her, thankfully.

"Can you please break up with her? For good," I ask.

Rowan just grunts in response.

I turn toward the pool table just in time to see James walk inside. His eyes immediately search the room until they land on me and Sophie. He licks his lips as his eyes trace over every inch of her. My jaw clenches.

Sophie must feel his gaze on her, because she cuddles closer to me. I wrap both my arms around her and cover some of her body in the process. James' eyes leave her body and meet my angry stare. A smirk covers his face when he sees me watching.

I take a deep breath to try and calm my nerves. I can't just go attack the asshole because he's the president of the Tennessee charter of our club. I'm just a lowly member of the club. But John could do something about it .

"I need to go talk to your dad for a second, baby," I murmur softly in Sophie's ear.

“Don’t leave Ro’s side, okay?”

She turns to me with a look of concern but nods her head in agreement. I make eye contact with my brother to make sure he heard me and he gives me a subtle dip of his chin in answer.

I stand up and place Sophie back on the stool before scooting it as close to Rowan as it will go. They’re like brother and sister to each other at this point, so no one will think anything of their proximity.

I head back out to the garage to look for John and find him talking to my dad. Their voices are hushed, so they’re probably talking about club business, and when they catch sight of me, they stop.

“What do you need, son?” Dad asks.

“We have a problem,” I say as I stop in front of them.

That peaks John’s interest. “What kind of problem?”

“James.”

John’s brow furrows. “What about him?”

“He’s looking at Sophie inappropriately and it’s giving me a bad feeling, not to mention, making Sophie really uncomfortable,” I tell them as I run my hand through my too-long hair.

John snorts. “A president of this club is looking at your woman and making her uncomfortable and it’s a problem? ”

“Not just my woman, your daughter. I’ve seen that look in men before and it never leads to anything good,” I argue.

“Son,” John says with a chuckle. “Know your place. The man can look wherever he wants because he’s a president. Maybe some day you’ll know that pleasure.”

He pats me on the shoulder condescendingly and walks into the clubhouse. I’m left staring after him slack jawed. He doesn’t even care that a grown man is looking at his daughter that way? That he’s making her uncomfortable?

My dad’s sigh makes me turn back to him. “Don’t listen to him, Gray. It’s not okay for him to do that even if he is one of this club’s presidents. I’ll say something to him and if he keeps it up, you let me know, okay?”

“Thanks, dad,” I murmur before giving him a hug.

We both head into the clubhouse and I go back to the bar to sit with Rowan and Sophie. Jennifer still isn’t back, thankfully. I lift Sophie up, making her gasp in surprise, and sit in her seat.

“Is everything okay?” She asks as she leans into me.

“It will be,” I tell her with a small smile.

But when I look up and see John and James talking, I don’t think I’m right. James is going to be a big problem; it’s just a matter of time.

I shake my head to clear it of the memories flooding me. I knew that James was going to be trouble, but I didn’t realize how much trouble he would be. He didn’t just cause trouble for Sophie; he’s causing trouble for everyone I love.

Cane and I are in Tennessee with our prospects and Eric in tow. I left Ro and Axel in charge of the club while I'm gone, which means they protect my family with their lives. We didn't need a ton of members with us, so Cane and I could handle it with the help of the prospects.

I've already brought the rest of the charters in on what's happening today.

They listened to what Eric had to say and backed my decision.

They all drove in today in their cars so we wouldn't draw attention with more motorcycles in town.

They all parked in a local parking garage so no one would know that we were at the warehouse.

The plan is to let Eric lure James to a warehouse that the club uses for business and that we'll all be waiting there for him.

When we got here this morning, I had Eric call James and set everything up.

He told him that he had Sophie and Asher at the warehouse.

James should be here any minute. The other charter presidents are hiding in another room while Cane, Eric, and I are waiting in the main room.

When James walks into the warehouse, I want to be the first person he sees.

Eric's phone vibrates in my hand. I look down and open the text.

James: I'm 2 minutes out.

Eric: They're ready and waiting for you .

I stuff the phone into my pocket and fist my hands at my sides. "He's two minutes out," I tell Cane.

Eric looks unphased. He knows that this is just the end for him. He burned my family too many times. I can't trust him to truly move on. He will get his quick death, though, as long as James walks through that door as planned.

We hear the rumble of a bike as James pulls into the gravel lot surrounding the warehouse. When the engine cuts out, I don't move, I don't breathe. I just wait for him to appear.

The door flies open and James strides in. "Eric, you filthy bastard, I didn't think you had it in you."

He halts in his tracks when he sees me standing there with Cane. His green eyes go wide and his face leeches of color. He whirls around and tries to leave, but the prospects are standing in the doorway now, blocking his exit.

"James," I mutter coolly. "Are you not happy to see me?"

He whirls around again and glowers at Eric. "What the fuck did you do? I got you out of that hellhole and this is how you repay me?" Eric doesn't respond, he just stares off into space.

"That's all you have to say?" I bark. "Nothing about sending people to kidnap my old lady and my kid?"

He faces me. "The Silver Springs charter was supposed to be mine. John promised it to me when I bailed the charter out with the funds that my charter fronted. He didn't

have an heir.

Everything would have fallen to some random person.

But no, he decided to take you on and mentor you.

He couldn't pop out a son, so he got the next best thing.

You," he says through a strangled laugh.

"You didn't even know what was going on.

No one from your charter did, except your secretary at the time. He was smarter than all of you."

"You're not telling me anything I didn't already know," I mutter as I step forward. "Why the hell did you think taking Sophie and Asher would change anything?"

He smiles at me maniacally. "You took something from me; I was going to take something from you."

I lunge but Cane and a few of the other presidents, who finally made themselves known, stop me from reaching him. The smile wipes off James' face when he sees them. He knows he's done.

"I'm fine," I murmur, and the guys release me. I push my shoulders back and stand tall. "James Black, you have gone against the Sovereign Sons code of conduct. You have betrayed your club. You have betrayed your brothers. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Fuck. You," he growls and then spits on the ground at our feet.

I chuckle. “You have been stripped of all the titles and rights given to you by this club. I’ll leave it up to the rest of you on what you want to do with him,” I say to the presidents beside me. They nod their heads.

I motion for Cane to follow me to the back room and the prospects grab Eric.

He comes willingly but doesn’t make a sound.

I close the door after the prospects lower Eric to the floor and exit the room.

They don’t get to see anything illegal that our club does, so they can’t be a part of what comes next.

Cane offers me a handgun with a silencer attached to the barrel.

I don’t hesitate; I point it at Eric’s head and pull the trigger.

His body falls to the floor a second later.

I watch as the blood pools around his lifeless form, but I feel no remorse.

He hurt Sophie. He tried to take her and Asher away from me.

“How do you live this life and be a good dad?” I ask Cane after a moment.

He clears his throat. “Sometimes it’s hard,” he admits.

“We do some bad things that could make anyone think they’re a bad person.

I just like to remember that most of the bad things we do are for the greater good.

We do the things we do, so more people don't get hurt.

We do what we can to protect our community, to protect our friends, to protect our family.

At the end of the day, that's one of the most important parts of being a good parent.

You're a good man, Grayson, and Sophie and Asher are so lucky to have you in their lives. ”

I swallow the lump in my throat. His words mean more to me than he could ever know. Being a good father is something I've been striving for since I found out that Asher was mine. I never want to disappoint him. I only want what's best for him.

“Thanks, brother,” I murmur before slapping him on the back. “Let's take care of him so we can get home.”

“Sounds good, brother,” he smirks.

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SOPHIE

One thing that lets an old lady know if she's going to make it in club life or not, is if her man shares everything with her.

When Grayson came back from Tennessee, I knew something was different.

He told me what happened right away. Eric was never going to be an issue again.

James was never going to be an issue again.

The immense relief I feel at their deaths should probably scare me, but it doesn't. I know that my family is going to be safe now, and that's the most important thing to me.

Today we're having an end of summer barbecue at the clubhouse. It's members, their families, and a few of the club girls. No outside charters, so it's more comfortable for everyone.

"Everyone is here, so we're ready to eat whenever," I call over my shoulder to Chef as I walk out of the kitchen with a large container of macaroni and cheese .

"Okay!" He hollers back.

Old school rock pumps through the speakers in the clubhouse and members are standing around laughing and drinking beer. A few of the club girls hang off the single guys. I smile as I walk by and place the macaroni on the waiting warmer.

Today we're having BBQ and marinated pork steaks, scalloped potatoes, sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, green beans, candied carrots, salad, and rolls.

Chef walks out of the kitchen carrying a large container of fresh rolls and butter.

When he sets them down, everyone knows it's time to eat.

A few cheers ring out before everyone falls into line.

Grayson and Asher step to the front of the line and Grayson pulls me along with them. The other officers and voting members fall in behind us and the prospects and club girls fall into the end of the line . I swear these guys do everything according to their rank.

Grayson makes me and Asher go ahead of him, but helps Asher get his plate together. It's amazing how something as simple as him helping our son with his plate makes my heart ache with happiness. I'm not alone in this anymore. I'll never be alone again.

Our meal is full of laughter and good food.

This isn't the same club that I remember, and that's probably because of the men in front of me.

They're nothing like the pigs who used to be in charge.

They're more like Grayson and Rowan's father, and I couldn't be more thankful for that.

My son isn't just going to have his father, uncle, and grandfather to be good male role models in his life . He'll have this entire club.

“What are you smiling about?” Grayson murmurs as he pulls my seat closer to him.

“I’m just happy that we’re here,” I say softly before planting my lips on his.

“Me too, baby,” he whispers against my lips.

“Gross,” Asher mutters, breaking the moment. We laugh and break apart. “Can we throw the football around, dad?”

“Yeah, buddy. Just finish your vegetables and we’ll go into the yard.”

Asher rolls his eyes. “Do I have to? Veggies are gross.”

“Hey now, if you want to be big and strong like all of us, you have to eat your veggies,” Rowan tells him with a wink.

We burst into laughter as Asher shovels his green beans into his mouth at warp speed. “Done,” he mumbles around a mouthful of food.

“Whoa, wise guy. Swallow all that food before you go anywhere,” I say through my laughter.

He makes a show of swallowing and then turns to his dad. “I’m ready!”

“All right.” Grayson plants a kiss on the top of my head and then leads Asher out of the room and into the yard .

I smile as I watch them go and then head into the kitchen to see if Chef needs any help. “You know that you can eat with all of us, right?” I ask when I see him huddling over his plate of food.

“I know, but I’m used to it this way.”

I shake my head in disbelief. “All right, old man. Do you need me to do anything?”

He waves me off. “Nah, sweetheart. Just go and enjoy the evening.”

“Don’t work too hard,” I tell him as I give him a kiss on the cheek and then head back into the main room.

Most of the guys are standing by the bar chatting with our bartender and the club girls. I walk over and join Cole and Nash who have Ana and Lacey on their arms.

“Dinner was great, Sophie,” Ana says with a big smile.

“I can’t take all the credit,” I say with a laugh. “Chef did most of the work.”

Nash’s brow furrows as he looks behind me. “What the fuck is she doing here?”

I whirl around and find a disheveled Candy glaring at me. I sigh and then immediately search the room for my son. I find him through the window, just where he should be, tossing around the football with Grayson outside.

“You can’t be here, Candy,” Cole says as he steps closer, pushing Ana behind him.

She doesn’t say a word and her eyes don’t leave me.

“Get out of here before you make things worse for yourself,” I mutter, not wanting to deal with her brand of crazy right now.

I grit my teeth when she still doesn’t move.

I advance on her. “Don’t make me drag you out by your hair.

” When I’m standing in front of her, she pulls a gun from behind her back and aims it at my head. I stop in my tracks.

“What the fuck, Candy?” Nash growls. I hear him move behind me, but I don’t take my eyes off the crazy woman in front of me with a gun.

She lifts the gun in the air and fires off three shots.

I duck in cover as plaster falls from the ceiling.

Hands grip my hair and drag me forward. Candy holds the gun to my temple as chaos erupts around us.

My eyes search the craziness for my son and find Grayson leading him to Rowan, who urges him further into the yard. Further away from Candy.

My shoulders sag in relief. At least my son is okay.

At least Grayson is okay. The cool metal presses harder into my temple making me wince.

I see Cole and Nash glaring at Candy, Ana is on her phone with the police, and the other members are moving into the room to find out what’s happening.

My eyes lock with Grayson’s as he storms into the room.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” His voice booms as he advances on Candy.

She backs up, pulling me with her until she's in the doorway. "Stop or I'll fucking shoot her!" She screeches.

Grayson puts his hands in the air and takes a step back, his eyes taking in every inch of me looking for injury. When he finds none, I see his shoulders slump minutely.

"What do you think you're going to get out of this?" He asks through gritted teeth.

"You," she scoffs. "You can't be with her. I've been by your side for almost seven years. I've put in the work. I should be the one to reap the benefits."

"What are you talking about?" Grayson grimaces. "We were never together, Candy. There's never been anyone but Sophie for me."

"She doesn't deserve it!" She yells. "She was supposed to stay in Georgia. You were supposed to be mine. I was supposed to be the queen of the club. I was supposed to be yours. You were supposed to love me like I love you!"

I wince as she tugs my hair with every statement. I almost feel bad for the woman. Almost. She was set up for failure by my father, but she's a grown adult and should know that that's not how a relationship works.

"Candy, you've been a member of this club your entire life. Don't do something you're going to regret," Grayson murmurs.

"I won't regret it," she sneers.

But before the gun can go off, the police swarm the clubhouse and surround Candy. An officer must come up behind her because her grip loosens in my hair and then I'm in Grayson's arms.

I watch on in a blur as the police toss Candy to the ground, knocking the gun away from her and cuffing her. She screams for Grayson as they lead her out of the clubhouse.

The police chief walks over to Grayson and offers him a hand. “We’ll take her from here, Grayson. Do you guys need medical?”

“Thanks, Tony,” Grayson murmurs against my hair. “I think we’re okay.”

Tony nods. “She’s going to the psych ward, and I can’t see her getting out with the security footage you guys have.”

“Good,” I mutter numbly as Tony walks away. “I better never see her face again.”

“If we do, I’ll kill her,” Grayson mutters. “She’s done fucking with my family.”

GRAYSON

My heart is about to beat out of my chest. I'm fucking nervous. I look at my son for reassurance and he gives me a big, lopsided grin. My nerves immediately ease. Okay, only by a fraction.

"You look awfully sure," I grumble.

"Because I am," Ash chuckles. "She's going to be so happy."

"And how about you? Are you happy?" I ask.

"Yep!" Asher chirps. "But I'll be happier when you marry my mama, and we finally move into the house!"

I reach out and ruffle his hair, sending the curls in every direction. "I'll be happier, too."

We've spent the day getting ready for this proposal.

Asher and I went to the barber to get our hair cut, we went to the jeweler to pick up the rings, and to the flower shop.

Then we came back to the clubhouse and set everything up.

Asher and Paisley made a banner, and the guys hung it up for me.

Chef is making Sophie's favorite pasta, baked ziti, with garlic bread and salad.

Now, we just have to wait for Sophie to come home.

Gwen took her out for a day of pampering, at my insistence. They got massages, got their hair and nails done, and did a little shopping to kill time. I'm expecting them to show up in the next five minutes and my heart is pounding from nerves and excitement.

Rowan walks up beside me and pats me on the back. "She's going to say yes, brother. She's loved you since we were kids."

That releases some of the tension I'm feeling. "Thanks, Ro."

"Just got a text from Wren," Axel calls out as he enters the room. "They're coming down the street."

Everyone rushes out of the room except me and Asher. Silence fills the clubhouse a few moments later. When Wren's car pulls into the lot, I hear the door close, and Wren's car pull away.

"You ready, Ash?" I ask as I pull him in for a hug.

He beams up at me. "Ready, dad."

I give him a smirk and then look up as the door to the clubhouse opens. Sophie strides inside, adjusting the bags on her arms. She stops in her tracks when she looks up and sees us waiting in front of her.

Her favorite flowers, lilies, cover the room.

Candles make a walkway to where Asher and I stand.

Her mouth opens in shock when she reads the banner above us.

That's the cue for Asher and me to drop to our knees.

Sophie drops her bags, and her hands cover her mouth before she makes her way towards us, tears glistening in her eyes.

"What is all of this?" She rasps.

"Sophie Parker, I have loved you from the moment I met you. It was a different kind of love, a friendly kind of love. But it evolved over the years into the one-of-a-kind love that I never thought was possible. You aren't just my best friend; you're the love of my life.

When I lost you seven years ago, my world shifted.

I thought that was it for me. That I'd never find love like that again.

Then you came back and altered my world once again, this time for the better.

You were like the sun breaking through the clouds after a rainy day.

A breath in my oxygen-starved lungs. The love I was missing out on was right in front of me, but it had only doubled in size," I say as I gaze down at Asher before turning my attention back to Sophie.

"Our love is no longer puppy love. We're no longer high school sweethearts.

We're now a forever kind of love. We have a second chance at this, and I could never

be more grateful for you and Asher stumbling back into my life.

Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife? ”

Tears are streaming down Sophie’s face, but she nods her head vigorously. “A million times yes!”

Asher jumps to his feet and cheers as I stand and sweep Sophie into my arms. I slam my mouth down on hers and kiss her with everything I’ve got. She meets my kiss hungrily until we hear a muttered, “ew” from Asher.

When we break apart, he throws his arms around us and smiles up at us. “We’re a real family now!”

“Yeah, we are,” I murmur as I pull them both closer. I pull the velvet box from my pocket and step back, kneeling once again. I pull the oval shaped diamond from the ring box and slip the gold band onto her finger. The gold looks beautiful on her tan skin.

“It’s beautiful,” she whispers as she looks at it in awe.

“Asher helped pick it out,” I tell her.

“You did?”

“Yep!” He cheers, bouncing up and down in excitement. “Let’s show her the rest of our surprise!”

Sophie’s eyebrows rise. “There’s more?”

I chuckle. “Follow us, baby.”

Asher leads us into the kitchen where our feast is set up in warmers. Chef finished everything early so he could be out of here before the surprise. I watch as Sophie looks over the food, her eyes growing larger when she sees her favorite.

“Chef’s baked ziti?” She asks.

“Only your favorite,” I murmur as I wrap my arms around her .

“Do you like it, mama?”

Sophie snuffles. “I love it. And I love the both of you more than anything.”

This is what I’ve been looking for my entire life.

A love that I don’t have to question. A woman who would do anything for our child.

A woman who would battle for us. Sophie.

It’s scary to think that I wouldn’t even have this if John hadn’t died.

He could have lived for another twenty years, and I would have missed out on everything.

I wouldn’t have gotten a second chance with Sophie.

I wouldn’t have been able to raise Asher.

I wouldn’t be able to hope for more kids.

I wouldn’t be able to hold her every night before I fall asleep and every morning when I wake up.

I hate that John did what he did, but I wouldn't change a thing in this moment.

"I'm so glad we're home," Sophie says as she turns in my hold.

"I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you," I murmur, pushing her blonde waves over her shoulder. "I can't wait to make more babies with you and watch them grow."

Tears fill her eyes once more. "I want that, too."

"Does that mean I can have some brothers and sisters? Because I'm kind of tired of being an only child," Asher grumbles.

I chuckle. "You bet, Ash. We'll get started on that ASAP."

Sophie's eyes widen and she smacks me in the stomach. "Hush," she hisses.

I smirk and pull her close. "It's all been worth it, baby."

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 6:55 am

SOPHIE

Last night was one of the best nights of my life. My family is finally going to be one. I get to marry my best friend, the love of my life, the father of my child.

The club was ecstatic for us, so much so that they are throwing us a party tonight. The girls wouldn't let me help with anything, so Grayson, Asher, and I stayed in our suite all afternoon, watching movies and relaxing before the evening.

When we're about ready to head downstairs, I throw on a rock t-shirt, distressed denim shorts and black sandals. I toss my curls over my shoulder and apply a little concealer, bronzer, blush, mascara, and lip gloss.

The light shines on my beautiful new ring in the mirror. I smile as I think about the future I'll get to have with Grayson. Strong arms wrap around my waist as I daydream.

"What are you thinking about, beautiful?" Grayson murmurs huskily in my ear, making goosebumps race across my skin.

"About how happy I am," I say as I turn around in his embrace and kiss him softly.

He gives me a big smile, his beautiful teeth on display. "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," I reply with a laugh. "Is Ash ready?"

"He's been ready," he chuckles. "He's so excited to tell all our family that we're

getting married.”

“I know I already said it, but I’m so fucking happy that we’re here.”

“Me too, baby,” he murmurs as he swipes a piece of hair out of my eyes. “Let’s go tell our boy that we’re ready.”

He takes my hand and leads me out of our room and into the living area, where Asher is waiting. His excitement is palpable as he paces around the room. He turns wide eyes to us and then bolts toward the door without a word.

I shake my head as Grayson pulls me after him. Music fills our ears as we exit our suite and head downstairs. As we get closer to the main room, we hear the chatter of our friends and family. When we walk inside, they all turn around and cheer.

My cheeks heat from the attention as Grayson pulls me close, a devilish smirk on his face.

He dips me low and slams his mouth on mine.

His large palm dips to my ass, lifting my leg to his hip.

The cheers grow louder as Grayson’s tongue delves in, stroking my tongue in a rhythmic pattern that almost has me stripping him down right here.

Until I remember that we’re in the middle of the clubhouse, surrounded by people.

Grayson pulls me to my feet and gazes down at me before brushing his thumb along my lower lip and fixing my lip gloss. Or what’s left of it. I take a deep, steadying breath, and then find Asher looking grossed out. A laugh bursts out of me, and I reach out and ruffle his hair.

“Going to have to get used to that, bud,” Axel tells him with a laugh.

“Gross,” Asher mutters before running over to his grandparents and aunt.

I shake my head and smile. Grayson’s hand finds my lower back as everyone moves to congratulate us. Lisa hugs me extra tight as she welcomes me to the family officially. I blink back the tears that fill my eyes, so I don’t embarrass myself.

The guys grilled so we could enjoy the cool fall night.

Summer is long gone and its finally bonfire season.

As the sun sets the guys dish out burgers and hot dogs for the kids, and steaks for everyone else.

We sit outside at picnic tables and laugh through our meals.

When we’re done eating, the kids make smores in the fire.

When the kids are with Lisa and Kurt, I sit by the fire with Wren. We’re a few drinks deep already and have been laughing our asses off all night. It’s so nice to have her back.

“What the hell is going on with you and Axel?” I ask when I see him watching her for the fifteenth time tonight.

She groans. “Nothing. He’s annoying.”

I laugh. “It sounds like nothing has changed between the two of you, then.”

“It never does,” she murmurs.

I swear I can hear a hint of sadness in her tone, so I change the subject. “What’s the deal with those two?” I ask with a gesture in Nash and Cole’s direction.

They’re sitting off to the side with Ana between the two of them. Nash and Cole are both hot as hell. Actually, every member of this club is hot now. I don’t know if that’s something they require of prospects, or if it’s just the luck of the draw, but you won’t see any of the women complaining.

“Ahh, those two,” Wren murmurs reverently. “Sit back, girlfriend, do I have the gossip for you.”

I giggle and sit back in my seat, holding my drink close to my chest.

“Apparently, they like to share,” Wren whispers dramatically.

“What?!” I screech, sitting up in my chair.

Wren widens her eyes at me, telling me to shut the fuck up, because everyone is looking at us. I wince at her and sit back in my chair, at least partially. When everyone turns back to their conversations, she starts again.

“They share. I’ve heard a few of the club girls talking about it and fuck, does it sound hot.”

“Wait, do they do stuff together? Or just to the girl?” I ask.

Wren shrugs. “That, I don’t know. But can you imagine how hot that would be?” She sits back and fans herself with her hand.

I definitely could imagine that. Nash has beautiful brown skin that’s peppered in black ink.

He's muscular, with black cropped hair, and deep chocolate brown eyes.

And don't even get me started with his smile.

Cole has tan skin that's bare, which is rare for bikers.

He has dark brown hair that's a little shaggy and beautiful green eyes.

I don't know many women that could handle being between those gorgeous men. But I know a few who would like to try.

I make eye contact with Wren, and we dissolve into laughter, knowing what each other is thinking.

"What are you two laughing about?" Grayson says as he picks me up and sits in my seat, placing me in his lap.

"Nothing!" I chirp.

"Mhm," he chides, just making us burst into laughter again.

It's a peaceful evening until Rowan shows up.

He was noticeably absent for the evening, and he didn't answer his phone after multiple members tried to call him.

We sent two of the prospects out looking for him about an hour ago.

He walks past us all with a dark expression.

My brow furrows and I turn to Grayson. He nods his head, and we follow him inside

with Axel, leaving Asher with his aunt and grandparents.

When we walk inside, he's not in the main room.

We look in the kitchen and don't find him, so Grayson leads us to Rowan's suite.

When we walk up to his door, it's ajar. We let ourselves in and hear the water running in his kitchen.

We stop dead in our tracks when we find him at the kitchen sink.

He furiously scrubs at his arms that are covered in blood.

A gasp tears from my throat and I'm instantly sober at the sight. Grayson and Axel move to stand on either side of him with concern coating their features. Grayson reaches out to squeeze Rowan's shoulder, but he pulls it out of his grasp while he continues to scrub.

"Ro, what happened?" Grayson rasps.

Rowan's shoulders slump and Axel takes the opportunity to pull the sponge from Rowan's hand while Grayson turns off the water. They lead him over to the kitchen island and force him to sit. When he looks up, his eyes are haunted.

"I was running late to the party, and I saw three members of the Devil's Knights run a car off the road," he says softly, his voice pained.

"The car was flipped upside down. I parked my bike and called 911 while I ran to the car. The driver's side was closer, so I tried to pull him out first. His seatbelt was locked, so I pulled out my knife and cut the strap.

He was covered with blood,” he rasps. “I checked for a pulse, and it was faint, so I moved to the passenger’s side.

The woman had a small cut on her head, but she looked okay, otherwise.

I cut her down and pulled her to safety.

I went to check on the driver again and his pulse was fading.

I did CPR until the paramedics showed up, but he didn’t start breathing again. ”

“Oh my gosh,” I say as I cover my mouth in horror.

“Are you okay?” Grayson asks thickly.

Rowan nods numbly. “The driver died.”

“I’m sorry, Ro,” Axel murmurs.

“How can one person in the car die and the other person be almost untouched?” He asks no one in particular. “And why the fuck did the Devil’s Knights run them off the road?”

We stay silent. There’s not an answer, unfortunately.

I wish he didn’t have to go through this, but I can’t help thinking that he was in the right place at the right time.

I don’t know what this means for the club and the Devil’s Knights, now.

They moved into this area and now they hurt people who live here.

Killed someone who lives here. That's not going to go over well with the club.

"Let's get you in the shower," Grayson offers. "We'll worry about everything else later."

"I don't want to ruin your night," Rowan says with a shake of his head.

"You're not ruining our night, Ro. Let us help you," I plead.

He nods his head minutely. "I'm glad you're going to be my sister, Soph."

I swallow down the lump in my throat. "Me too, Ro."

Grayson and I exchange a worried look over Rowan's head as they walk him to his room. This is something that's going to have a profound impact on Rowan's life and we'll be here for him every step of the way.

GRAYSON

Two years later

I walk into the bedroom and chuckle when Lily's smiling face greets me. Our one-year-old daughter is my wife's twin. Her blonde hair is wild, curling in around her chunky cheeks. The only trait she got from me is my hazel eyes.

"Dada!" Lily coos as I get closer.

I smile and pull her into my arms. "Good morning, princess. Did you sleep well?"

She nods her head enthusiastically and then rests it on my shoulder, her little arms wrapping around me.

I kiss her head and breathe her in. Even more so now, I realize just how much I missed out on in Asher's life.

I didn't get these moments first thing in the morning.

I didn't get to hear his first words or see his first steps.

But I won't miss out on anything else with him.

It makes me appreciate these moments with Lily even more.

Lily wasn't a surprise to us; we were trying the minute we got married. Sophie was

pregnant a month later. These last two and a half years have been the happiest of my life.

We moved into our house after I proposed to Sophie.

We knew that we were ready for more kids, and now that Sophie is pregnant again, it's perfect because there is plenty of room for our family to grow.

When we told our family last night, they thought it was hilarious how quickly we moved.

Rowan said, and I quote, "get off of her."

We told the club yesterday, too, and everyone is excited for us. The club these days is more family friendly. I thought the guys would hate that, but they love having the kids around, and my kids love all their uncles.

I walk out of Lily's room and down the hallway.

This house has five bedrooms and four bathrooms, so we won't have to worry about our growing family fighting over the bathroom.

The main floor of the house is open concept.

There's a large kitchen with stainless steel appliances and white cabinets with black countertops and hardware.

A large island sits between the kitchen and living room, where a large sectional is positioned in front of the stone fireplace with a large television mounted, encased with built-in bookshelves that we added after we moved in.

Asher is helping Sophie set the table as we walk in.

He rushes over and takes Lily from my arms and our chocolate labrador retriever, Smokey, follows them to the table.

He loves being a big brother. He's eight years old now and is doing so well in school.

He even started playing peewee football.

He says he wants to follow in my footsteps and actually make it to the college level.

He's eight, though, so I'm sure he'll change his mind a couple of dozen times before then.

Either way, we'll support him in whatever he decides to do.

I watch as Asher helps Lily into her highchair and then descend on my wife.

My hands wrap around her and find her still flat belly.

She's in the second trimester now, so hopefully she'll start showing soon.

There's something primal about seeing the woman you love carrying your child.

I'd have a dozen more kids with her if she'd let me, but she says we're stopping at four.

"How are you feeling today, baby?" I murmur into her neck.

"Good," she says as she spins in my arms.

She's been having morning sickness on and off this entire pregnancy, but so far, the second trimester has been good. I hope it stays that way, because I hate to see my woman sick.

"Good," I reply huskily before planting my lips on hers.

"We're trying to eat here," Asher grumbles from his spot at the table.

We break our kiss with a laugh before taking our seats at the table. It doesn't matter how much time has passed, Asher still thinks his mom and dad kissing is gross. It doesn't stop me from doing it, though.

I sit and watch my family eat. This is something I never thought I would have, the simplicity of eating with the woman I love and our children. Now, I get to do it every day. I smile at the thought.

"What are you smiling about?" Sophie asks as she nudges me with her elbow.

"Just thinking about how lucky I am," I tell her with a wink. And I am . So fucking lucky.

SOPHIE

Six months later

I arch my back as far as it will go as Grayson thrusts into me. I'm standing at the end of the bed with my chest pressed to the mattress. Gray stands behind me, his fingers digging into my hips as he hits that sweet spot deep inside me.

This has been our best position in the last month of my pregnancy. I don't feel comfortable in any other position, but I'm desperate for my husband. I have been this

entire pregnancy.

“You feel so fucking good, baby,” Grayson murmurs huskily as his chest covers my back.

“I’m so close,” I whimper as I attempt to thrust back into him.

He stands tall again as one of his hands leaves my hip and finds my clit.

He pinches the swollen nerves, and I shatter around him.

I shove my head into my pillow and bite the material to stop myself from screaming.

I feel Grayson still a few moments later as he empties himself inside me.

I stay like that. Boneless and sated. Grayson slips from my body but returns a moment later with a warm rag. He cleans me up and helps me to stand.

Fluid rushes out of me as soon as I’m standing and I look at Grayson with wide eyes. “I think you broke my water.”

Grayson’s wide eyes mirror mine. “Are you serious?”

I nod my head frantically. “Call your mom and dad. They need to come watch the kids. My bag is downstairs. We can leave as soon as they get here.”

Grayson jumps into action, calling his parents and setting out clothes for us. He helps me get dressed and leads me downstairs. When Lisa and Kurt show up, we get in my SUV and drive to the hospital.

My contractions start on the drive there. By the time we get to the hospital, they’re

about five minutes apart. Grayson proves how good of a man he is once again by how he acts during labor. He doesn't leave my side and is constantly asking what he can do for me.

We decided to go through this pregnancy without finding out what the sex of the baby was. We already have a boy and a girl, so all that truly matters is a healthy baby. Three hours into my labor, it's time to push.

"You can do this, baby," Gray murmurs as he wipes the hair away from my face. "You're so fucking strong."

I pant through the contraction, borrowing some of his strength. "It hurts," I whimper.

"I know it does, but you only have a little bit longer until our baby is here," he says with a pained look. "I wish I could take this pain from you, baby, but I can't. The only thing I can promise, is that I'm right here with you." He squeezes my hand firmly.

I nod my head with determination. When my doctor tells me to push, I do, and after five more minutes, the sound of our baby's cries fills the room.

"It's a boy!" Grayson cheers before kissing me on the forehead. "You did it, baby!"

Tears fill my eyes as I watch Grayson cut the umbilical cord and they place our newborn son on my chest. He is the spitting image of Grayson already with a head full of dark hair and hazel eyes that blink up at me.

"What are we going to name him?" I ask as I gaze up at my husband .

"How about Hudson?" He asks with tears in his eyes.

I look adoringly at our son and smile. "Hudson is perfect."

"Welcome to the club, Hudson," Grayson murmurs. "We love you so much already."

My eyes mist over. I never thought that I would have this.

I thought that I would spend the majority of my life looking over my shoulder for my father.

I thought that it would just be me and Asher against the world.

But it isn't. I've built this wonderful life for myself.

No, not just for myself, for my kids, my husband.

Every time I have delivered one of my babies, I think of my mother.

I wonder what she would have been like. I wonder if my life would have been different if she hadn't died.

I wonder if she'd be proud of me. From what the old timers have told me; she would have been an amazing mom.

So, I decided to live that legacy for her.

I'll spend my days making sure that my kids are happy and safe.

I'll make sure they know that they're wanted and loved.

And I know that my husband will be right there with me. Forever.

THE END

KEEP READING FOR A SNEAK PEEK AT ROWAN'S STORY.

EVERLY

I roll onto my side with a groan, finding the opposite side of my bed empty. I frown and drag myself to a sitting position. Where the hell is Travis? I wipe the sleep from my eyes and grab my phone from the nightstand to check the time. It's ten, which means I slept for twelve hours.

I can't believe how tired I've been lately.

Travis has been so understanding, though.

I've been going to bed early every night this week and haven't been up to send him off to work every morning, which I usually do.

Apparently, today was no different. Thankfully, it's the weekend, so I didn't have to be up for school.

Travis is my fiancé. He's a lawyer at his dad's law firm in Charlotte.

We live in a town forty minutes south. Silver Springs, North Carolina is one of the most beautiful towns I've ever seen.

The rolling hills in the area give the town an old time feel and we're close to the South Carolina border.

Silver Springs is a small town with only ten thousand residents.

We moved here a couple of weeks ago to escape the city.

We plan on raising a family here and building a life here.

I lucked out in getting a job teaching at the Silver Springs Elementary School, otherwise we might not have found such a nice town to move to.

We're due to be married in a couple of months after being engaged for two years and being together for five years.

We met when we were in college and hit it off instantly.

At the time, my best friend Nicole was dating his best friend, Keith.

They set us up and I couldn't be more thankful to them for that.

They're no longer together, though, which is for the best because Keith ended up being a royal asshole.

I drag myself from the bed and walk into our bathroom, making my way to the toilet.

I halt in my tracks when I see the box of tampons waiting for me.

When is my cycle supposed to start? I immediately go to my vanity and find my birth control packet.

I gasp at the sight. I'm already on the last day of my inactive pills.

How did I miss that? My period never showed up.

I wrack my brain, trying to figure out if I've ever missed my cycle on birth control before, but can't remember a time where that has happened.

I rip open another drawer and find an old pregnancy test. We're not trying to get pregnant, but I'm an anxious person and have convinced myself I was pregnant before.

I open up the test and rush to the toilet, my bladder about to burst. I quickly pee on the test and put it back in the packet, setting a timer on my phone.

What the hell is Travis going to think if I'm pregnant?

Will he think I planned it? Will he think I lied about being on birth control?

Ugh, this is not what we need right now.

I wash my hands and brush my teeth to kill some time. Before I know it, the timer goes off, so I rush back to the vanity and fumble with the test. I take a deep breath and flip it over, reading the results. Positive.

My eyes go wide. I'm pregnant? Fuck me. I quickly get dressed and rush out the door, grabbing my keys from the hook as I go.

I get in my car and back out of the garage, heading to the local drug store for some more tests.

That test was old. It was probably a false negative.

Yeah, it had to be a false negative. Right?

There's no way I'm pregnant. I take my birth control at the same time every day and I never miss a pill. This can't be happening.

My trip to the store and back is a blur with my nerves at an all-time high. I scramble out of my car and back inside, setting out multiple tests to take and then guzzle a

couple of bottles of water.

Thirty minutes later, five positive pregnancy tests stare back at me, along with the old test that apparently didn't give me a false positive. I'm pregnant and I think I'm in shock.

I don't know how long I stand there, but when I hear Travis call out for me, I panic.

I start to try to hide the tests, not wanting this to be the way he finds out, but I'm too late.

Travis enters our bathroom, his eyes going wide as he takes in the tests in my hands.

He opens and closes his mouth, trying to find words.

"You're pregnant," he whispers.

"I can explain," I rush out.

He doesn't let me, though. His large frame rushes me, swooping me up into his arms and swirling me around. "We're going to be parents!" He cheers as he squeezes me tight. Tears spring to my eyes at his excitement.

I should have known that Travis wouldn't have been upset with me, it's not in his nature. We already have a future ahead of us and starting a family was always going to be a part of that.

"Hey," he murmurs as he places me back on my feet and pulls back, his dark blonde eyebrows furrowing. "Are you okay? What's wrong?"

"I didn't know how you were going to react," I tell him honestly. "This changes things for us."

“The only thing it might change is our wedding date, we can either push it back or move it forward, but kids were always in the cards for us, sweetheart. It’s just happening for us sooner than we thought it would,” he smiles down at me as he pushes the black hair away from my face.

“We’re going to be parents,” I whisper.

“We’re going to be parents,” he says with a big smile. “I can’t wait.”

“What are we going to tell our parents?” I ask with a wince.

Both of our parents are super religious and weren’t very fond of us moving in together before we got married. Having a baby out of wedlock is going to throw them for a loop.

“I think they’ll handle it better than you think they will,” he says with a laugh. “My parents asked if we could get together for dinner tonight, why don’t you invite your parents to tag along, and we’ll tell them?”

“Don’t you think it’s a little soon for that? We don’t even know how far along I am.”

“I think that the sooner we tell them, the sooner you’ll be at ease. I don’t want you or the baby to be stressed right now,” he says as his hand reaches out and splays over my stomach.

I bite my lip and nod. “Okay. I’ll text my parents. Let yours know that they’re joining us. I’m going to take a shower and get ready.”

“Perfect,” Travis murmurs before planting a gentle kiss on my lips. “Everything is going to be fine.”

I'm finally ready to go about two hours later. I spent extra time on my hair and makeup, smoothing out my long black hair with a flat iron and doing my best makeup. This feels like a really important moment in my life, so I want to look my best .

I walk into our closet and pick out a red off the shoulder sundress and pair it with sandals.

I look in my full-length mirror and rub my hand over my still flat stomach, thinking of how this dress will look in a few months when I start to show.

A smile crosses my face. This baby wasn't planned, but I know that we're going to love him or her to pieces . I just hope I'll be a good mom.

The smile leaves my face at that thought. My mom isn't my biggest supporter. To her, I've always been too heavy, too curvy, too loud. She didn't want me to work and thought that I should take on the role of a traditional wife.

Well, it's too bad for her, because I can't control my weight or curves, I have no desire to stay quiet, and I love my job as a teacher. That doesn't make things any easier on us, though. Maybe this baby can be a bridge between us. Either that, or this is going to tear us apart even further.

Travis walks into the closet and smiles when he sees me. "You ready for this?"

He looks so handsome. His dark blonde hair is combed to the side and a little damp; his blue eyes are shining with happiness. He's wearing a pair of khakis and a black polo shirt.

"As I'll ever be," I mutter before taking his hand.

He leads me out to his car and opens the door for me, waiting for me to slide inside

before he closes the door and walks around to his side. The drive to the restaurant is quiet with both of us lost in thought, but Travis' hand never leaves mine.

When we get to the country club, Travis helps me out of the car and hands the valet the keys before leading me inside.

We see our parents at a large table in the middle of the restaurant and head in that direction.

This isn't exactly the secluded area that I'd like to tell everyone about us being pregnant, but I guess it's going to have to work.

"Hi guys!" Travis' mom Carrie calls out.

Her son inherited her dark blonde hair and blue eyes. She's tall and slender, the total opposite of me. I'm not super short, but standing next to all of them makes me feel that way. I'm five foot six, but even Carrie is five foot eleven.

Russel, Travis' dad, stands from his seat to welcome us. He has dark brown hair, brown eyes, and a similar build to his son. Tall and slender. Both he and Travis are six foot two.

They give us hugs and then we turn to my parents.

Laura Kincaid is my height but slender. She has petite curves and short black hair.

Her hazel eyes are the same color as mine, but that's where our similarities end.

She barely touches me during our hug and then turns to Travis with a warm smile.

My father though? Edward Kincaid is one of my favorite people.

He stands at about five foot ten and has an athletic build.

He has dark brown hair and green eyes. He gives me a huge hug and pulls out my chair for me. My parents are night and day.

We make small talk through dinner, but I'm not sure I hear most of it because of my nerves. When we finish dessert and Travis grabs my hand, I know that it's time. I sit up and push back my shoulders.

"We actually wanted to talk to you guys about something big," Travis begins.

"Oh gosh, don't tell me you're pregnant," my mother mutters under her breath.

The air rushes from my lungs in a woosh. I stare at her, my mouth agape. Travis gently clasps my hand and shoots my mother a glare. It's enough of a tell for her to know that she's right.

"You're kidding," she spits. "You couldn't even wait until you got married? It's bad enough that we had to tell our family and friends that you were living together, but now we have to tell them that you're knocked up? What are they going to think?"

"What are they going to think?" I screech.

"What does it matter, mother? We are already engaged; we're getting married in a few months and we love each other.

We're in this for the long haul. So, what does it matter if we have a baby before our marriage is official?

We're happy about this, so it doesn't really matter what you, or anyone else thinks! "

I wince when I realize I just had that outburst in the middle of the country club dining

room and everyone is watching us. Everyone at the table is wearing shocked expressions. Well, everyone except my dad, who has a small smile on his face. Like he's proud of me.

I scoot my chair back and get up from the table. Travis follows after me, telling the valet to get his keys. We're silent as we wait for his vehicle and for most of the forty-minute drive.

We're about five minutes away from our house when Travis' phone goes off. I figured it would be his parents or one of mine calling, but the contact just says "DK."

"Who is that?" I ask softly.

He ignores the call with a wince. "Just a client."

His phone rings again and once again, he silences it.

"You can answer it if you need to," I tell him as I look out the window.

"It's fine. It's nothing that can't wait until the morning."

Multiple headlights capture my attention in the side mirror of the car. The headlights are approaching fast and driving erratically. My heart sinks to my stomach because something feels wrong.

"Look out for the people coming up behind us," I warn Travis.

His face drops when he looks in the rearview mirror. "Tighten your seatbelt," he orders.

"What?" I ask .

“Tighten it!” He barks as he tightens his grip on the steering wheel.

I do as he says, my eyes wide in fear. “What’s happening?”

“I’m so sorry, Ev,” he rushes out. “This never should have touched you.”

I don’t have time to ask any more questions because three motorcycles surround us and force us off the road. My body feels weightless as the vehicle flies through the air. The last thing I see before everything goes black is the vehicle flipping before we hit the ground.