



Tracked by Hound (Steel Rebels MC #5)

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Category: Romance

Description: Chelsea

After a long day at work dealing with demanding customers, the last thing I expected when I returned home was to find an armed intruder pointing a gun at my brother and demanding that he return the money he stole.

That can't be right.

Ransom is my hero.

He has been since he took me in and raised me after our parents died in a horrible accident.

I'm shocked and horrified when he admits the truth, even more so when I learn who he stole the money from—the Steel Rebels MC, the most notorious motorcycle gang in the city.

Now a giant, menacing man is here to collect.

If Ransom can't pay it back, his life is forfeit.

That is, unless I can convince this brute to take me as collateral, buying time for my brother to come up with the funds he's already spent.

I'm relieved when the man accepts my proposal, but the more time I spend trapped with him, the more I fear I'm about to lose something I never expected...my heart.

Hound

As the club's tracker, it's my job to recover anything that's been taken from us or find anyone who needs finding.

So, when Saint sends me after some stolen money, I figure it's a job like any other.

That is, until I meet her.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 9:08 am

Chelsea

Run!

Everything in my body is screaming at me to run, but I can't. My feet are glued to the floor, my eyes locked on the terrifying sight in front of me.

A mountain of a man is prowling our small living room like a caged animal. He is massive, the biggest man I've ever seen, his broad shoulders and muscled arms straining the worn leather of his jacket.

My heart is pounding hard against my ribcage as I force my gaze to his chiseled face—strong jawline, firm mouth, and a buzzcut that accentuates his thick brows.

Run!

Coming home from work to find the front door kicked in and an armed stranger in my living room is the stuff of nightmares. And yet, I find myself frozen to the floor, staring at the man who has yet to notice me, taking in every inch of his dangerous, imposing form.

Run, Chelsea!

But the truth is, I can't move. When I arrived and saw the wreckage of my front door, my first instinct was to slowly back away then call for help. But when I caught a glimpse of the man kneeling on the floor in front of the intruder, face white with fear, I couldn't leave.

My brother's face has a look of visceral fear on it. The sight of Ransom's bleeding lip and terrified expression were enough to scare the hell out of me. But I can't leave my brother like this.

Think, Chelsea.

A series of ideas run through my mind, ranging from running at the intruder, hoping to catch him by surprise and grab the gun from him, to simply tiptoeing away and calling the cops.

Something tells me that even with my brother's help, we wouldn't be able to best this man, so I figure the second option is really the only one.

I need to get out of here and call the police.

I've already been standing here too long.

With that in mind, I lift my foot to take a step back when a deep and dangerously calm voice stops me in my tracks.

"Don't even think about it."

I freeze, my eyes widening in alarm when the giant stops and turns to look at me. Something in those alarming gray eyes tells me that he knew I was there the entire time. He doesn't even have to raise his gun to send chills rushing down my spine. No, those dark eyes are enough.

"CJ," Ransom cries out when he notices me, but before he can get up, the man points the gun in his direction without once taking his eyes off me. "Please, that's my sister. Please !"

“All the more reason for her to join us.”

“No!” There are tears in my brother’s eyes.

Tears I haven’t seen since I was fourteen and he was twenty-three, his arm over my shoulders as the doctor delivered the news of our parents’ deaths in a car accident.

He’d tried to be strong back then, but I’d seen the tears, had watched them spill out despite his best efforts to keep them in.

His eyes are shining with unshed tears now as he pleads with this stranger to not involve me in whatever the hell is happening here.

“Please...my sister has nothing to do with this. I’ll tell you everything, just let her go.”

Ransom’s words don’t seem to move the giant one bit as his steely eyes stay on mine, and everything in that dangerous gaze tells me that leaving is not an option.

With a shaky breath, I finally step fully into the apartment.

a move that pulls a protest from Ransom, but I don’t take my eyes off the stranger long enough to glance at my brother.

I slowly amble toward them, stopping in front of the stranger before finally addressing my brother. “Are you okay, Ransom?”

“He’s fine,” the beast of a man says calmly, almost dismissively. “For now. It’s up to him if he stays that way.”

“He’s bleeding,” I say quietly, gesturing to my brother’s lip. “You’ve already hurt

him.”

“That little scratch? That’s nothing, a warning tap.”

I swallow deeply at the threat, fighting to steady my weak knees as those dark eyes bore into me.

I fight the urge to look away, gathering the little bravado I reserve for when I have to deal with difficult customers I encounter at the store where I work.

Granted, most of those customers are mean old ladies with more bark than bite.

He’s only a man, Chelsea . A man built like a tank, but a man, nonetheless.

“I-I don’t know what this is about, but I...I’m not going to stand here and let you hurt my brother,” I say, wincing internally at the shakiness in my voice.

Something like respect filters into those dark eyes. “And what are you going to do about it?”

“I...I’ll call the cops. I mean, I’ve already called the cops, and they should be here—”

His laugh catches me off guard. It’s a loud booming sound that sends my heart racing with both fear and excitement. “Retract your claws, kitten,” he says with a smirk. “But sure, go ahead and call the cops. They can arrest your thieving brother right along with me!”

“My brother is not a thief!” I hiss, knowing it’s a lie even as words leave my lips.

He truth is, I know too much about my brother’s activities.

Ransom is a tech wiz, always on computers, never clear about what he is doing.

It was not until after our parents passed and I came to live with him that I found out he was hacking and stealing money from people.

I was horrified, and we exchanged some harsh words until he promised to stop.

He assured me that he'd only stolen from criminals and had convinced me that he'd covered his tracks well enough that no one could trace it back to him, and yet, here we are.

In our living room with a stranger who looks ready to kill.

A man who has no doubt taken a life before and won't hesitate to take another.

It's all in the eyes—the danger—clear, harsh, and easy to read.

“So here's how this is going to play out,” the stranger says, his eyes cold and hard again. “Your brother has two options. Return all the money he stole from us or take a bullet to his brain.”

“All of it?” Ransom pales further, his face turning chalk white. “How the fuck do you expect me to return that much money? I don't have it anymore, and—”

“Then we are done here,” the man says with horrifying nonchalance.

I watch with terror as he raises his gun, and I see it in those steel eyes sharp as a wolf's, he is going to kill my brother.

Ransom took me in when our parents died.

He has sacrificed so much to take care of me and our grandmother, paying for the apartment we now share and all the bills from the nursing home.

He taught me how to throw a punch, took me to buy my high school prom dress, and threatened all the guys in the neighborhood to steer clear of his sister if they didn't want to deal with him.

And now, he's going to die in front of me.

My legs are moving before my brain can catch up.

One second, I'm frozen, my entire being paralyzed with fear, and the next a primal instinct pushed by desperation takes over.

I launch myself forward, a blur of motion as I move to shield my brother from the gun.

I feel the impact of my body against Ransom's and the weight of his arm locking around me as I throw myself in front of him.

"No!" My breath catches in my throat, a choked sob escaping my lips. I bite hard on my trembling lip as I turn to the stranger. "You can't kill him. I won't let you!"

I catch a flicker of surprise in his eyes as he drops the gun but doesn't say a word. Ransom tries his best to push me out of the way and protect me as he always has, but I hold on tight to his shoulders, unwilling to lose yet another loved one. "Chelsea June!" he shouts.

"No, I won't let him kill you." I sniff, my heart wrenching painfully in my chest. The memory of losing our parents rushes in.

The panicked drive to the hospital, the fear, the hope, and then...

the pain. I turn my wet, pleading eyes to the giant standing over us.

“Isn’t there a third option? Please?” I plead, blinking tearfully at the stranger. “Please.”

“Your brother has to pay back the money he stole. With interest. There is no other option.”

“He won’t be able to give you anything if he’s dead,” I tell him.

Ransom pushes me off, managing to move me to the side, but not without a struggle.

“I’ll pay,” he says finally. “I can’t pay it all at once.

I used some of the money to cover my grandmother’s nursing home expenses for the next year.

There isn’t much left, but I’ll figure out a way to pay it back. I just need some time.”

“How long?”

“Two months,” Ransom says, before quickly correcting himself when the stranger raises a single thick brow. “Fine, six weeks.” The stranger just continues to stare at him, so he says, “Seriously? Okay, fine. One month. I can’t get it sooner than that.”

The man walks to the couch and lowers himself onto it, placing the gun on the cushion next to him before turning to us.

“Tell me, why should I trust a thief?” he asks, smirking when my eyes flare at his

words, the urge to defend my brother strong, but I decide to keep my mouth shut for the moment.

“Do you really expect me to take your word for it? I mean, what’s stopping you from taking the rest of the money and disappearing? ”

“Then what do you want? My ID? Passport?”

“Those could be forged. With your computer skills, I imagine it’s child’s play to get fake identities.”

Ransom makes an exasperated sound as he sits up.

“Then what do you want?” he demands, missing the way the giant’s eyes move from him to me and stay there.

My lips part in a gasp at what he’s implying, but it takes my brother a minute of silence for his brain to catch up.

He shoots up to his feet, eyes blazing with fury.

“Absolutely not. My sister has nothing to do with this. You’re not taking her! ”

“I don’t believe you’re in a position to negotiate with me.”

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Ransom moves in front of me, and this time, it's he who shields me with his body. "Please...anything else. She's only twenty, practically a kid still."

The stranger leans back against the couch and stares at him coolly. "You have nothing else of value. Nothing that would motivate you to stay close and work hard to repay the money you stole from the Steel Rebels."

Steel Rebels? The motorcycle club?

I lean to the side to stare at him before slowly looking up at my brother.

My ears must be failing me. I must have heard the man wrong.

That has got to be it because surely there is no way in hell Ransom would be dumb enough to steal from the infamous motorcycle club.

There are petty criminals and small gangs that love to wreak havoc in the city, and then there's the Steel Rebels MC.

The Steel Rebels are known to be the most dangerous men in all of Chicago.

Just a few weeks ago, they took out the Chrome Vipers, another criminal motorcycle club that used to terrorize the area where I work.

The Vipers forced every business in the area to pay a protection fee when they were the ones making life a living hell for everyone.

And yet, the Steel Rebels ran them out of town before taking over their territory.

Now they don't just own one area of the city, they control more than half of Chicago.

And these are the men that Ransom stole from?

I fight the urge to smack the back of my brother's head or kick him in his shin. Anything to knock some sense into that empty brain of his. God, he's lucky I got here when I did, or he'd be dead already. The men in the club are not exactly rumored to be patient or understanding.

No, Ransom was writing his own death warrant when he stole from them.

"I'll go with you," I offer quietly, but the two men clearly hear me as they both turn to look at me.

My eyes stay on those steel gray ones, my heart pounding as the next words slip out.

"If you promise not to hurt my brother and give him a month to return the money he took, then I'll come with you. "

"No! I will not allow it," my brother yells, but he doesn't have a choice.

The stranger doesn't bother pointing that out either.

It would be foolish for the man to blindly trust us.

Ransom would have us over the border and into Canada before the sun was fully set.

He would get us new identities, transfer my grandmother to a different nursing home under a different name, and we would start our lives over, but something tells me this

man would still find us.

And he wouldn't be so generous the next time he pointed his gun at Ransom.

I can't risk that. I won't. The only thing I can do is hope Ransom can pay the Rebels back before they run out of patience.

"I'll go with you," I say again, pushing to my feet and evading Ransom when he tries to grab my hand and stop me. "Just give me a few minutes to pack my things, then I'll come with you."

"CJ...Chelsea, this is madness. You can't go with this man. The Rebels are monsters—"

I shut my bedroom door in his face, leaning against it as I push down the panic and fear that threatened to choke me earlier when I saw that gun pointed at my brother.

I'm not as scared for my safety as I am for my brother's.

Something in the man's eyes when we spoke earlier, the way he dropped the gun so quickly when I got in the way...

He didn't want to hurt me. I've been told I'm good with people.

My job as a retail clerk has taught me how to deal with different kinds of people, how to make the toughest customer happy.

I take deep breaths until my hands have stopped shaking before I walk deeper into the room and grab a bag to pack a few clothes and toiletries.

I make quick work of it, unwilling to leave the two men alone for much longer.

Whatever I leave behind, I can always come back for.

Assuming the man doesn't lock me in some basement and throw away the key.

I guess now I know how Belle felt with the Beast.

Ransom is still breathing when I finally emerge, which I take as a good sign, but the man has moved from the couch and is now standing by the broken front door, his massive build filling the doorway.

"CJ," Ransom's voice is broken as he steps forward.

My heart twists at the desperate way he says my childhood nickname.

Only Ransom has ever called me CJ. My mother insisted that everyone else always use Chelsea.

"I can't let you leave with him. You don't know what these kind of men are capable of like I do. "

And yet he stole from them , I want to shout, but I know his heart was in the right place, and it can't be undone now, so I don't. "I'll be fine," I say instead, forcing a smile to assure my brother before turning to the giant blocking the doorway. "Right?"

"Yes. We don't put our hands on women...unless they ask nicely."

I fight the urge to roll my eyes at the last part, ignoring Ransom's angry growl.

Not exactly the resounding assurance my brother needs right now, but it'll have to do.

"I'll text and call every day so you don't have to worry.

Just focus on getting them their money.” I step forward and wrap my arms around him in a tight hug. “I’ll be fine. I promise.”

He nods, and I imagine his throat is as choked up as mine. I pull away and force another smile, one I hope is convincing enough to assuage his worries.

“I love you, sis, and I’m so sorry.”

“You’ll make it up to me, big brother. You always do.”

He doesn’t stop me when I pull away, and with a teary smile, I wave at Ransom before following the stranger out.

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Hound

The sun has long set when we finally step out of the building. I fight a sigh when I realize how late it is—much later than I was expecting to wrap up this particular job, but when I turn to the girl silently following me, I realize there was no helping it.

She's beautiful.

Chelsea is breathtaking, her skin the color of a blushing rose petal and her hair is dark brown with curls that bounce when she moves.

Curls so wild, they look like they have a life of their own.

She wears it loose so that it brushes her shoulders.

Her eyes are a soft amber, the color of warm honey, rich and golden, sucking me in with their innocence, and that Cupid's bow mouth.

God, I could kiss it. Lick those lips until they part for me...

Jesus Christ, what the fuck am I doing taking this girl?

This is out of character for me. I never make deals with anyone who dares mess with the Rebels. These petty criminals know what they're getting themselves into, but they always have the gall to act surprised when I track them down.

No, I never waste time listening to pathetic excuses and pointless pleas from people

who knew better, but tonight...

“I have questions.”

“Not here,” I huff, and take long strides toward the spot where I left my bike parked.

Annoyance and a little frustration at myself for being weakened by a pair of golden eyes and a pretty mouth war within me.

A face of an angel and a body made for sin, she’s God’s perfect creation with those juicy tits begging to be touched and curvy hips made for my hands to hold.

Tonight did not go how I expected, and it annoys me to no end that there is nothing I could have done differently. Not with her around. Saint will have some choice words for me, but he knows I’d never hurt a woman, so what else was I supposed to do?

I sensed her the moment she approached the broken door, and I let myself bask in her gaze without turning to look at her.

When I finally did, nothing could have prepared me for the sight of her.

She scrambled all rational thoughts from my mind and sent every ounce of blood rushing south.

For several seconds, I couldn’t breathe.

I couldn’t think. So, I let a man that had fucked over the Rebels go with barely a scratch.

For her.

“Hey, will you stop for a second?” she calls from behind, and I hear her footsteps as she hurries to catch up with me.

I don’t stop until I’m beside my bike, and when she steps up next to me, she’s panting.

I grab the helmet and turn to her, amused like I never have been before to find her glaring at me.

“Later,” I say before she can speak, sliding the helmet over her head and adjusting the chin strap. “I’ll answer any questions you have later.”

Despite the impatience I read in her eyes, she doesn’t say a word but instead nods and climbs onto the bike when I instruct her to.

Chelsea’s hands go around my waist once she’s seated behind me, and I have to fight the urge to groan at the soft caress of her hand.

Fuck, how long has it been since I’ve felt the touch of a woman?

No, since I’ve wanted to feel the touch of a woman.

Too long it seems, seeing how my hard cock juts in my pants.

“You set?” I ask, revving the engine, and the sound seems to startle her as she jumps and her grip tightens around my middle, dropping dangerously close to my erection.

It takes sheer willpower not to lean further into her touch.

Annoyed with myself, I tear out of the parking space.

I imagine it's going to be the longest ride to the clubhouse, but it passes in a flash.

My mind is filled with thoughts of the temptress clinging to me like a lifeline.

I mourn the loss of her hands when she withdraws and climbs off my motorcycle once I'm parked in my spot.

"Can I ask now?"

"No," I say, grabbing her bag and storming toward the elevator, using my keycard to access it.

Chelsea steps beside me as I press the button for the fifth floor where my apartment is.

The logical thing to do would be to take this girl straight to the club president's office and tell Saint about everything that's happened, and yet, I choose my apartment.

I don't examine my personal feelings too deeply, unsure whether or not I am willing to face the answer that lies within.

"I don't even know your name," Chelsea mutters from beside me, and I know better than to turn and look at her. My brain doesn't seem to function properly whenever I do.

"Hound," I say after long beats of silence.

"Of course it is," she says with a small huff.

The elevator doors silently open to reveal a long hallway with five doors facing each other.

I don't stop to question what she means by that snarky remark as I walk out and head straight for the third door to our left.

I take out my keys and unlock the door before nodding for her to enter.

Chelsea stares at me apprehensively for a long moment, chewing at her bottom lip and, I imagine, weighing her options, but she did come this far.

"This is my place," I say, nodding toward the apartment.

"Just you?"

"I live alone," I answer patiently, and that seems to placate her as she takes a tentative step into the apartment. I don't follow and instead place her bag just inside the door.

"You can wait here while I—"

"What?" Her eyes turn to me, panicked as she grabs my hand. "You're leaving me alone?"

My brows arch at her reaction, surprised that she didn't jump at the chance for some space. "Not for long. I need to talk to someone about your presence here," I say. "Unless you prefer to come with me to meet the president of the Steel Rebels."

She quickly drops my hand like she's been burned and takes a step back into the room. "I... No, I think I'm fine here, waiting for you."

"No one but me has the key to this apartment, so you don't need to be worried about someone else walking in."

"Um, yeah, okay."

She seems nervous, and its instinct that makes me step forward and grasp her chin, tilting her head up so those eyes are locked on mine. “You’re safe here. With me,” I say, pushing back my own desire. “I promise you.”

“Okay,” she whispers, the sound barely audible. My blood roars in my ears the longer I stare into that face. It’s so close to mine that it would be so easy to dip in for a kiss. God, I bet those lips taste like the sweetest honey, pillowy soft under mine.

Fuck!

I step back before I can do something crazy like kiss this girl or take her like a wild beast in doorway of my apartment. But Christ, she tempts me. Tears at my control like it’s nothing. “I’ll be back soon.”

This time, I don’t look at her as I turn around and stomp toward the elevator.

I bad temperedly thumb for the ground floor where Saint’s office is located.

Unlike the quiet of the residential top floors, the elevator door opens to the pure chaos that exists on the ground level.

The club’s bar is on this floor, and next door is a mechanic shop, both of which are often crowded with members of the club, but tonight I’m not in the mood to socialize, so I walk right past them and head down the corridor to Saint’s office.

I knock once before pushing the door open, which proves to be a huge mistake, but it’s quite on brand for me, seeing as I’ve been making a lot of those lately.

“Fuck, sorry,” I curse as I turn around, but not quick enough that I miss the woman straddling the president’s lap, or her flushed face.

A few years ago, I never would have imagined Saint or any one of my brothers seriously getting themselves hooked on a woman, but in the last several months, they've been dropping like flies.

Heck, Saint went ahead and got himself hitched.

Had a wedding and everything. "I'll come back later, Prez. "

"No, wait!" It's the woman who speaks, and I hear the quick rustling of clothes. "It's my fault for distracting Saint when he's supposed to be working...and for not locking the door."

"I don't mind being distracted as long as it's my wife doing it," Saint counters, and when I turn around, I find them exchanging knowing smiles. "Why don't you go ahead and wait for me at the bar, angel? I'm sure what Hound wants to say isn't going to take long. Right?"

It's a question, but I hear the command beneath it. "Sure."

His wife, Jade, rolls her eyes, and with a last wave, walks out, closing the door softly behind her. "I just got an email from the bank," Saint, not a man to waste time, points out the second the door closes. "The person who stole from us only repaid half the sum. Does that mean that you—"

"No," I cut in, heaving a sigh as I lean against the door, most comfortable close to an exit. Knowing this, Saint doesn't bother inviting me to sit. "I didn't kill the guy."

His eyes widen in surprise. "Interesting."

"I'm not a complete monster, Saint." I frown at the defensive tone I catch in my voice, and with how Saint's brows go up, I can tell he didn't miss it either. "He

promised to pay the rest back within a month.”

“Why?”

There is a knowing look in his eyes that makes me think that he sees more than I’m saying, which pisses me off for some reason.

I hate that I can’t shake the restlessness brought on by the girl holed up in my apartment.

The need to get back to her is urgent, almost desperate, and it pisses me the hell off.

“Why what?” I grind out, perhaps harsher than I should, but Saint doesn’t bat an eye. I bet his coolness comes with dealing with hard-headed men all day.

“Why did you let him go, Hound? It’s not like you to give in to sob stories or trust blindly.”

“I did not trust blindly,” I point out, choosing to ignore the first bit of that statement.

“I accepted something as collateral to guarantee the payment. Well...someone. His sister.”

“You kidnapped a woman?”

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“She volunteered.” It’s semantics. Sure, I didn’t drag her here kicking and screaming, but I imagine, given the choice, she wouldn’t have come at all. But kidnapping...

There’s amusement in Saint’s expression as he watches me, but he doesn’t share what he finds funny, and I don’t bother asking. I’m not sure I’ll like the answer. “I’m choosing to believe you’ve got a handle on this, as you always do. So I’ll trust your judgment. For now.”

I wait for him to ask to see her. No one gains access to the Rebels’ clubhouse without being strictly vetted. And especially not people who are here for extended stays. So I wait for the follow-up questions, and when they don’t come, that’s all the response I need, and I turn to leave.

“Hound!” He stops me before I can open the door. My brows furrow at the awkward look that settles on his expression. “If the girl needs any help or company while adapting to this place, Jade is always looking to meet new people and make friends.”

The offer is surprising, and I respond with a nod before showing myself out. My thoughts are on Chelsea as I head back to my apartment, my heart thumping hard in my chest with the need to see her. I don’t bother examining these feelings as I let myself through the front door.

I take off my boots and walk into the living room to find her pacing.

She stops when she spots me, heaving a sigh even as the nerves in her eyes disappear, but not completely.

“You’re back,” she says, taking a step forward but stopping herself before she reaches me. “Uh, c-can I ask those questions now?”

The urge to close the distance between us and touch her is so strong that I force myself to turn away, stripping off my jacket so I have something to do with my hands.

“Ask away,” I say, heading toward the kitchen with no plan in mind.

I open the fridge and contemplate grabbing a beer, but I need my wits about me when I’m around her.

“What is it you do?”

I settle on coffee, closing the fridge to brew some.

“I’m a tracker,” I say as I grab the ground coffee beans from a shelf.

“If you want to be technical about it, I’m one of the club’s enforcers, but my main role is tracking down men like your brother.

” The rich scent of freshly ground coffee beans fills the air as I scoop them into the filter of the coffee maker before closing the lid.

“And what do you do with them...men like my brother?”

I briefly turn to glance at her, surprised by how close she’s moved. “Whatever needs to be done.”

“You kill them,” she guesses, and when I don’t outright deny it, she looks away. The machine whirls to life when I turn it on. “What happens if Ransom can’t come up

with the money? Are you going to kill us?”

I watch the timer tick down as I mull over her words.

To be fair, most men I go after are more often than not dangerous criminals and not genius hackers trying to provide for their families.

I recall what Ransom said about how he'd spent the money, and I can't honestly fault him for doing what he had to so he could take care of his family.

That doesn't mean actions don't have consequences though, and I'm the consequences.

“We...I don't kill women and kids as a rule. I don't harm innocent people.”

“My brother—”

“Stole half a million dollars from some very dangerous people. He took money that did not belong to him and was cocky enough to think I wouldn't find him, but I did.

” The timer beeps, but I don't turn to it.

I find that I am no longer in the mood for coffee.

My nerves are already frayed as it is. “When people steal from us, they need to be punished, or everyone in the city will think we're an easy target. ”

Long beats of silence pass before she shudders out a breath. “I don't know anyone who could do what you do.”

“The same could be said about your brother,” I point out, then choose to change the

subject before it sours the evening any further. “Do you want something to eat?”

Chelsea shakes her head, and I read exhaustion in those beautiful amber eyes.

“I’m just tired,” she says, leaning against the counter.

“I had to deal with these mean old ladies at work, and then when I came home, our door was broken and there was a maniac with a gun in our living room, stepping all over my clean carpet and threatening to end my brother’s life. ”

“And by maniac, I assume you mean me?”

“You don’t look too crazy now,” she says with a yawn. “It must be the exhaustion talking.”

“Go ahead and get some rest,” I say, nodding toward my bedroom.

The apartment has two bedrooms, but seeing as I’ve never anticipated having an overnight guest, I haven’t gotten around to furnishing the other and only use it to store my weapons and supplies.

Chelsea nods and grabs her bag before disappearing through the door.

I set the coffee pot aside before stretching to release the tension coiling my muscles.

My steps are heavy as I walk to the bedroom and catch the sound of the shower going on in the ensuite.

The image of her naked body behind the door sends my cock swelling to full mast, and I growl in frustration as I tear off my shirt and jeans, leaving me in only my boxers.

How the fuck am I going to survive the night?

My skin is thrumming with need when I pull back the covers and climb into bed.

I'm about to settle in when the bathroom door opens and Chelsea walks out wrapped in a towel, those heavy brown curls dripping with water, and God, she's a dream.

I didn't think I could get harder than I already am, and yet, staring at her proves how wrong I was.

I clench my fist as I fight to rein in my desire, unable to stop myself from trailing my eyes over that sexy body. Those curved hips and slim waist, to the perfect swell of her breasts. And when I look up to that gorgeous face, it's to find her watching me, but not with lust.

It's shock and panic in her gaze.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 9:08 am

Chelsea

For the second time in less than a day, I find myself frozen to the floor, unsure of what to do. Hound is in bed, and naked from the looks of it.

Does that mean he expects us to share the same bed? But I've never shared a bed with anyone before, let alone a man. Thanks to my overprotective brother, I've never so much as kissed a boy before, and now I'm going to skip all those steps to...sleep with a man?

Sure, the man in question is built like a god. He has arms the size of tree trunks covered in gorgeous tattoos and a face most men would kill to have, but isn't sharing a bed with someone you just met a giant leap? All I know about him is his name, and that he...kills people.

I chew on my bottom lip as I consider that this man might expect something from me. Some kind of reward for the inconvenience of not killing my brother.

"Chelsea."

My eyes shoot up from the naked tattooed chest to the man's eyes. "Huh?"

"Is something the matter?" he asks, sitting up, which sends the covers slipping down his defined abs to pool at his waist. The move reveals more of the man, and I blush fiercely, trying and failing not to stare at those sculpted abs. And then there's that V-line that disappears into the covers.

Oh God ! I hiss at my own thoughts, forcing my eyes from him. “You’re...um, sleeping here?”

Hound is quiet for a long time, so I brave a look only to find those steely gray eyes trained on me.

“I should have considered that you would be uncomfortable sharing a bed with a stranger,” he says, pushing off the covers to reveal that he was, in fact, not naked under the sheets.

I wince at my own disappointment at revelation.

“You can sleep here, and I’ll take the couch—”

“No!” I blurt out, as surprised by my own outburst as he clearly is. Hound raises a brow as if expecting me to explain, but I have nothing. A few minutes ago, I was panicking from the thought of sharing a bed with a man for the first time in my life, and now what? I don’t want him to leave?

This man is dangerous. I saw it with my own eyes what he’s capable of, and yet, I feel the safe around him.

The time he left me to go speak to his president was nerve-wrecking, and everything fell into place when he walked back in through the door a half an hour later.

It didn’t make sense to me then, it doesn’t now, but all I know is that I feel safe around him.

No, I don’t want him to leave.

“Chelsea?”

“Stay,” I say, flushing at my own suggestion. Confused by it too. “It’s...um, there’s no reason for you to sleep on the couch when there’s a perfectly big enough bed here...”

“I’m fine—”

“And also, I’m not familiar with this place so I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep alone.” Not entirely true, but close enough.

Hound stares at me for a while which wrecks my nerves further, and it feels like forever before he nods. “I’ll stay,” he says, climbing back into bed. I try to keep my eyes firmly on his face but find them slipping to his abs, my pulse racing as they dip down...

Nope, not doing that!

“Okay, it’s good that you’re staying,” I blurt out before I can catch myself. I flush, mortified by my own reaction as I scramble to grab my bag. “I’ll, um...get dressed in the bathroom.”

I walk into the bathroom to get ready for bed, taking my sweet time to get dressed.

There are nerves swirling wildly in the pit of my gut before I realize that stalling only adds to them.

I tidy up after myself before creeping back into the bedroom, surprised by the disappointment that sets in when I find Hound already asleep.

I tiptoe to the empty side of the bed and climb in, eyeing Hound for any movement, but he doesn’t stir.

The sheets are cool against my skin, and I sigh at the feeling before turning to glance at the man sleeping next to me.

He sleeps on his back with an arm under his head, a position that exposes more of his muscles. The soft rhythm of his breathing fills the quiet room, and I allow myself to stare at him for a while as I wait for sleep to take over.

For a criminal, Hound sure is handsome, and I find myself wondering how I would have reacted if he'd shown up at the store and approached me. If he'd flirted with me. Would I have flirted back? I doubt I would have even know what to say given that I've never really tried before.

With a soft sigh, I turn away and close my eyes, willing my brain to shut down for the night, but...nothing happens. I sit up to fluff the pillow and tuck the covers around me before sliding back down and waiting for sleep to carry me away.

Any time now...

It takes me approximately ten minutes to realize there'll be no sleep happening tonight, at least not for me.

I turn to stare enviously at the dosing man next to me, wanting him to be as nervous and restless as I am, but then again, he didn't find out that his brother stole half a million dollars from the scariest MC in the tri-state area before being used as collateral.

Of course he would sleep like a baby without any worries in the world.

The devil on my shoulder suggests I kick at the covers and wake the man so we can both be miserable, but I question if I'm ready to deal with a sleep-deprived club enforcer. Probably not.

With another sigh, I shift my position, turning onto my back to stare up at the ceiling in hopes of finding the solution to my sleeplessness there.

The clock on the nightstand ticks softly in the background, each second stretching into eternity.

The mattress creaks slightly when I flip over to my side, hoping the change will coax sleep to my weary mind, but it only brings more frustration.

Okay, this is not working!

A frustrated whine climbs up my throat as I try to find a comfortable position, adjusting the pillow beneath my head once more, but that does little to help.

After what feels like an eternity of tossing and turning, I start to turn to face him again, but before I can, a hand snakes under the covers and over my waist, then I'm pulled flush against Hound.

My mouth parts on a gasp as his arm wraps around me, drawing me into the warmth of his body.

His skin is a furnace, and even with clothes on, I can feel the heat radiating from him.

In his warm embrace, I find my frustration softening, and something else takes root.

The hand on my stomach runs a soothing motion up and down before accidentally grazing my left boob.

I bite hard on my lip to stop the sound that threatens to squeak out, wincing at the wetness that spreads between my legs at the contact.

“Why can’t you sleep?” he murmurs, his deep voice thick and raspy. “I thought you said you were comfortable with me staying.”

“I am.” I sigh, pushing back against him to feel more of his warmth when a deep rumbling sound stops me in my tracks.

“Fuck, kitten, don’t do that.”

I worry the covers between my trembling fingers. “Do what?” I ask.

“Just sleep,” Hounds says after a moment, burying his face in the crook of my neck as if that’s going to help. I try to breathe quietly, biting hard on my lip when his warm breath brushes against my ear, sending a storm of goosebumps licking up my skin, and I want—no, need something.

I have no idea what it is I need, but every bit of my body is trembling.

The hand on my stomach making soothing motions isn’t doing me any favors.

My nipples are painfully hard behind my nightgown, and the spot between my thighs is aching.

Pushing against the solid wall of muscle behind me offers little relief; in fact, it only lights a fire under me. “Hound…”

“Sleep,” he says again, his voice rough, and whatever shred of exhaustion that was present earlier is gone. “You need to stop moving, Chelsea. You don’t want me to take you up on what you’re offering me right now.”

It’s a warning—a threat I ought to listen to, and I would if my brain wasn’t all fogged up. My body seems to have a mind of its own as I push back against him once more,

and he groans when my ass brushes against something hard. “Oh!”

“You’re killing me here, baby.” He exhales into my hair even as he slides his hand up my nightgown, caressing my thigh. There’s no stopping the whimper that slips out when his fingers bite hard into my skin. “I’m trying to be a good man.”

I have no idea what being a good man has to do with anything.

I can barely think past the hand on my hip, wishing it would climb higher and touch that aching spot between my thighs.

I instinctively push into his hand, whimpering when he pulls away, but before I can embarrass us both by begging him to touch me there again, Hound flips me to my back and pulls me under him, his massive frame hovering over me.

His eyes are dark and heated, his expression hard as he stares down at me. It should scare me—remind me of the kind of man I am dealing with. Anything to clear my head of the fog, but I find myself hypnotized by his steely gaze.

And then the hand is back beneath my nightgown, trailing up my thighs and stopping dangerously close to where I want it most. Those heated eyes watch my reaction, darkening with lust when I arch into his hand, all but begging for him to touch me there. To ease the ache that’s driving me to madness.

“Is this what you want?” he asks, leaning down until his face is only a few inches from mine.

His dark eyes are on mine as he lifts his hand to my stomach, his touch burning into my skin.

I whimper when it climbs up to fondle my breasts, my back arching off the bed at the

maddening sensation.

“You should know better than to tease me, Chelsea.”

Is that the first time he’s said my name? I’m not even sure anymore. I can’t think with my brain cells fried to bits. “More,” I beg, unsure exactly what it is I’m asking for, only certain that I want it. Want more of this man. “Hound—”

His mouth slams down on mine.

My eyes flutter to a close when he fastens his lips over mine in a kiss that was not meant to happen. Not with a man who only hours ago threatened to kill my brother. But now, I breathe him in like my life depends on it, swallowing his broken groans.

I find myself opening my legs wide to accommodate more of him. “Oh God!” I cry into the kiss when the thick ridge of his erection brushes my sex. My hands find their way to his shoulder to anchor myself as I rock forward and rub my clothed center against him, chasing that delicious feeling.

“It’ll be better without any clothes on,” he says raggedly against my lips, and in one swift move, he yanks down my panties, tearing them off completely.

His lips are pressed to mine as he tugs his boxers away.

It’s at the tip of my lips to tell the man of my inexperience.

That I’ve never so much as kissed a man before, but his hand goes to my butt, and he yanks me hard against him.

“Oh God!”

My back arches off the bed with a sob, a rough shudder rolling through my body as he presses his silky shaft against my bare sex. My folds flood with moisture. He was right. Oh, it feels so much better naked.

“Wrap your legs around me.”

I’m trembling as I lock my thighs around him, moaning at the feel of his naked body against mine.

Hound makes an impatient sound as he starts thrusting against my sex, his hardness massaging my feminine lips and sparking heat through my core.

His hand tightens on my butt as he rocks forward, his thick shaft gliding against the sensitive bundle of nerves between my legs.

It’s dirty and obscene and definitely not something I should be doing with the man who practically kidnapped me...

But it feels too good.

“Don’t stop,” I cry, tightening my arms around his shoulder as I roll my hips in time with his, the wetness of my arousal easing the glide of his cock between my folds.

“Fuck, tell me you’re close, baby,” he grinds out, gripping me harder as his hips slam upward and forward, the friction against my clit threatening to make me explode.

Is that what he means by close? If so, then yes!

I’m so close, like a countdown to a detonation that threatens to destroy me completely.

But I have no voice to tell him that as pleasure wraps its tight fist around my throat and robs me of the ability to speak.

“Oh!” I sob, digging my nails into his shoulder as I work my hips faster and harder, meeting his feverish need with my own until I feel it happen.

Hound’s mouth takes mine, capturing my scream as waves of pleasure roll through me, one after another.

My body thrashes underneath his massive frame uncontrollably as I struggle to understand the delicious heat rocking through my system.

My toes curl in pleasure and my sex pulses intensely, clenching and releasing against his thickness.

“Fuuuck!” he roars, breaking away to bury his face in my neck, and I absorb every rough tremor of his body before I feel his wet release coat my thighs and sex.

He rolls his hips, painting me further before he collapses on top of me with a heavy grunt.

My legs fall from his waist, and the hands on his shoulders drop weakly to my sides.

Slowly, I feel the fog in my head start to clear, and my breath slows as I feel my eyes grow heavy with sleep. I should probably think about what just happened and how the hell I’m going to deal with it, but I’m warm and my body is humming, and now I just want to sleep.

“Chelsea.” I feel Hound push back, but I don’t open my eyes. “Are you okay?”

“Hmm, m’kay,” I hum, my voice a little slurred even to my own ears. “So sleepy.”

“We need to clean up,” he says, but I don’t bother opening my eyes. The thought of leaving this comfortable bed doesn’t sound at all appealing to me.

“Later.”

He mutters something that I don’t quite make out before I feel him pull away from me.

I mourn the loss of his warm body against mine, but I’m too exhausted to protest. I slip in and out of consciousness.

At one point, I feel a wet cloth touch the spot between my legs and over my thighs, and later, I feel him climb back into bed behind me.

Hound pulls me into his embrace, wrapping his massive arms around me, and I cling to the man like ivy, nuzzling his chest before everything fades away.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 9:08 am

Hound

The world outside is quiet, wrapped in the stillness of the night, but my mind is racing.

I glance at the clock on the bedside table, sighing when I realize it's almost four, but I'm still wide awake.

As someone who functions well with little sleep, it doesn't bother me that I haven't slept all night.

It's the why that has my thoughts swirling.

I'm still holding her when the first sliver of pale dawn creeps through the gap in the curtains.

It paints Chelsea's sleeping form in a soft light, highlighting the delicate curve of her cheek and mouth.

I find myself staring at her—as I have all through the night—and my breath catches somewhere in my throat.

I don't remember the last time I slept or woke up next to anyone.

For a man like me, such warmth and quiet intimacy is a foreign concept.

I've created too many enemies to lie comfortably in the arms of a woman.

But this woman is different.

A strange, unsettling flutter builds in my chest every time I look at her. It's not unpleasant so much as it's unfamiliar. I turn my head away from the woman cozied up in my arms and glare at the ceiling, listening to her soft breaths.

What the fuck have I done?

I never expected to find myself here, wrapped in the embrace of someone so beautiful. So dangerously tempting. It's terrifying in ways I have never experienced before. I think about the way she watched me last night, mouth parted as she begged me to abandon all reserve and just...take her.

I could have.

Christ, I was so close to abandoning reason and rutting her in my bed like a sex-starved maniac, but I sensed her innocence in the kiss. The way she watched me with surprise through every caress. Those beautiful golden eyes brimming with need and wonder as I touched her.

The way she reacted... It's as if she's never been touched before, so I held back. Shoved down my own need to impale her with my cock, to take what she was so innocently offering.

And it's no wonder that such thoughts are slowly creeping back into my mind.

Fuck!

A wave of panic washes over me, cold and sharp with the sudden urge to leave.

To get the hell out before I do something stupid like lean down and kiss that pouty

mouth.

Christ, she's not some chick I picked up at the bar and decided to spend the night with.

Heck, I was never supposed to even touch her in the first place.

I should have known better than to give into my baser needs.

With a sigh, I ease myself out of bed, careful not to disturb her.

The sheets rustle as I slide away. When Chelsea stirs, I freeze, turning around to glance at her, but she doesn't wake up.

She tucks her hands under her head and burrows deeper into the pillow with a soft sigh that calls for me to climb back into bed and hold her close.

One more glance at her and my resolve, which is practically thin as ice at this point, will simply shatter.

I force myself to look away, stumbling toward the ensuite. The bright bathroom light is harsh and unforgiving, and I avoid looking in the mirror. I know what I'll see. Red-rimmed eyes, shadowed with the telltale signs of a night spent staring at a girl I had no right touching.

Jesus Christ!

I splash cold water on my face, the shock a brief, welcome sting, but it does little to quell the churning in my stomach.

I can't push off the thought that I took advantage of her.

Chelsea is collateral—her purpose here is clear.

She's not a guest here, and despite those golden eyes staring pleadingly at me, I should have known not to give in.

The thought stays as I shave the stubble on my chin, the rough rasp of the razor doing nothing to provide any distractions. It's her eyes and those lips I see when I step into the shower, that perfect body fitting against mine like a puzzle.

My dick is in my hand before I know it, and I drop my forehead against the tile as I jerk off, the memories of last night flooding my senses.

The taste of those soft lips, the way they hitched against mine as I rubbed my cock over her wet pussy, her nails scratching my back as I slid my hard dick against her thighs, touching her soft tits...

"Fuck!" I grunt through clenched teeth as I climax, ropes of white flying onto the tiles and washing away.

I stroke my cock faster, drawing out my orgasm as I picture Chelsea on her knees, taking my cock into that pretty mouth of hers.

I'm panting when I'm done, but even that does little to rid me of the tension in my muscles.

Chelsea is still asleep when I finally leave the bathroom. She barely stirs when I walk to my closet, sprawled on my bed like she belongs there, and a fucked-up part of me wants her to. For her idiot brother to skip town and leave her with me.

I'll protect her.

I dress in the dim light, the silence in the apartment pressing down on me. Stuck between wanting to climb into bed and hold her close, or continue to beat myself up for desiring someone I have no business wanting.

So, I choose the third option.

With a last glance at my sleeping angel, I leave the room and walk out of the apartment.

The hallway is cold and empty, but I ignore the silence as I head down to the elevator.

I press the button for the ground floor with no idea of where exactly I mean to go until a few minutes later, I find myself standing outside the only place open this early.

The club's auto shop.

I stare at the entrance for long seconds, contemplating heading back to my apartment and crawling into bed with the woman I can't seem to get out of my mind.

There's a roaring need to head back, but before I can give in to the thought, I catch some movement inside the auto shop, and I welcome the distraction.

Axel, the club's official mechanic, spots me at the same time I do him.

The man grins and waves his grease-stained hand at me.

"Hound! Perfect timing. Come give me a hand with this beast." He gestures toward a hulking motorcycle, its chrome gleaming under the bright indoor lights.

He doesn't ask what the fuck I'm doing outside the auto shop at six in the morning.

I step inside, the scent of oil and gasoline a comforting distraction. “Is that a Harley Davidson CVO Road Glide RR?” I whistle as I approach.

“She’s a beauty, alright.” Axel nods in appreciation. “Got here a few days ago. Think the fuel injectors are clogged, but it needs a few kinks straightened out.”

“Yours?”

“Yep,” he says, circling the bike. “I had to leave the warmth of my bed and the comforting arms of my woman to make time for this bike. If I spend one more morning out here, Brooke will not be happy with me.”

“Well then,” I clear my throat, trying not to think of the woman I left in my own bed as I push up the sleeves of my shirt, “how can I help?”

Axel throws a heavy wrench at my hands, and I catch it, gripping the cold metal tight as I step forward.

We work on the bike in silence, falling into a quiet rhythm set by the low hum of the garage fan and the clink of metal against metal.

I listen to the sounds and try to lose myself in the task, but my mind keeps drifting to Chelsea.

To the way her skin felt beneath my fingers, that mouth parting... seeking mine.

Wanting me just as desperately...

“Fuck!” I curse out when the O-ring seal pops out and I fail to catch it in time. I watch it roll away from sight, cursing myself for being too distracted to pay attention to the job at hand.

Axel's eyes flick to mine, a brief assessing glance. He must see the shadows under my eyes or the tightness in my jaw and decides to finally call it out. "Rough night?"

"Something like that," I say, my voice rough as I go collect the seal.

"Heard you brought someone to the clubhouse." He laughs when I turn around, my brows furrowed in surprise at the words. "Blaze told me he saw you walk into the elevator with a woman just as he was pulling into the lot."

"There are no fucking secrets in this place!"

He laughs but doesn't argue the point. "So, is she the reason for the rough look on your face?"

My first instinct is to shake my head and shrug off the concern.

I'm not one to seek help, choosing to fight my own battles, but the Steel Rebels are the closest thing to a family I can claim.

"She's not a guest," I start, considering carefully what to say.

"Chelsea is here as collateral. Incentive for her brother to pay back the money he stole from us."

"You kidnapped her?"

"No!"

"So she came willingly?"

"Well..." I hum, the memory of Chelsea throwing herself in front of her brother to

defend him filters in. “Not exactly.”

“Hound—”

“I wanted her,” I admit, turning to him and watching with amusement at the surprise that crosses his expression.

“I went there intending to get money back or make an example of the fool who dared to steal from us, and then she showed up, wanting to protect her idiot brother. She agreed to come with me if I promised to let him live and give him more time to get the money.”

I took advantage of the situation, bringing her to the clubhouse with me. Touching her when I shouldn’t have...

“Hound,” Axel says, this time reproachfully.

“She’s here to protect her brother, but Jesus, how the fuck can one person be that perfect?

” I grind out, disgusted with myself. “I’m clearly in the position of power here.

Anything I do or say will probably make her feel like she’s obligated to reciprocate.

And she’s so young, so fucking innocent. ”

“I was in a similar position just a few months back,” he says, and that brings me up short.

“You remember Kane, Brooke’s dad. He was the head mechanic and my mentor.

Imagine what a mind fuck it was when I realized that I had feelings for his daughter.

” Axel heaves a sigh, reaching for a rag to wipe the grease from his fingers.

“Feelings I fought for a long time because it felt like I was taking advantage of her. I was older, more than a decade older than Brooke, and had no right wanting her. She was still grieving her father.”

Everyone remembers Kane. He was a kind man and a devoted father. Before he died, he entrusted the care of his nineteen-year-old daughter to Axel. Everyone knew how Brooke felt about Axel, and no one was surprised when the two finally got together.

“It worked out, didn’t it?”

He nods. “Yeah, but only because I let her set the pace. You ought to do the same. Back off a little and let your girl come to you,” he says, rising to his feet and clapping my shoulder. “But leaving her alone to wake up in a strange place isn’t the best way to go about it.”

Fuck, he’s right.

The thought of Chelsea waking up alone, feeling scared and uncertain in a strange room is enough to get me moving.

“Thanks, man,” I say to Axel as I head out, my mind set on Chelsea.

I leave and head back to the club, hurrying through the first-floor bar, making a beeline for the elevator when someone steps in front of me and blocks my path.

I try to walk around them, but they block me again, and my impatient eyes drop to a set of startling green ones. The same green eyes that I saw last evening in Saint’s

office. “Jade,” I start, unsure how to proceed.

“I heard that you brought a girl home yesterday.” She beams, and I fight a groan. First Axel, now Jade. Teenage girls get a bad rap; there are no worse gossips than bikers. “You should bring her down later so the other girls can meet her.”

“Sure,” I respond, waiting patiently for her to step out of my way so I can get to Chelsea.

“Oh, come with me to the kitchen. Ingrid and I are on breakfast duty this morning. We’ll fix you a tray to bring to her,” she says.

I follow her into the elevator and up to the next floor where the club kitchen is.

Jade rushes ahead of me toward another girl already in the kitchen.

I watch the two murmur and giggle among themselves as they hurriedly prepare a tray, and it’s Jade who brings it to me.

“Here, take this to her. Call us if she needs anything else.”

“Thanks,” I say, accepting the tray.

I’m still perturbed by the entire interaction as I let myself into my apartment.

Unsure what to expect when I walk into the bedroom, I’m relieved when I find Chelsea still asleep.

I stop by the door to watch her, my heart racing as I stare at her.

A part of me can’t believe that someone so perfect would want to be anywhere near a

brute like me.

These hands have fought and killed... No, she would never let them touch her unless she was too tired to remember the man she was rubbing herself against.

The thought sours my mood, so I force myself to walk in, placing the breakfast tray on the bedside table.

I must not be quiet enough, because she stirs, and I watch with awe as those golden eyes blink open.

Chelsea stares at me for a beat before her eyes widen with surprise, and she quickly sits up, hair bouncing with the move.

“Oh, I forgot,” she says, combing her fingers through her curls. “I...um... Good morning.”

God, I want to grab a fistful of that mussed-up hair, slam my mouth down on hers, and kiss her until she’s whimpering and we’re both gasping for air.

Everything in me wants to shove off those covers and lick her from top to bottom, kiss her breasts, and feel those nipples pebble under my tongue.

I want to bury my face between those thighs and lick every inch of that pussy until she’d begging me to take her.

I want her.

I’m desperate for her. So much it drives me to near insanity. A need unlike anything I’ve ever felt for anyone in my entire life. God, I would kill for a kiss from her. To feel the press of her soft lips against mine, those fingers digging into my shoulders

with every wet glide of tongue.

Despite the raging need for her, it's the memory of Axel's words that glue me in place. I don't want to take advantage of her, so I'll be patient. I'll back off and let her come to me. Even if it kills me, I'll wait.

"Good morning," I say, my voice gruff even to my own ears. "I brought breakfast."

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 9:08 am

Chelsea

He looks good.

Perhaps a little too good, and it's clear he didn't just wake up.

And God, the man is so freaking handsome, it's annoying.

Somewhere in the back of my mind is a voice that begs to remind me that the man standing in front of me is a dangerous killer and practically a kidnapper, but I tune it out, choosing instead to ogle the man and take in all the rugged details of his face all at once.

His jaw is smooth and freshly shaven, and I catch the light scent of his aftershave.

I blush at the memory of feeling his stubble against my jaw when he kissed me last night, and I'm a little disappointed he's shaved it away.

I flush, my ears burning with embarrassment at the memory.

Christ, I have no idea what came over me last night to act the way I did, but I don't exactly regret it.

A part of me wants to do it again, and maybe this time there will be more.

Shit, I bet it's written all over my face too.

I quickly drop my eyes from his face to his massive frame, brows furrowing when I notice for the first time that he's fully dressed in a pair of jeans and a black shirt.

"Are you going somewhere?" I ask, sitting up and causing the covers to drop from my shoulders.

The strap on my nightgown slips, but I barely pay mind to it until I look up to find those steely eyes trailing over me with something hot in them.

A shudder rolls down my back, my body responding furiously when he traces his eyes over the exposed skin.

There's desire clearly written in his gaze, and...

it should scare me. It should do a lot more than just scare me, but instead, it does the opposite.

It sends heat licking up my body and my nipples aching.

Desperate for a repeat of what played out last night, I'm about to do something dumb like invite Hound into bed when he finally speaks, his voice cutting into the tension like a knife through butter.

"I left for an hour or so," he says, tearing his eyes away from me and turning his back as he walks toward the window. "I just got back."

Oh.

His words cut right into my fantasy, and I try not to hide disappointment that he didn't stay in bed with me. I try to focus on the bright side, putting on a smile as I turn to the tray of food on the bedside table. "Thank you for the breakfast. It looks

delicious.”

“The ladies downstairs made it.”

“Ladies?” I ask, trying to play it off, but I find curiosity clawing at my chest, half terrified of his answer. “I didn’t know the Steel Rebels had women in the club.”

“We don’t,” he says, stopping at the window and drawing the curtains to allow in sunlight. “Barely any women apply to be a prospect for our club. They seem to prefer the all-female MC further south. Ever heard of the Iron Lilies?”

I shake my head. “No.”

“It’s an all-female club in Springfield. One of the largest in the state.”

“Huh,” I muse, and as intriguing as it is to learn about this particular subject, I find my mind wandering to the initial point. “So, uh, what about the ‘ladies’ downstairs? They’re not... Oh God, taking women and holding them here as collateral isn’t a common thing for the club, is it?”

“No.” He chuckles, the first sign of humor on his face since I woke up, and I find that I love the deep sound of his laugh. “They’re members’ partners—girlfriends and wives.”

“You guys have...wives?”

This time, he laughs fully. The sound starts low in his chest, a rumble that vibrates through the air.

His head tilts back slightly, exposing the strong line of his jaw as he lets loose.

The sound makes my stomach flutter and a strange warmth spread through me.

I watch as his whole face changes, eyes crinkle at the corners, that hard steel softening and sparkling with amusement.

God, he's beautiful. A sight so magnificent I am robbed of the ability to think, breathe, or do anything but...stare.

"Contrary to what most people think, bikers are not nomads. Quite the opposite. We settle down, marry, and have kids."

"And do you want that too?" I blurt out. "A wife and kids?"

The laughter dies from his face, and there's a sudden shift. The warmth in his eyes slips away, and I want to take my words back. Anything to bring the light back to his expression, but I see him shut down. Shut me out.

What's wrong? I want to ask. I question what soft spot I unknowingly poked, but I know I will not get an answer from the man. Before I can say something else, he nods toward the tray of food. "You should eat that before it gets cold."

"Will you join me?"

"It's all yours," he says, his voice neutral, creating more distance between us. A part of me wants to climb off the bed and walk to the man who's standing at the other end of the room. Uncertainty over whether my actions would be welcome is what keeps me glued in place.

I nearly laugh at my own thoughts. I'm not exactly on a honeymoon, now am I? Less than a day ago, this man nearly shot and killed my brother. I'm here, not as a guest or a girlfriend, I think bitterly, but as collateral. It's best if I don't forget that.

Still, I find myself wanting to be close to him.

A dull ache settles in my chest as I attempt to remind myself of my place here.

Sure, he indulged me last night, but that doesn't exactly have to mean anything.

It was special to me because it was my first kiss, but Hound probably has a revolving door of gorgeous women.

They probably bump into each other as they come and go from his place in droves.

A man like this, built like a woman's wet dream, could have his pick, so why would I think myself special?

The sadness begins to morph into resentment and perhaps a little bit of jealousy.

The urge to pull the covers up to my chin and turn my back on him is strong, but I refuse to mope.

I need to call my brother and assure him that I'm fine, and my manager to let him know I haven't been kidnapped on my way to work or anything crazy like that. Well, not exactly anyway.

"Is it okay if I contact my brother?" I ask, my voice with a little bite in it, but I can't exactly push the thought of other women in bed with Hound out of my mind.

Up until a few hours ago, I did not know of his existence, and now, after a kiss and a mind-blowing orgasm, the man has somehow imprinted on my mind.

Get a hold of yourself, Chelsea!

And yet, when he turns around at my question and those stormy gray eyes land on me again, I find my body craving his touch. Which only serves to frustrate me further. “You’re not a prisoner here, Chelsea. You can contact your brother anytime you want.”

We both know that’s not true. At least the first part of his statement, but I don’t mention that as I reach for the nightstand and grab my phone.

I expect Hound to stand guard and listen in on the call to make sure my brother and I aren’t concocting a plan to break me out of here, but he excuses himself, giving me privacy.

I stare at his broad back until it disappears and the door closes softly behind him. With a sigh, I dial my brother’s number. Ransom answers on the first ring, his panicked voice breaking through the speaker and nearly splitting my eardrum.

“CJ, are you okay?”

I pull the phone from my ear before he can do any permanent damage to it and put him on speaker. “I’m fine, Ransom,” I say, climbing off the bed and heading to the bathroom to brush my teeth.

“Did that monster touch you? I swear to God if—”

“No,” I cut in, cheeks flaming at the memory of Hound gripping my butt and rubbing his manhood against my sex, the friction working wonders for clit.

But it wasn’t just sex, there was intimacy, those gray eyes heated as they locked on mine, threatening to take me apart and then put me back together.

And Christ, I would have let him.

“Chelsea?”

“Huh?” I clear my throat when it comes out a little raspy. “Sorry, did you say something?”

“Yes, I asked if something happened. I’ll kill him if he hurt you.”

There’s regret in his voice, and I catch the hint of fear too.

Ransom, protective brother that he is, stands no chance against an entire motorcycle club.

Unlike the neighborhood boys he threatened when they whistled and catcalled me, his methods would not work on Hound and the others here.

“I’m fine,” I assure him through a mouthful of toothpaste.

“It’s not too bad here. Besides, I get to take a break from work, and I bet it’s nice to have the place all to yourself.

” I rinse my mouth before walking back to the bedroom, phone in hand.

“It must be a reprieve not to have me fussing at you for making a mess.”

My attempt at humor doesn’t go unrewarded as he laughs, but I can tell his heart is not fully in it. “He hasn’t put you in some dark basement, has he?”

“No, I’ve got my own bedroom,” I say, turning to the tray and reaching out to snag an apple slice, popping it in my mouth. “I even get served breakfast in bed. Hmm, I could get used to this.”

“I’m sorry, CJ,” he says after a moment, but this time, I sense the tension and fear he was holding ease. “I never meant for any of this to happen. I should have known better than to fuck with the Rebels.”

“I’m not mad,” I say honestly, realizing with some surprise that it’s true.

At least not as mad as I was when I found out who he’d stolen from.

“But you have to promise me that you’ll stop stealing.

I’m not a kid anymore, Ransom. I work now, and I’ll help with Nonna’s nursing bills.

You have to stop bearing all the weight and live your life for once.”

“C—”

“Promise me, Ransom. That once you repay the Steel Rebels, then that is it.” The memory of my brother on his knees with a gun aimed at him is one that will be burned in my mind for eternity, and the thought of that happening again makes me sick to my stomach.

The next Hound might not be as patient. “You’re done stealing after this. Promise me!”

“I’m done,” he says with a heavy sigh.

“Good, now do whatever it is you have to do, but don’t worry about me. I’m safe here. Probably safer than I would be anywhere else in the city.”

I reach for another apple slice and then another as our conversation moves to lighter topics, and when the call ends, I realize I’ve wolfed down most of the breakfast.

Whoever made the egg toast is my new favorite person.

I'm about to go find Hound to ask him that before I remember that I am mad at him.

I climb off the bed, shooting a text to my manager to let him know I'm dealing with a family emergency and can't come to work, feeling a little guilty at the half truth. Minutes later, he texts back letting me know that he's got someone to cover my shift.

With that settled, I glance at the bedroom door and debate whether I should go after man before deciding against it.

I turn toward the ensuite bathroom again, the promise of a hot shower a less terrifying prospect.

Something about being in his bathroom, using his soap to clean up, sends my heart racing.

It's stupid. Foolish to find even a sliver of joy in something so small, but I can't help myself.

Everything in here smells like him, and a small smile forms on my lips when I bring his body wash to my nose before lathering it over my skin.

I try not to think of last night as I shower, those rough calloused hands on my body, touching me in ways no one else ever has.

God.

The sigh slips out when my hands brush over my nipples, wishing it were his hands instead.

Wanting him in here with me, loving on my body like he did last night.

He's so close too. Just a room away. Bet he'd hear me if I called out.

Maybe he'd join me in the shower, slam me back against the wall and then...

"Oh God," I sigh again, withdrawing my hands from my tits. I quickly rinse off before stepping out. I wrap a towel around my body before emerging from the bathroom, and I'm just crossing the threshold when the bedroom doors open and Hound steps in.

We both freeze. Mid-step, mid-breath.

The stillness in the room is replaced by a sudden charged tension. I'm still damp from my shower, my hair tousled, and he's standing in the doorway, giving me a hungry look. One that reminds me of a lion bracing to attack.

And I wait for it.

Despite the weakness in my knees and the racing of my heart, I wait for him to make the move.

To close the distance between us and recreate the magic of last night, but he does no such thing.

To my utter surprise, he turns to look at the opposite side of the room.

"Sorry," he says, his voice tight. "I should have knocked. I'll leave and give you some space to get dressed. "

"Space?" I scoff, stopping him before he can leave. Is he really going to ignore me?

Pretend last night never happened?

My jaw clenches so tight, my teeth ache. Hurt curdles into something hot and sharp in my chest. I want to kick something, preferably the man who suddenly seems to have the restraint of a saint. If he was going to act so cold, then he never should have touched me.

How dare he make me want him—give me a taste of heaven and then deny me another slice? I could have gone my entire life never knowing what it feels like to be pulled against a strong body, touched by skilled, calloused hands, or kissed by a mouth so addictive I had dreams about it.

Now that I know how it feels, I can't function without it—him—and he pulls away. Creates a distance between us so large, it's practically a crater. The thought that he might not want me as desperately as I want him sends angry tears burning behind my eyes.

It's humiliating that I would fall for the last person I should. A man who threatened my family and practically kidnapped me from my home is the one person I should steer clear of, but I desperately want him close.

And he doesn't want me!

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Hound

Her beautiful golden eyes are bright with unshed tears. Her expression—a confusing mix of frustration, hurt—and raw vulnerability, pierces me right through the heart.

She’s angry at me, that much is obvious, and yet I’ve no clue what I’ve done to have her looking at me the way she is. Almost like she isn’t sure if she wants to slap me, run, or cry.

I’m usually pretty good at reading people, picking up on subtle cues, but right now, I’m practically grasping at straws trying to make sense of her feelings.

Maybe it has something to do with her being trapped in here for the time being.

Perhaps talking to her brother made everything seem more real.

I should have known the easy air about us would not last, all things considered.

Space.

Isn’t that what is best in this situation? Letting her come to me instead of expressing the weight of my desire for her and scaring her off, or worse, pressuring her into a situation she doesn’t want. She doesn’t want to be here, and given the choice, I imagine, she’d take the first bus back home.

“Chelsea—”

“If you don’t want me, just say so.” She sniffs, folding her arms protectively over her chest. “It’s probably on brand for powerful, gorgeous men like you to treat women like this.”

I blink at the accusation, ignoring the subtle compliment she tosses in there, which I’m pretty sure wasn’t intentional. “Chelsea, what are you talking about?”

I watch her take a deep breath, and for a fleeting moment, I’m almost sure she’s about to tell me, but her gaze hardens again and she looks away.

Her knuckles are white as she grips the towel like she’s trying to physically restrain herself from speaking.

I want to walk to her, release the grip, and calm her down, but something about her demeanor holds me back.

I’m afraid going to her will only make things worse.

She probably doesn’t want me, the man who brought her here in the first place, anywhere near her.

Not when she’s so vulnerable, dressed in nothing but a towel and looking so fucking gorgeous.

So fucking irresistible it makes my hard cock ache in my pants.

I’ve been hard from the second I walked into the room earlier and saw her on my bed dressed in a nightgown so sheer I could practically see the outline of her tits.

Watching them pebble against the silk of it had nearly driven me to madness.

Goddamnit!

I want to touch her.

I want to do more than touch her, and it takes pure will to keep me rooted to the floor.
“Chelsea...”

“If you're set on pretending that nothing happened last night, then I'll do the same,” she finally says, not meeting my eyes, but I hear the heartbreak in her voice.

I take a step forward, but she looks up, pinning me in place as those honey brown eyes meet mine.

“You know what? No, I'm not going to pretend that nothing happened.

” I watch as she starts pacing before stopping to glare at me.

“Is this what you do? Bring women to your bed and then treat them callously the next morning?” Then she's back to pacing again.

“Was breakfast in bed supposed to be some kind of consolation prize? ‘Here, eat this and pretend I didn't give you the best freaking time of your life.’”

Oh.

Tension eases from my muscles as the reason for her attitude clicks. “You didn't like the food?”

My poor attempt at a joke is met with a scathing look that would set my body ablaze if it wasn't already burning with need for this beautiful woman. “The egg toast alone could win a culinary award or something,” she hisses. “It doesn't change the fact that

you're a jerk."

It's clear that I read her wrong and made a great error by trying to give her space.

Something that neither of us wanted nor needed.

I make a mental note to never accept relationship advice from Axel again as an easy smile stretches my lips.

I start toward her, and she backs up, gasping when her back connects with the wall, cheeks flushing when I cage her in.

"I don't bring women to my bed or treat them callously," I say, equally amused and surprised by the quick flash of jealousy in her expression before she looks away.

I lean into her and grab her chin, tilting her head up so her eyes are on mine.

"Kitten, I don't bring women to my bed or my apartment, period.

" I add the last bit before she can try and find a flaw in my statement.

"In fact, you're the first woman I've ever brought to the clubhouse.

" I run my thumb over her silk-smooth skin, loving the feel of it.

"Everyone is already making a big deal out of it."

She visibly swallows, but I note the look of pleasure that crosses her expression at my words. "Well, I would hope that you don't make it a habit of kidnapping women and bringing them here."

“You’re the exception,” I promise, sliding my hand up to cup her jaw. I watch as her cheeks flush and the pink deepens to a red. Her eyes briefly stray away before they meet mine once more, the vulnerability in them shattering any walls I had erected around my heart.

“You’ve been acting strange all morning. Like...um, you don’t want... I mean, do you regret last night?”

Regret?

Jesus Christ, I’ve been replaying it over and over in my mind all morning; it was all I could think about.

She was all I could think about. How can she be blind to how fucking hard it’s been for me to keep my hands off her?

And now, she’s close and smelling of my soap.

The need to take what I’ve been denying us both all morning is strong as I slide my hand to her nape and into her hair, wrapping her long curls around my fist and tugging lightly.

I watch that perfect mouth part on a gasp, eyes blinking up at me with need.

“Is this what you wanted?” I growl, wrapping my free hand around her waist and pulling her up against my chest. “A repeat of last night?”

“Yes,” she whimpers, her tits rising and falling quickly. “I mean... No, I just...”

“Just?”

Her eyes drop to my mouth, and I feel her breath quicken, “I just... You kidnapped me.” And then her eyes are back on mine. “I shouldn’t want you, or this.”

“But you do.” She swallows and nods, but I tighten my hold on her. “Words, kitten.”

“Yes. I want you—”

My mouth lowers to hers before she can finish talking, catching her gasp with my lips.

I push her into the wall, pinning my hard dick between us as I deepen the kiss.

A vicious groan kindles in my chest as her mouth opens for me, letting me in.

To taste...to devour...to lose myself in the intoxicating essence that is her. Just her.

It’s wet, the kiss. Wet and maddening.

Chelsea whimpers as I lick our tongues together, her hands moving to my shoulders as I sink deeper into the kiss. My head swims with need as I swallow her mewls, my hard cock aching, so I’m forced to rock against her for relief.

This is as new to me as it is to her. Not the virgin part.

Christ, at thirty-four, I’m the furthest thing from a virgin as one can get.

I have a healthy sex drive, and on occasion, I’ve found myself going out with my MC brothers to bars and hooking up with like-minded women.

Interactions that were never meant to last. Fake names were exchanged with no promise to keep in contact, a mutual agreement on both sides.

I never wanted anything beyond that, and I was fine with it.

Fine with fleeting moments. Not once did I re-live a single one over and over in my mind.

Wanting and craving a replay as much as I want with Chelsea.

It seems she's imprinted on not just my skin but in my heart.

I want her—need her more than I crave my next breath.

Mine! comes the unbidden thought.

I release my hold in her hair to touch her, my hands desperate and seeking as I run them over her shoulders, slowly tugging off the towel, and it falls to the floor, pooling at our feet. My breath is as ragged as hers when I pull back to look at her.

“Fuck,” I growl as my eyes drop to her nude body, groaning in pleasure at the sight of her pale tits and the pink bead of her nipples, puckered and begging to be touched.

I indulge her, closing my palm over her left breast and fondling the soft skin in my hands.

Christ, she's perfect. “I'm going to show you just what it is I've been thinking about all morning!

” My eyes drop to the rest of her, loving every dip and curve, wanting to kiss and worship every freckle, explore her perfect body with my hands and lips until she's sobbing for my cock.

And she'll have it, goddamnit. Before the day is over, she'll have me inside of her!

Marking her as mine.

Mine!

“Hound,” she moans when I brush my thumb over her nipple.

Her eyes are soft and drowsy when they lock on mine, and that perfect mouth wet and swollen from the kiss.

She pulls back a little when I lean in, and my mouth lands on her cheek.

I groan but brush my lips down her jaw, kissing a path down her neck. “Wait, Hound...I need...”

“Want you,” I grind out, sliding my hand down her stomach and between her legs.

She jerks hard against me, crying out when my fingers caress the spot between her legs to find her soft folds drenched and slick with arousal.

“And I can see you want me too. Let me take care of you, kitten.” My breath is ragged as I drag my knuckle between her feminine lips and up the center of her drenched pussy.

She jolts against me, digging her nails into my shoulder as I rub my knuckle over her sensitive nub, feeling it swell under my caress.

“Need... Oh God, Hound... I need...”

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“I know just what you need, kitten.” I let my head drop to her neck, and I’m helpless to do anything but kiss her skin, inhaling the scent of my soap, but on her, it smells different.

Too good—intoxicating. “Let me take care of you.” I tease her clit with my thumb as I lick the smooth column of her throat, listening to the soft puffs of her breath as I move lower.

“Something,” she moans as my lips move to her chest, my mouth watering as I draw closer to her juicy tits. “I need to tell you something... Oh, God, what are you doing to me?”

“Nothing yet.”

Chelsea cries out when my lips close around a rosy bud, sucking desperately at it and losing myself in the taste of her.

Mine!

The voice roaring in my head is desperate now. Dangerously possessive. I can’t say the words, afraid they might scare her, so I decide to show her.

When I get down on my knees, there is a moment of relief when they touch the ground, but I only allow myself a second to feel it before I’m raking my hands up her thighs, pushing them open for me.

A deep growl slips out at the sight of her pussy, pink and wet, gleaming with arousal

that makes my mouth water for a taste.

I lean in, letting her soft scent flood my senses, and before I know what I'm doing, I find my face pressed against the inside of her thigh, inhaling her. "Mine!"

"Hound, I've never... Oh!" She sobs when I push up and slide my tongue between her feminine lips, dragging it over the wet valley of her sex.

I moan harshly at her sweet scent, getting drunk on it in seconds.

It wrecks me. Every intention I had of taking it slow disappears, and suddenly I want to devour every inch of her pussy, and so I do.

I clutch her thigh and rest it over my shoulder before burying my hungry tongue in her sex, sawing at her pussy like a mad man.

My cock juts behind my fly, leaking endlessly with desperate need to join the party.

My grip tightens as I suction my lips over her clit and draw at the swollen bud, her pleased cries barely breaking past the fog in my brain.

"Oh, God!"

She falls helplessly against the wall as her hips move over my face, hesitantly at first before her shyness fades and she starts rocking forward.

Rocking her sex furiously over my seeking tongue, her arousal coasting down my jaw with every move.

Her broken moans fuel me, and I find that I can't get enough.

I'm helpless to do anything but lap at her sugary juices, feeling her clit swell with every lick.

I definitely shouldn't drown myself in someone whose future with me is uncertain, but there's no helping it.

Mine!

I need to have her. Lord above, she's everything.

Her sharp intake of breath lets me know that she's close. A rough tremble rocks through her body, and her pussy starts to quiver against my tongue. "Fall for me, kitten. I want to hear you scream," I growl against her sex.

The need to see and feel her come apart in my arms pushes me to move faster, batting at her clit with rough strokes before closing my lips around the bud, sucking at the sensitive nub.

"H-hound!" she screams as her body breaks into rough shudders.

Her pussy pulses over my tongue, clenching and releasing rapidly as she climaxes, wave after wave of pleasure rushing in.

Her tits are flushed, those juicy nipples puckered as she rolls her hips, riding out the orgasm until she's a boneless mess.

Chelsea is still trembling when I lower her leg from my shoulder before climbing to my own feet.

She falls limply against me, and I ignore my own aching cock as I brush her hair back from her face to kiss her temple.

“Now this is what I imagined doing to you,” I say, allowing my lips to linger. “But I’m not done with you, Chelsea.”

I don’t wait for her response as I slide my hands behind her thighs and lift her into my arms. She’s still trembling when I carry her to bed.

I kiss her softly on the mouth before pushing back to undress.

Those golden-brown eyes watch me as I get undressed, following my fingers as I unbutton my shirt before shrugging it off.

She doesn’t shy away even when I unbuckle my jeans before tugging down the zipper.

Her mouth puffs open with surprise when I yank down my jeans along with my boxers and my cock bobs out.

The tip is red and angry, aching for release, but I am a patient man if anything.

This is not the time to lose my damn mind. I’ve never been with a virgin before, but I know enough to realize the last thing she needs is a bull on steroids rutting her on the bed. I’ll go slow until she’s begging for me to take her, even if it kills me, and with the way I feel, it damn well might.

Chelsea watches me silently as I climb onto bed, moaning when I pull her against me. She fits with my body like we were molded to be together, every rugged inch of my hard to her soft.

“Hound,” she whimpers when my hand slides up and down her back in a soft caress. “I’ve been trying to tell you something, but you keep distracting me... Hmm.” She hums when my hand drops to her butt, fondling her perfect mound in my large palm.

“What is it you want to tell me?” I ask, slowly nudging her legs apart and sliding my hard dick between her thighs. We’re in the same position we were last night, but this time, it’s ten times better with us both fully naked.

“I don’t know if it’ll change anything,” she says, opening her legs further for me, and I can’t resist the urge to thrust my cock against the juncture of her thighs.

My cock is so fucking hard it could hammer down a nail.

She’s so close, her pussy is mere inches from my leaking tip, and it takes everything to not thrust into her.

Patience!

“Tell me,” I choke out.

“I...I’m a virgin,” she whispers, and I groan at her words.

“I know.” Of course, I suspected as much, but hearing her say the words sends the animal in me roaring to claim her. Mark her so everyone knows she belongs to me. A dangerous killer that would not hesitate to do whatever it takes to protect her.

“I was trying to tell you, but you kept distracting me...” Chelsea stills against me and pushes back to meet my heated eyes. “What do you mean, you know?”

“I just do, kitten.” My hand travels between her legs as I lean in to brush my lips against her, sliding them over her mouth until she opens for me.

“And it changes nothing.” She whimpers into the kiss as I rub my middle finger over her entrance, teasing the spot until she relaxes enough to let me in.

“You have no idea what a fucking turn on it is, knowing that someone as beautiful as you would want a man like me to touch you. To be the first man to touch you.” I tuck my digit into her opening and curl it, causing her to jerk against me as I tease the sensitive nerves in her sex.

“You bring out a side of me I never knew existed. A side that wants to take out any man that dares look at you.” I catch her wince when I add my index finger.

I stroke her clit with my thumb until she relaxes once more to allow my digits inside of her, pushing them shallowly in and out of her until she’s whining and moving to meet my fingers.

“I’ll be damn sure to be the last man that gets to touch you this way. ”

“Yes,” she pants, writhing helplessly against me. I can tell she’s close to another orgasm as her breath hitches and her eyes glaze over. “Only you.”

“Say it!” I demand as I drive my fingers into her, rubbing her clit as I slowly stretch her for my cock. “Tell me who you belong to!”

“Yours,” she sobs. “I’m yours, Hound, please... Oh God, I can’t take it... Need you.”

“Fuck!” I growl, pulling my fingers away.

She whines at the move, but I’m desperate to be inside of her.

I can hear my blood roaring in my ears as settle between her thighs.

I take a moment to admire her, my own need forgotten in those precious seconds as I breathe her in, and goddamnit, she looks so fucking gorgeous lying naked beneath me.

Her eyes drowsy, lips parted and tits flushed.

Her legs opened for me, braced for when I pop her precious cherry.

In this moment, I realize what makes Chelsea different from all the others.

I am in love with her.

There is no telling when it happened or how it did so suddenly.

Maybe it was the first time our eyes met or last night when she curled into my embrace and went to sleep.

Or maybe sometime during my own sleepless night, as she lay dreaming in the arms of the stranger she'd let pleasure her, breathing softly and trusting I wouldn't hurt her.

Or maybe it was this morning when she woke up and smiled at me.

Whatever the case, it's useless to pretend that I am not utterly in love with this woman. That I wouldn't tear out the heart of any man that dared hurt her and lay it on a platter for her.

She's mine. Whatever happens after this, Chelsea is mine!

My heated eyes are locked with her warm honey brown as I take firm hold of my hard dick and guide it to her sex.

My heart is hammering hard as I rub the head of my shaft up and down her folds, gathering dampness on my cock before gently working it into her entrance.

"Mine," I growl when I manage to get the head inside her impossibly tight sex.

“Hound.” She whimpers as my cock stretches her walls, wrapping her arms over my shoulders as I inch deeper into her.

“It’s okay,” I soothe, bringing our mouths together in a long, hungry kiss and groaning when she responds in kind.

I lick into her mouth, kissing her until she starts writhing under me, her hips moving restlessly.

Strumming her clit, I push another inch into her, giving her a few seconds before slamming forward.

I roar as I tear through the thin barrier of her innocence and fill her with my cock.

Fuuuck!

She cries out, her back arching off the bed in surprise. “Oh, so big,” she whimpers, digging her nails into my back.

“I’m sorry, baby,” I say raggedly, kissing her face as I try to rein in my body. I thought I was ready for this, but she’s so wet and tight—it’s nothing I expected and my cock threatens to explode. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she replies, hugging my shoulders. “It feels...strange. Hurts a little.”

“I’m sorry,” I rasp, kissing her neck and face, giving her a moment to adjust to my length.

“The pain’s fading now.” Her grip tightens. “Feels good too. Don’t stop.”

“I’ll make it better,” I growl as I start moving, slowly at first as I stroke my cock

inside of her.

I know damn well I'm bigger than the average man and ought to give her more time to adjust better to my girth, but I can't help myself.

Whatever control I was grasping onto has snapped like thin rubber and now, I have to have her.

Breed her. Christ, the thought of Chelsea pregnant with my child sends my hips moving faster, harder.

I have a moment of uncertainty, but the pause sends her nails dragging over my back, urging me to move.

"Please," she begs, holding me firmly against her, and then I'm pumping into her. I clutch her thigh and bring it to my hip, which sends me impossibly deeper. We both moan, and then I'm moving like a mad man, no finesse whatsoever as I slam into her.

"I'm not going to last, kitten," I warn, rocking so hard into her the bed creaks and the headboard slams against the wall.

"Fuck, your pussy is a fucking dream, it's a fucking miracle I've lasted this long.

" I brush my lips over hers, our breaths mingling hotly between us as I hammer into her.

"Need you to come for me. Want to hear you before I fill you with my cum."

She flushes at my words, but I am too far gone to admire the beautiful tinge on her cheeks. Or the way her eyes turn glassy when I grind the base of my cock over her clit, thrusting shallowly until she's sobbing and writhing helplessly under me. "Oh

God... Hound... Faster!”

I drive my cock into her, pinning her to the bed as I slam in and out of her in rough thrusts.

The wet sound of our flesh meeting fills the room, drowning in our ragged breathing.

I bury my face against her neck as I pick up the pace, gripping her thigh as I pound furiously into her, feeling her teeter closer and closer to an orgasm.

Her breath catches in my ear and nails claw my back seconds before she explodes.

She orgasms with a scream, and her pussy clenching around my cock is what sends me falling right off the edge with her.

The orgasm roars out of me, tearing through my abdomen in rough shudders that threaten to take me under.

It sweeps through me in violent waves, turning my thrusts brutal as I bury seed into her.

“Mine!” I growl into her ear as our bodies shudder against each other. “You belong to me.”

“Yes,” she whimpers as her sex clenches and releases around my cock, milking me until I’ve poured everything into her.

Heart, soul, and seed.

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Chelsea

I wonder what club enforcers usually do on a boring Tuesday afternoon.

I bet they don't spend it in the bathtub with the girl they sort of kidnapped, with bubbles floating all around the bath.

Hound probably has a million things to do, and yet here I am, keeping him to myself.

But wrapped in his strong muscles with my body deliciously lax, I can't find it within myself to feel bad about it.

Is this... Stockholm syndrome?

These feelings I have for a man who is no more than a stranger to me cannot be healthy. Something in me wilted when I thought he didn't want me. The feeling was so strong and scary for it to be brought about by a man this dangerous. Thoughts of him with other women were crushing to my psyche.

And then he offered me a kernel of hope. "You're the first woman I've brought here, to the clubhouse ." And then another. "You're the exception." They kept coming, words that worked to soothe the ache. Words that opened me up like a flower, and all was forgiven.

He kissed me like I was precious, then made love to me like he wanted to swallow me whole.

And now I'm sitting between his legs with my back to his front, taking a bath because he insisted it would help with my soreness as I try to retrace my steps to when exactly I gave my heart to this dangerous man.

"I can practically see the wheels in your brain turning," Hound teases, his breath brushing softly against my ear and sending goosebumps licking up my body. "Tell me what's on your mind, kitten."

I shift my head and angle it so I'm staring into those steely gray eyes. "Why do you call me that?"

"You don't like it?"

"No, it's just... I've never heard anyone use it before," I muse. "Is it my hair?"

He laughs, and there's that sound again.

I can tell he doesn't make it often, and a part of me wants to stick around longer to hear more of it—to tease it out of him.

"It's not your hair," he says with a deep chuckle.

"You were bold when we first met, pulling out your claws and threatening to call the cops on the guy holding a gun in your living room."

Right, and was that only yesterday? And now I'm in the bathtub with that very man. I must be out of my goddamned mind.

"What happens if Ransom can't pay back all the money?" I ask, half terrified that whatever's happened between us is not strong enough to override his duty to the club.

"Will you kill him?"

“No.”

I search his face for any sign that he’s lying, but find none, and that puts me at ease.

I turn around to face the front, leaning against his chest. “He and my grandmother are the only family I have left,” I confess.

Maybe it’s the water or the bubbles. Or perhaps it’s the strong man behind me, but I find myself dropping my guard.

“Our parents were in a car accident six years ago. I was fourteen and Ransom was twenty-three at the time and had just finished college. He was set to move to LA to work for some big tech company when the accident happened. Our parents didn’t make it. ”

“I’m sorry.”

My eyes flutter to a close, burrowing into his arms for comfort.

“Ransom had to stay here in Chicago and look after me. I was a high school freshman, and Nonna was already in the nursing home. He had to take care of a teen and an elderly woman all on his own.” I’ve always felt sorry that Ransom had to sacrifice his dream, and now that he’s close to living his life without the burden of taking care of me, he gets in trouble with a freaking MC.

He hadn’t told me how bad our financial situation had gotten, insisting that I save all the money I made from my retail job, little as the pay may be.

“If it comes down to it, don’t hurt my brother. Take me instead.”

“No one will hurt either of you. I promise.”

I'm a fool to trust the words of a man like him, but I do. With my body thrumming with pleasure and heart racing with every thought of him, I allow myself to believe. "What about you?" I ask, choosing to change the topic. "I don't imagine your parents like what you do."

Hound stills against me for a second before the tension releases with a sigh. "My parents don't care about much of anything when it comes to me. Haven't seen them since I was fifteen."

Shit, I should have realized it was a sore subject when he shut down earlier when I asked him if he had any plans of getting married and having kids. It's the bubbles, they've clouded my mind.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked," I hurry to say, closing a hand over his large forearm. "You don't have to talk about them—"

"I don't mind." His rough tone says otherwise, but I don't comment on it, choosing instead to run a soothing hand over his wet skin.

"My parents spent a lot of time in and out of jail. Petty crimes that ranged from shoplifting to disorderly conduct and multiple visits from children services for child neglect. They made it abundantly clear that they never wanted me, reminded me every day so I never forgot."

I shudder at his words; they're cold, and his tone carries a deep-seated hatred.

Is it any wonder he chose the profession he did?

A man raised in a cold home grew into a cold, unfeeling man.

One who doesn't seem terrified by the thought of pulling a trigger.

He was probably seeking the family he never had when he joined the Steel Rebels.

“I’m sorry,” I offer.

“Don’t be,” he says, his voice distant. Almost as if he’s re-living his childhood over again.

“They were arrested for armed robbery when I was fifteen, and I decided I wouldn’t be there when they came back from jail.

Packed my shit and left before children services could put me in a group home.

I lived with an uncle for a couple of years and then left when I turned eighteen.

Joined the military because I had nowhere to go, and later, the Rebels. ”

There are questions I have, but with the mood suddenly so dark, I figure this isn’t the right time. I search my mind for what to say to chase off the dark cloud looming over us, but come up blank.

“I love gardening,” I blurt out when nothing else comes to mind.

It’s so off topic that I feel Hound’s confusion from behind me.

“Nonna, my grandma in the nursing home, used to own this beautiful garden at her house in the suburbs. It had tomatoes and herbs like rosemary and sweet basil. One time, she and I were harvesting the tomatoes to make some sauce when I spotted this heart-shaped tomato. My grandma told me that if I placed the tomato on my nightstand and wished very hard on it at night, like one does a wishing star, then I would be visited by prince charming.”

“I assume you were not so easily fooled,” he says, his voice much lighter than it was a few seconds ago.

“In my defense, I was six,” I argue. “And I trusted my grandmother implicitly, so I took the heart-shaped tomato and wished on it every night, but the thing about tomatoes on nightstands is that they have a short lifespan.”

“Of course,” he chuckles.

“Yeah, well, let’s just say my prince charming never showed up.” I sigh, trailing a finger up his arm. “For all the wishing I did, I was rewarded by a swarm of ants. Someone tossed it in the garbage when I wasn’t looking.”

“My guess, you learned from that experience.”

“Hmm, not quite,” I muse, turning slightly to trail my hand over his firm pecs, loving the feel of his muscles under my fingertips.

He hisses when I absentmindedly graze his nipple with my nail, so I do it again.

“Nonna was great at weaving stories; I fell for so many of them.” I lay my hand flat on his pec, smiling when it shifts under my palm.

“I’d bet you fifty bucks that she’s selling tall tales to all the little old ladies at the nursing home. ”

“Fuck,” he hisses when I tweak his nipple playfully.

“I want to get back into gardening,” I say, sliding my hand down his chest to the firm ridges of his stomach, pretending not to notice the effect my touch has on him, though it’s heady.

“The feeling of dirt under my fingertips and the smell of fresh herbs and vegetables was my favorite thing.” His stomach contracts under my touch as I count the ridges, wondering how much work he has to do to get his body this firm.

“I don’t hate my job at the retail store, although the customers can be a bit much, but...

If I had to pick, I would garden my entire life.

Not much space for it here in the city, though. ”

“Chelsea—”

“I can just see it,” I muse, dragging my nails softly over his skin as I picture myself on my knees in a small garden, sowing some tomato seedlings into the earth.

“There was this one cute pair of brown overalls with sunflowers painted all over them. I used to wear them whenever we gardened. I wonder if I can find a similar pair. It was so long ago—”

Hound’s hand grabs my wrist and yanks me back from my fantasy. My brows draw in confusion at the move, so I look down at where our hands are joined. Heat climbs up my neck and brightens my cheeks when I realize my hand is inches away from his manhood—his very erect manhood.

“Oh,” I gasp, the sound breathy and uneven. “I... Sorry, I was so carried away that I didn’t notice.”

His eyes are hooded when I look up to meet them. “You got me all worked up, kitten,” he says, voice thick and husky. “I’m this close to bending you over this tub and fucking you senseless.”

“Oh!”

“I’m not going to do that, though. You’re sore,” he says, raggedly, releasing my hand, and I know I should pull back, apologize, and stop teasing the man when he looks like he’s in pain, but I don’t.

“Is there something I can do?” I ask, my eyes locked on his jutting cock, fascinated by the size. I bite my lip as I look up at him once more, all thoughts of mischievous grandmothers and gardening gone. “Maybe you can show me...teach me how to please you?”

“Teach you?”

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“Yes.” I nod, wrapping my hand around his stiff cock. “Show me what you like, and I’ll do it.”

He studies me for a long moment, and I think he’s not going to say anything, so I experimentally stroke his heavy shaft.

He groans, and I watch in fascination as those dark eyes glaze over.

I realize that I haven’t seen him like this.

He’s always the one pleasuring me, and now, I get to watch his reaction.

“You’re killing me, kitten.”

“Show me what you like,” I plead, my own sex pulsing with need, but I keep my focus on him.

He starts to speak, but it morphs into a hiss when my fingers accidentally brush the crown of his shaft.

My eyes widen in alarm, and I rush to apologize at the pained look on his face. “I’m sorry, did that hurt?”

“The opposite,” he chokes out, those gorgeous stormy gray eyes darkening further with what I’ve come to recognize as arousal. “Use both hands... Fuck, yes, like that.”

“You’re so big,” I say, leaning in and offering him my mouth, and he takes it without

a second of hesitation.

I moan when our tongues meet, stroking over each other slowly at first before it turns feral.

The slick friction sends warmth spreading through my body, and, distracted, my hand tightens around his girth, making him moan.

“Sorry,” I giggle against his lips. “I never was good at multitasking.”

“You’re doing great,” he pants as I stroke his cock under the water, gauging his expression as I try different things to see what he likes the most. “Fuck, baby!” he shouts when I add my other hand and use them both to apply more pressure to my strokes.

“You like it?” I ask, drunk on excitement, as I lean in and brush my lips over his before kissing a path down to his bristled jaw. I hum at the scent clinging to his throat as I move lower, tonguing his Adam’s apple. “Hmm, you smell so good. Is that your aftershave?”

“Chelsea…”

“Yes?” Out of curiosity, I bite into his pec, and his hips shoot up, his cock jutting in my hands.

I smile, daring the move once more, harder this time before soothing the spot with my tongue.

He’s close. I don’t know how I know this, but I can tell that he is, so I tighten my grip on his cock, stroking him faster as I drag my tongue over his chest, and when my teeth graze his left nipple, his cock jumps in my hand, and he comes with a shout.

His back falls against the rim of the tub, a rough shudder rolling through his body as I stroke him through it until he hisses and nudges my hand away.

My sex is aching with need, and I find I want to do it again. There's something intriguing about watching a strong man like Hound come apart from my hands, and it's a sight I would give anything to see again.

"Your turn."

I barely have time to react before he palms my breasts.

I gasp when his fingertips circle my left nipple, moaning when it puckers under his wet hands.

My sex clenches in response to his caress, flooding with moisture with every touch, but it's clear he has no intentions whatsoever of taking it slow like I did with him.

"Oh God," I cry out when he dips in and takes my nipple between his lips, sucking hungrily at the sensitive bud until I'm sobbing to relieve the ache between my legs. I search blindly for his hand, guiding it between my thighs when I finally clasp his wrist. "Hound..."

His eyes flare with heat when he slides his fingers between my folds to find me slick with arousal.

A moan slips out when he teases my clit, rubbing slow circles around the bud all the while keeping those dark eyes on me.

"You were so good, kitten," he praises, sliding his middle finger into my sex. "I should reward you."

“Hmm.” My eyes flutter when his thick digit brushes over a sensitive spot inside of me. “Reward, yes.”

“You’ve earned it.”

My eyes snap open, and I whine with disappointment when he pulls his finger out of me, but the feeling doesn’t last as his hands grip my waist and he pulls me from the water before bending me over the side of the tub.

I gasp at the sting when his hand slaps my butt then pulls my cheeks apart.

Everything happens at once, and before I can make any sense of it, his face is buried against my core.

“Hound!” I cry out at the first stroke of tongue over my sex. He grips my hips to steady me, then parts my folds with his tongue. Then he goes mad with it, licking and sucking eagerly at my sex until I’m sobbing. I grip the tub for something to anchor myself on as he begins an assault on my senses.

A cry slips out when he slides his digit back into me, lapping at my sensitive clit as he slides his middle finger in and out me, pushing me closer and closer to an orgasm.

Oh, God. God!

“I wish I could take a picture,” he growls, voice heavy with arousal.

“You look like a goddamn dream taking my finger into your tight pussy.” I blush at his words, feeling the urge to hide, but that would mean stopping.

It feels like I would die if he pulled away.

Christ, what has this man done to me? “Come for me, kitten.”

His free hand slides up my body and cups my breast, pinching my nipple between his fingers, and that sends me off the edge.

I climax with a sob, my knees trembling, but he pins me in place as he adds another finger, sending a hot rush of pleasure licking up my body as he thrusts in and out of my sex.

Somehow, that intensifies the orgasm, and I scream as another wave, stronger this time, rolls in.

“Hound!” I sob, my sex clenching hard around his thick digits. “Oh God.”

“That’s it,” he says, stroking me through the orgasm. “So fucking beautiful.”

I’m trembling when he pulls me back into the water and wraps me in his arms. I know we need to leave the cooling water, but I can’t move my muscles.

Not yet. I allow myself to burrow into his arms, tuning out all the thoughts that are not centered on this moment and around the man I’ve given my heart to.

No scary thoughts about how we came together or the future.

No, I refuse to think of anything but the strong arms wrapped around me and the grounding scent clinging to his skin.

“I should work hard for such rewards in the future.”

When he laughs, I find that I want hear that sound every day for the rest of my life. More than anything, I want to make him laugh. Make him happy.

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Hound

The scent of freshly brewed coffee and warm bread assaults my senses as I step into the kitchen, and I stop for a moment, taking it all in.

The breakfast spread, the flowers on the counter, and the gorgeous woman bent over the island dressed in nothing but a shirt that exposes those long, beautiful legs and a pert ass I want to touch, all still feels strange even a week later.

She's on her phone with her back to me, her hair a textured expanse of brown curls, framing her shoulders. She's humming a tune I can't quite place as she rapidly taps on her phone. I don't announce my presence, instead to just watch her.

How did we get here?

Chelsea was supposed to be on lockdown in my apartment until her brother came up with the funds.

The vases of wildflowers around my place are proof that it hasn't been happening that way. When she's not making love with me or on the couch binging some show she's obsessed with, Chelsea has been hanging out with the other women in the clubhouse, coming and going from the apartment as she pleases, though never leaving the clubhouse grounds. Not that I would stop her if she tried.

It is reckless of me to allow these feelings to cloud my judgment.

She could easily sneak out and flee with her brother, but she always comes back to

me.

I've made it clear to her that I won't kill Ransom.

But his debt must still be repaid. Saint isn't about to let someone walk after stealing half a million dollars from the club, regardless of me falling in love with that person's sister.

One week.

That's how long we've been playing house. We act like a normal couple in every sense of the word, not a woman and her temporary keeper.

Christ, what the hell is happening to me?

I'm acting like this thing between us is forever, but it can't be.

At the end of the day, Chelsea is only here until her brother repays what he stole.

A dark thought causes me gut to twist painfully.

I've developed intense feelings for Chelsea, and she acts like she feels the same, but is she simply biding her time?

Making the most of her situation until her brother comes to retrieve her?

As if sensing my presence, Chelsea turns and I watch as a blush creeps up her neck when she catches my stare.

Just a single glance, and my world tilts on its axis.

That sexy mouth stretches in a wide smile, and her eyes light up as she sets her phone aside and straightens to give me her full attention.

“Good morning,” she beams, reaching up to slide a curl behind her ear. “I made breakfast.”

I nod, my eyes firmly on her honey brown ones. “I see that.”

“You got home late last night, and I wanted to let you sleep in.” Chelsea takes a step forward but must see something in my face that makes her hesitate. “I hope I wasn’t making too much noise in the kitchen. I tried to be as quiet as...”

I’m already striding toward her before she can complete her statement. I wrap an arm around her waist and yank her hard against me, then I kiss her. Chelsea is clearly startled as she freezes for a second before her arms circle my shoulders and she’s kissing me back.

It’s unnerving.

That I need this as much as my next breath.

Before Chelsea, there was no one. First came a family that never gave a shit about me and then an uncle who only let me stay because I could help him with his small garage.

Then I joined the military when I turned eighteen because I had no idea what to do with my life, spent eight years of my life learning how to track bad guys for Uncle Sam on the other side of the world before coming home to do pretty much the same thing for the Steel Rebels.

Then I met her, and suddenly, I had everything.

I am a fool to allow myself to get lost in the light of a sun that will soon be taken from me. To get drunk off her lips. but I can't help myself. The same way I couldn't stop myself from falling for her.

Chelsea sighs into the kiss, the sound deep and content.

It brings to the surface an animal inside of me, and in the blink of an eye, I have her against the counter, licking into her mouth like a hungry man.

With her so close, surrounded by her soft body and addictive scent, my mind goes blissfully blank.

I kiss her with complete abandon, my lips clinging to hers like she holds the air I need for my lungs, and she responds in kind.

Her body is pliant against mine, her little whimpers turning into moans when my hands drop to her pert ass, squeezing the perfect mounds with my hands.

My dick is hard as steel, and I realize that if I don't pull back, I'll soon have her bent over the counter, fucking her into oblivion.

Chelsea whines when I break the kiss, those gorgeous eyes blinking up at me in confusion, and I almost give into the desperate need to fuck her where we stand, but I can't.

I'm already running late for the meeting Saint set up yesterday.

I've been neglecting my duty to the club and spending too much time holed up in here with her.

"That was my apology," I say, my voice rough even to my own ears. "I can't stay for

breakfast.”

Her face falls, and I force my eyes away from her swollen lips, pushing back the need to damn it all to hell and kiss her again.

I wish we could make love in the kitchen like we did yesterday morning.

I’d lay her on the counter and eat out that pussy until she’s all warm and wet for my cock.

We could make love in the kitchen and then move to bed, spend the rest of the day huddled together until the sunlight fades.

But I have a duty to the club. One I’ve been overlooking.

“I have a meeting with Saint,” I tell her. “We have a lot to do, and I’ll probably be downstairs all day.”

Chelsea smiles, circling a finger around my peck. “It’s so tempting to try and convince you to stay,” she says, and I have no doubt in my mind that she would succeed. In fact, she wouldn’t have to use that much effort in her attempt.

“I’ll be thinking of you the entire time,” I promise, taking her hand and bringing it to my lips. She blushes at the move, the pink in her cheeks deepening into a pretty red, and once again, I’m tempted to stay.

“Miss me,” she whispers, leaning in and brushing her lips over mine before pulling back. She leans against the counter and angles her body to reveal her shapely legs and the sexy outline of her tits. “See you later.”

Fuck, now how the hell am I supposed to focus on the meeting with the image of a

half-naked Chelsea floating in my mind?

When did my shy virgin become such a siren?

I force myself to walk away, adjusting my erection as I move toward the door, hoping it goes down before I get to the office, and grateful that it's a bit easier to conceal tucked into the waistband of my tight jeans.

Saint is not alone when I get to his office, but I am not surprised to find the club's VP, Knox, present as well.

But seated on the leather couch across from him are Gray and Scarlett.

Now then, I am surprised to see. Scarlett is the daughter of the Chrome Vipers' late president.

A month ago, Gray was sent to spy on our rival MC and find evidence of their involvement with trafficking women and auctioning them.

While falling in love, he and Scarlett were able to prove that the Vipers were indeed the scumbags we thought they were and brought them down.

The money that was earned through their illegal activities was set aside to open and fund a women's shelter.

The same money Chelsea's brother stole.

"You're right on time, Hound," Saint calls out when I let myself in, slowly closing the door behind me. I nod to the others before walking to the only empty chair in the office. "Another sum was deposited to the account two days ago."

Saint's words give me pause, and for a panicked moment, I imagine Chelsea's brother covering the amount and taking her away. I thought I had a month with Chelsea. It's only been a week, goddamnit! I force my hammering heart to calm down as I ask, "In full?"

"No, we're still short two hundred grand."

I try to hide my relief at his words, keeping my expression carefully neutral.

Though it isn't lost on me that somehow Ransom has managed to come up with over half the sum in only one week.

He's clearly motivated to get his sister back sooner rather than later. "So, what is it you wanted to discuss?"

"Right," Saint claps his hands and turns to the couple.

"I called Scarlett here because the money that was stolen was hers to begin with, and since she's also a whiz with math and did all of her father's accounting, we need her help to see if we can go ahead with the shelter even without the full funds. "

"Then what is he doing here?" I ask, nodding toward Gray, whose hand is firmly clasped with Scarlett's.

"I go where she goes," the man says, and I snort, putting on a disgusted look at the cheesiness, all the while pretending I don't want to leave this room and seek out Chelsea.

"Co-dependent much?"

"Don't be an ass," Gray snarls, showing teeth. "Last I heard, you've been locked up

in your apartment with a woman for the better part of a week. The way I see it, you're in no place to judge me."

Touché.

"Quiet down, children," Knox, who's been quiet until this moment, calls out, earning a glare from us both. "If you two don't mind, can we get back to the business at hand?"

Scarlett gives us a breakdown of the expenses needed to fund the shelter, and since we're already using the building where the auction was taking place, we've saved the cost of having to secure a location.

That particular location was also selected to make a statement and turn a place that was once filled with fear into one of hope.

I was there when we raided The Den, an auction house that was disguised as a gentleman's club.

While Saint was busy rescuing Jade from a backroom, Knox and the rest of us went in and cleaned house.

At the time, we had no clue who was funding the auction, so we sent Gray to spy on the Chrome Vipers.

I was there too when we attacked their clubhouse and brought the fuckers down.

Perhaps this is why I wanted so badly to punish Chelsea's brother. He'd threatened to halt all our hard work and plans by stealing our money. Chelsea showing up when she did saved the man's life.

“We can manage even without the remaining funds.” Scarlett’s words cut through my thoughts and bring me back to the present. “If there’s a problem, I can always sell one of the Vipers’ other holdings and make up for the deficit. I guess it’s a good thing everything is under my name.”

“You don’t need to do that,” Saint tells her. “That money is yours.”

“I don’t mind. My father put everything under my name so I would take the fall if he was ever caught,” she says with a sad smile. “I don’t mind using the money for good when needed. For now, what we have will be enough to start work on the building.”

“Perfect.” Saint claps his hand, and he’s about to say something else when there’s a sudden knock on the door. We all turn around when the door is pushed open and a frizzy-haired prospect peeks in. “What is it, Kyle?”

“I’m sorry to bother you, Prez, but there’s a man in the bar asking to see you,” Kyle answers. “Says he’s here to discuss his debt and see his sister.”

Ransom.

My heart nearly stops at the thought of Ransom coming for Chelsea.

Suddenly, I get the urge to get up and run to my apartment, pack my shit, grab my woman, and leave the damn city.

Hide her in some shack in the middle of nowhere and keep her with me for the rest of our lives. But I force myself to remain seated.

“Bring him in,” Saint says, but I can feel his stare on me. “He could be here to clear his debt.”

I don't give Saint the satisfaction of seeing me panic. I don't allow anyone in the room to read the fear spreading in my heart. Christ, I just found her! Her beautiful smile and those eyes that light up every time they look up at me.

I'm about to lose her.

Then I'll be back to having nothing.

The room is quiet as we wait for Ransom to be brought in, and when it finally happens, I have to force myself to stay still. The man tosses a glare in my direction when he spots me before turning to look around the room.

"Where is my sister?" he asks, and I have to admit to some grudging respect at the steadiness of his town. "I'm here to see my sister."

"No," Saint says calmly, leaning back in his chair. "You are not in a position to make any demands."

Ransom takes a step forward. "My sister—"

"Is safe and will stay here until we have our money as agreed," Saint's voice is firm. "Now, do you have the rest of it?"

My eyes are firmly on Ransom, and I read fear in his eyes despite his bravado; the man is terrified, but I have to give him credit. Not many men would come in here willing to go toe-to-toe with Saint.

A little twisted, sick part of me wants to make him disappear. That way, I'll never have to worry about his sorry ass coming for Chelsea and taking her away. She's mine, goddamnit. But she'd never forgive me for hurting her brother. How the fuck do I go back to a life without her?

Will I survive?

I'll have to, because hurting this man would mean hurting Chelsea. I would first cut off my own hand before I did that.

Fuck!

"I'm not discussing anything until I see my sister," Ransom says again. "I want to verify with my own eyes that she is unharmed. Then we can talk about the remaining debt."

My heart cracks, at least what was left of it before Chelsea arrived. I feel those shards practically chip off, leaving a gaping hole in its wake. Chelsea is leaving, echoes over and over in my mind, but there's still hope, and Saint's next words give me that.

"You have the money then?" he asks.

I hold my breath, anticipating Ransom's answer—fearing it. And when it comes, whatever's left of my heart shatters into pieces.

"Yes."

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Chelsea

“What did you say these are called?”

I look up from the soil, lifting my hand to shield my eyes from the warm sun as I turn to Jade.

She’s crouched next to the rosemary seedlings, holding a delicate fern ready to be transplanted into a terracotta pot.

Unlike her clean hands, my fingers are stained with rich, dark soil—the kind that smells alive and promises to nourish the plants.

“It’s a fern,” I say with a smile. It still feels surreal, having a friend here.

Well, multiple friends who are willing to not just keep me company but encourage my hobby.

When I was introduced to Jade and Ingrid, I was a little nervous about fitting in.

Unlike them, I wasn’t someone who had come here willingly.

I wasn’t dating a Rebel. And yet, they made me feel welcome.

They introduced me to Brooke and Scarlett, but the pair of best friends are both still in school and rarely at the clubhouse.

I could get used to this, I realize.

Friends, a place with a courtyard garden, and a man I have fallen hopelessly in love with.

Hound and I have sex, lots and lots of sex, but neither of us have brought up that there is something else developing between us.

A part of me wants to believe that a man like him would never make love to me the way he does if he didn't have some kind of romantic feelings for me.

“What about that one?”

I follow Jade's eyes to a small collection of spiky plants I've arranged in a sun-drenched corner of the garden.

I chuckle when Ingrid touches one and hisses as she gets pricked.

“Careful with those. They're all succulents.

They do well in the sun and don't need much care,” I say, trying not to imagine what will happen to this garden when I'm gone.

It was overgrown and wild when Jade showed me the little space that had been left unattended for who knows how long.

It had taken the girls and me two days to pull out the weeds and get it ready for planting. “The aloe vera is my favorite.”

“Why?” Ingrid asks, the crescent moon birthmark under her cheek visible when she turns to me. I remembered when we first met and she always turned away to hide it.

That she so willingly shows it to me now only adds to my feelings of belonging here.

“It reminds me of my mother.” I reach out and take one, running a finger gently over the fat leaves.

“My mother tried keeping some in our home, but she was never very good with house plants and always overwatered them. These will have to be brought in when it starts to get cold.” I look up and smile at the girls.

“Besides, it has healing properties. Might prove to be helpful around here.”

Jade chuckles. “With these adrenaline junkies, they’ll need it.”

We share a laugh and a few more jokes at the guys’ expense before falling into a comfortable silence, the only sounds the rustling of leaves from the single tree at the corner of the courtyard and the soft thud of soil as I work.

This garden, as small as it is, has become one of my favorite places.

A few more trips to a local nursery, and soon, the place will be bursting with life.

I’ll have Bougainvillea spilling over the railing in vibrant magenta, with basil and rosemary perfuming the breeze.

I’ll add a few tomato plants for the girls’ homemade sauces.

“So, Chelsea,” Jade breaks the silence, her voice casual. “Hound... How’s that going?”

A warmth spreads through my chest, and I try to fight the flush that climbs up my neck.

It's still new, this feeling—the lightness that settles inside of me whenever I think of him.

It's like my body has been set aflame every time he touches me, but it's not always physical.

Although we never discuss our feelings, Hound is surprisingly easy to talk to.

His humor is often dry and quick, and sometimes, I just want to hear the sound of his voice.

“Good,” I say, maybe a little too quickly for it to not sound suspicious. I pluck a stray weed from the soil so I have something to do with my fingers. “Really, good. He...um, takes care of me.”

Jade nods, her eyes twinkling. “Takes care, huh?”

I blush, ready to come up with some lame example that doesn't include fucking like rabbits when a sudden flash of movement catches my eye. A figure appears in the courtyard, and I turn around to watch Scarlett approach.

“Hey, Scarlett, where's your better half?” Jade teases as she approaches us.

Scarlett lifts a single, perfectly trimmed brow. “Do you mean Gray or Brooke?”

Jade smirks. “Both.”

“Gray is with Saint,” she says, stopping next to us and looking curiously at the plants. “As for Brooke, she left with Axel. My bet is they want a quiet weekend away from the chaos of the clubhouse.”

I sigh at the thought of going away somewhere with Hound. Maybe to a beach or a cabin deep in the mountains where we could spend the weekend making love and talking about our future, not as a woman and her sort-of keeper, but as two people in love with each other.

“Want to join us?” Ingrid’s words cut through my thoughts. “We’re helping Chelsea with gardening.”

I look up at Scarlett’s pale blue dress and six-inch stilettos. “I don’t think she’s dressed for it,” I say with a laugh. “You’ll need a change of clothes.”

She laughs, then sobers quickly. “Maybe another time. I actually came to get you, Chelsea,” she says, surprising me. “Your brother is here. In Saint’s office. He’s demanding to see you.”

I stand up, eyes wide with excitement as her words sink in. “Ransom? He’s here?”

She nods. “Yeah. Saint asked me to get you.” Scarlett offers a small smile. “I’ll go tell them you’ll be a few minutes if you want a chance to wash up, but your brother seems anxious to see you.”

I’m practically vibrating with excitement at the prospect of seeing my brother after a week.

It’s the longest we’ve ever been apart, and we haven’t been talking much as I found myself distracted by Hound.

We text daily, but I imagine that the lack of calls might have worried him enough to come all the way here.

Christ, I’ve missed both him and my grandmother.

I turn to the other girls, who smile at me and motion for me to go ahead. I take enough time to wash my hands, but there's little I can do about the mud sticking to my jeans and shirt.

Saint's office is on the first floor, so we don't have to go far.

My heart is racing when the door is pushed open and I walk in.

I spot Hound first, his stony face something I've come to find comforting.

There are three other men in the room, and I recognize the blue-eyed man seated behind the massive desk as Saint, the president and Jade's husband.

The other two I don't recognize, but the patches on their leather jackets let me know they are club members.

Scarlett walks to the dark-haired man and takes his hand, so I assume he must be Gray.

"CJ!"

Before I can turn, I am quickly engulfed in familiar arms, and I choke back a sob as I hug my brother back. "Ransom!"

"Are you okay?" He pushes back from the embrace to look at me, and he must see something because his eyes flare with fury before he turns accusingly to Hound.

"Where the hell have you been keeping my sister, you psycho? She looks like she crawled out of a hole. You promised you would take care of her."

I look down at my clothes and realize that I do look like I crawled out of a hole.

I bet my face and hair weren't spared from the mess of the garden.

I grab my brother's arm before he can get into Hound's face and get himself killed.

There is restrained fury on Hound's face that tells me he might not stop at simply punching my brother.

The tension in the room is palpable.

"I was gardening," I tell my brother in an attempt to alleviate some of it. "I'm fine, Ransom. Some girls and I were gardening. For fun." I quickly add the last bit before he can make an assumption.

Someone clears their throat, and all attention shifts to the man seated behind the massive desk. "Well, now that you've seen your sister, where's the rest of our money?"

My head whips to my brother. "You have it? The money?"

Ransom looks uncomfortable as he shuffles his feet nervously.

"Not all of it," he says, and if possible, the room's temperature falls a few degrees.

I shudder at the chill, shifting protectively next to my brother even as my eyes search Hound's.

I know he's the club's tracker and an enforcer, but he promised he wouldn't kill Ransom.

He promised!

“Do we look like a joke to you?” Saint’s voice is hard as steel and dangerously low. “How dare you come here making demands without fulfilling your end of the bargain.”

Ransom’s eyes widen slightly as he turns to me, and I see the dark circles under his eyes. He looks bone tired, like he hasn’t had a wink of sleep in days, and my heart breaks at the thought. “You still have three weeks. I have some savings from working at the shop—” I start.

“No,” Ransom cuts in, placing an arm protectively around me. “Chelsea doesn’t deserve to pay for something I did. My sister has suffered enough. Let her leave. Please. Take me instead.”

The room falls into a tense quiet, and I turn to find Hound watching me.

His eyes are unreadable, and something painful twists in my stomach.

A part of me wants to go to him, beg him to fix this, but even I understand that it’s beyond his control.

My brother stole money from the club; it’s not Hound’s fault.

“How did you steal the money?” Saint asks, his hard blue eyes trained on my brother. “What exactly do you do?”

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“I’m a hacker,” Ransom responds, his voice surprisingly firm. I know he’s nervous, but only someone who knows him as well as I do would be able to tell. “I’m a genius with numbers and computers. I can follow any online trail, especially money, but I do a lot of other things too.”

“So how did you know to steal our money? Did you hack the bank?”

“When the president of the Chrome Vipers disappeared and their clubhouse was attacked, I figured it would be a while before anyone tried to access the accounts, so I thought there was no harm in taking some,” he says, managing to sound sorry and a little sheepish.

“I tracked down an account used by the Vipers that had been inactive for a while, and I emptied it. I didn’t know the money actually belonged to the Rebels. ”

“Would that have stopped you?” Ransom’s silence is apparently all the answer Saint needs. “You’re surprisingly honest. I’ll give you that. And I have to say I’m impressed that you’ve managed to come up with over half your debt in one week. Did you steal it from someone else to get it?”

“No,” Ransom responds. “I hacked into some rich guy’s emails until I came across some insider news about an aerospace company on the verge of a big announcement.

I invested in the company’s stock just before the press release, then sold at a profit a few days later.

I guess you could call it insider trading, but I bounced the money around enough that

it's untraceable now. ”

Saint leans back in his chair and studies my brother for a long time before his eyes shift to the quiet man I've spent the better part of a week loving, waking up to, and sharing meals with.

I've told him secrets I've never shared with anyone before, not even Ransom.

Saint must see something in his face that I don't because he nods in understanding.

“We'll let you both go.” Both? “Under the condition that you work for the club until the full debt is repaid plus one year.”

Ransom gapes at the man. “You want me to work for the Rebels?”

Saint's eyes harden. “You have a problem with that?”

“No,” Ransom quickly responds, shaking his head. “I'll work for you. As long as my sister goes free.”

“We don't steal from innocent people, but there are other ways for you to work off the rest of your debt.

” Saint's voice is firm when he speaks. “We don't trust you, and since you'll be working around money for the next year or so, you'll be under close supervision to ensure you behave.

If you steal from us again, I will not spare you. ”

Ransom is already nodding, and by the surprise written on his face, I can tell he didn't come here expecting to leave with my freedom, let alone a job. “Thank you.”

“You’re both free to go,” Saint says with a wave. “Don’t even think about skipping town. I’ll see you here first thing Monday morning.”

Ransom is bouncing on the balls of his feet, but I don’t share his excitement. When I tear my eyes from the club’s president to Hound, I don’t know what it is I was expecting to see, but it’s not this blank expression on his face.

He heard Saint, right? I’ve just been released, asked to leave, but Hound won’t even look at me.

Please look at me , I silently plead with the man. Ask me to stay. Say or do something to show that this hurts you as much as it hurts me.

I love him.

It’s been my first thought every time we wake up together.

All those times I sat across from him at the dining table or cuddled with him on the couch as we watched trashy TV, I tried to tell him without words that my feelings run deep.

All those secret touches under the sheets and kisses that didn’t just lead to sex meant something to him too, right?

Right?

“Let’s go, CJ,” Ransom says, wrapping an arm around my shoulders.

“I’ll wait while you clean up and grab your things, then we’ll stop by the nursing home to see Nonna.

She got in trouble with the nurses for trying to prank her physical therapist by hiding in a closet.

She got bored and fell asleep, leaving the poor nurses to panic and search for hours before they found her. ”

I smile because it’s expected of me, and I let Ransom drag me out of the office because it would be crazy to resist. I walk alone to the elevator, fighting tears when I press the button to the fifth floor.

I don’t cry when I let myself into Hound’s apartment; the memories of our morning still fill the space.

I sniff back the tears when I walk into the bathroom to shower, using his shampoo and longing to feel him step in behind me and hug me as he often does when I’m showering.

When I step out of the bathroom, the bed sits mockingly in the center of the room, reminding me of what I’ll be missing when I leave.

How could he let me leave?

The tears come then, and I lower myself to the bed, reaching for his pillow as sobs rack my body. My phone vibrates from somewhere in the room, possibly my brother asking what’s taking so long, but I’m not ready to go just yet.

I’ll be thinking of you the entire time.

Hound’s last words brought me comfort when he said them earlier this morning, but now, they haunt me.

When the phone vibrates once more, I force myself up.

My moves are sluggish as I get dressed. I pack my things, sneaking a few of his shirts into my bag.

If he misses them, he'll have to come get them.

My heart is heavy when I walk out and the door shuts firmly behind me. Ransom looks worried when he spots me coming out of the elevator, his brows furrowing at my red-rimmed eyes that I don't bother hiding from him.

"Hey," he says, looking behind me. "What did that beast do?"

"Nothing," I say, walking toward his waiting car. "He didn't do anything at all."

And that's the problem.

Hound

The wrench slips, clanging against the metal frame of the bike and no doubt drawing all focus to me. At least from the few people in the room who weren't already watching me. I sigh, reaching down to grab the wrench, but the engine oil slicking my gloves makes it hard to get a firm grasp on it.

I grab a rag and wipe them down before trying again with more success this time.

I try to get back to work, but I can't focus with all the men watching me like one would watch a live bomb that's going to explode and take everyone out.

Heck, even Saint is in the auto shop, huddled with Axel and Knox, talking in hushed tones, but it's clear I'm the who they're talking about.

I let her go, but I'm fine, goddamnit!

I'm not going to rage and fight every man in the clubhouse just because I was the fool who had the most precious thing in the world and lost it.

I shake my head, willing it back to my bike.

I wrecked it just yesterday when I slipped off the road because my head was not where it was supposed to be and I took a turn too fast on wet pavement.

I got lucky and walked away with all my limbs intact and only a few scratches.

My head has not been screwed on tight lately, but it'll all fade and be back to normal in no time. It has to! Fucking hell, it's been a week already, how much longer do I need?

My stomach growls, a hollow ache that mirrors the emptiness I've felt since she walked out of Saint's office with her brother. Everything in me wanted to stop her, grab her arm and tell her fucking brother to leave alone.

Somehow, I let the girl matter.

I laugh at the thought, drawing more attention to myself. I'm delusional to think that I let anything happen. I had no control whatsoever over my feelings for Chelsea. They took root the second I saw her, and nothing short of a miracle could pry them out.

I'm fine, goddamnit! I was doing well for myself before she came into my life and wrecked it. I was doing darn well for myself.

I'm nearly done with the bike when three shadows fall over me, blocking my light. With a sigh, I glare at my MC brothers, not in the mood for whatever it is they're plotting. What's a guy gotta do to fix his bike without a bunch of assholes constantly getting in his way?

"What?" I demand.

"You are a fool," Axel says, crossing his arms over his chest as he stares me down. With another sigh, I toss the wrench away before shooting to my feet so I'm staring the fuckers dead in the eyes.

"Piss off, Axel. I'm just trying to fix my bike here."

"You are brooding," Saint cuts in. "Everyone can see it. You've been a pain to be

around for a week, ever since you let your girl walk away.”

I scoff before deciding I’m past talking.

The truth is I didn’t let Chelsea do anything.

I could have stopped her, forced her to stay in the clubhouse with me, but what power did I have to make such a decision for her?

To keep her in a place she’d been forced to come.

Her brother had accepted Saint’s proposal, and she was free to go wherever she pleased without an obsessive man watching her every step.

And she chose to leave. She didn’t say goodbye, never even looked back.

If that isn’t confirmation that I was merely a way for her to pass the time, then I don’t know what is.

She never really wanted me; she just wanted her time here to be as painless as possible.

And fuck if that knowledge doesn’t stink like a bitch.

I’m about to turn around and leave when a commotion draws my attention to the entrance, and I watch Ransom storm in, fury darkening his expression.

Fuck, I don’t have time for this. The fucker has been mean mugging me all week, staring at me like he wants to pick a fight he has no chance of winning, and now, it’s seems he has finally found his nerve.

Fucking perfect. It so happens that I am now in the mood to fuck someone up.

Ransom storms toward me, pushing his way past the three men between us, then proceeds to shove me into the wall. He lifts his fisted hand as if to punch me, and I wait for him to make his move so I can send him flying. Luckily for him, the punch never happens.

The men behind him step forward as if to pry him away, but I raise my left hand to keep them back. Whatever problem Ransom has with me, I can deal with it my darn self.

“You fucking asshole!” he rages, with his fist aimed at my face. “What did you do to my sister?”

My eyes darken, and the first sign of life in what feels like days snaps into me as my blood turns to ice at the thought of something wrong with Chelsea. “What’s wrong? What happened to Chelsea?” Whose bones do I need to break?

“She’s not been the same since she left this fucking place,” he yells, slamming his fist into the wall next to my head, but I don’t flinch, patiently waiting for him to keep talking, desperate for any news about Chelsea.

“She hasn’t been eating or sleeping, and her boss says that she keeps zoning out at work.

” His eyes are filled with hate, and I see it, the urge to make me pay for every moment of her distress.

“My sister was fine before she came here, and now she cries at night when she thinks I can’t hear her.

Chelsea, who's never said a mean word before she met you, went off on some old lady at work today, and she got fired! ”

Fuck!

Emotion swamps me as my eyes meet Saint's over Ransom's shoulder, and his nod is all I need. I shove the distraught brother to the side, ready to leave when I remember that I fucked up my bike yesterday and haven't finished fixing it.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuuuuck!

“Take this,” Axel calls out, and I turn around just in time to catch the keys he tosses my direction as he nods toward the Harley Davidson I helped him fix up a few days ago.

Everyone in the club is very protective of their bikes, and I'm equal amounts surprised and touched that Axel would trust me with his ride after witnessing what I did to my own.

I was distracted then, grieving a love I thought I'd lost.

Not anymore.

“Thanks, man,” I say, tearing off the work gloves and tossing them aside. I rush toward the bike, then I'm tearing out of the shop. I'm going to fix this. It's obvious now that I've been lost in my own grief without considering for a second that Chelsea might feel the same way.

Space, freedom... I thought those were the things she wanted—needed.

The last time I did this, she was angry at me. Thought I didn't want her. Jesus Christ,

is that what she thinks now too? That I don't want her? Lord above, I've been a fool. A fool blinded by love, but a fool nonetheless.

I pull up outside of her building and turn off the engine.

I don't bother worrying about the safety of the bike in this neighborhood—with the Steel Rebels insignia all over it, only a man with a death wish would so much as look twice at it.

My heart is hammering in my chest when I storm into the lobby, heading straight for the elevator before deciding to take the stairs when it doesn't immediately open.

The worry inside of me hides an insidious panic that she might not want me.

Christ, what do I do if Chelsea decides I've taken too long to come to her and doesn't want me anymore?

What if Ransom was wrong about how she's been feeling?

My sanity has been hanging by a loose thread, her rejection would snap it.

Despite the urgency, I freeze when I reach her door. I stand there, my pulse quickening, the urge to kick the door in just to get to her faster is almost overwhelming. But then I imagine it crashing open, the shock and fear on her face.

Patience.

I take a deep breath, steadying myself to rein in my whirlwind emotions, then I knock. Each rap against the wood feels like a plea, a silent prayer that she'll open up and let me in. Both literally and figuratively.

After a few minutes, which feel like an eternity to my panicked mind, the door finally creaks open, and there she is.

Standing in the doorway, wrapped in soft, worn pajamas that hang loosely on her frame, her hair a tousled mess of curls cascading over her shoulders like the leaves of a tree, she looks both effortlessly beautiful and achingly vulnerable.

My heart lurches in my chest as I take in the sight of her. The way her eyes, still sleepy, widen in surprise as they meet mine. They're the same deep pools of honey I fell in love with two weeks ago. Except that time, we were on opposite sides of this same threshold.

"Hound," she chokes out, and her eyes pool with tears that have my heart clenching. Christ, I want to reach out and pull her into a hug, let her know how much I've missed her. I've been dying slowly, craving her more than I did my next breath, but I don't know if my advances would be welcome.

Fuck it!

I step into the room and wrap my arms around her, yanking her hard against me. And suddenly the world feels right again. I bury my face in her hair, breathing in her scent and letting it steady me.

"God," I say in a shaky breath, tightening my hold on her when she tries to shimmy away. No, I'm done with the whole space bullshit. There will be no such thing between us again. Not when it makes us both this fucking miserable. "Just a little longer, kitten. Please."

Chelsea stops moving, and her hands tentatively circle my waist. We stay locked in an embrace for minutes—hours, it feels like—before she pulls back, and this time, I let her go. She clears her throat and moves away from me, her eyes looking

everywhere but at me.

“W-what are you doing here?”

“I came here to see you,” I say, letting myself inside. She sighs before walking deeper into the apartment, so I take off my boots and follow behind. “Your brother came to see me. He was ready to punch me for making his sister cry.”

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Chelsea whirls around, horror in her expression, but I catch that beautiful flush I love so much. “What? Ransom had no right to tell you my private business!”

“He told me you got fired too,” I say, walking toward her, but she backs up a step, lifting her hand to stop me. “Chelsea—”

“Please stop,” she begs, before releasing a ragged breath. “It’s embarrassing enough that you found me looking like a homeless person, and now Ransom has been blabbering to everyone. I can’t...”

“Hey, don’t cry,” I say, horrified, closing the distance between us and drawing her into my arms despite her best effort to keep me away.

“I’m not crying,” she sniffs. “Fine, you probably figured that I have feelings for you, but it’s probably the Stockholm syndrome, and you’re here to what? Comfort me? I don’t need it. I’m fine.”

“Well, I’m not,” I say, pulling back so her eyes meet mine. “If you are suffering from Stockholm syndrome, then it seems I am as well.”

“What?”

“I let you leave, kitten, because I figured that’s what you wanted,” I confess. “That day, I wanted to punch your brother for coming for you. It took all my strength to not chase after you and beg you to stay, but Christ, I didn’t want to pressure you into something you didn’t want.”

“I wanted to stay,” she admits, running her sleeve under her nose. “I thought you’d stop me. I wanted you to.”

“I’m sorry, Chelsea.” I pull her back into the embrace and hug her close. “Fuck, I’m sorry. I missed you.”

“I missed you,” she echoes, returning my embrace for long seconds before she breaks the silence. “It’s Lima syndrome.”

“Huh?”

Chelsea pulls back, and this time, there’s a smile on her face. “When a captor falls for the person they’ve kidnapped, it’s called Lima syndrome.”

Her mouth is moving, but I don’t register the words as all the emotions I’ve buried inside surface all at once, nearly knocking me out with their strength.

“Fuck, I missed you, kitten.” I lift my hand to her cheek and cradle it, staring into the beautiful eyes of the woman I love more than life itself, before leaning down and bringing our foreheads together.

“It’s been a miserable week for me too, Chelsea.”

“You should have come sooner.”

“I know,” I say, my hand trailing down her cheek, moving lower and groaning when I cup her tit to find she doesn’t have a bra on. My cock hardens in seconds, pressing against my fly. “I need to have you, baby. Now.”

Her hands circle my shoulder before she pulls me down, her breath puffing in needy pants. “Then take me.”

I slam my mouth down on hers, and I feel something inside me settle into place as she opens up for me, her grip on my shoulder tightening as we deepen the kiss.

It's feral and wet, two hungry people who have been starved for each other.

I taste her tears on her lips, evidence of how desperately we've both longed for this.

Christ, I should take it easy, love on her gently like the petal that she is, but Lord above, I can't control myself.

Not this time.

"Need to be inside of you," I growl against her mouth, pushing her back against the wall.

My hands drop to her pajama pants and feverishly tug them down.

They slip down her thighs, and Chelsea doesn't break away from the kiss as she steps out of them.

I drag my fingertips up her thighs, gently massaging her pussy to part her soft folds.

She whimpers when my digit grazes her clit, and there's surprise when I find her already wet.

Her pussy is drenched. "Fuck, kitten, were you playing with yourself before I showed up—"

"Please don't ask," she says, mortified by the looks of it. "I can't take any more embarrassment today."

“What were you thinking when you were touching yourself?” I demand, sliding my finger into her entrance. She jerks against me, her mouth parting on a moan when I start pumping in and out of her drenched sex. “Tell me, kitten!”

“You,” she whimpers, burying her face in my shoulder as she rolls her hips to meet my thrusts. “There, are you happy now that you’ve embarrassed me beyond reprieve?”

“How rude of me. I should apologize.”

“You should... No,” she whines when I pull back my fingers, my hand moving to unfasten my jeans. I tug down the zipper and shove them out of the way.

“Hold on to me, baby,” I grind out, sliding my hand to her ass and lifting her against the wall.

Chelsea instinctively wraps her thighs around my hips, crying out when I slam into her.

My groan echoes through the room as I fill her impossibly tight pussy, stretching her with my massive cock.

I’ve thought about this all week, replaying all the moments we made love and dying to have just one more night with her.

“Want you,” she cries, clawing my back. “Missed you so much.”

There are no words or voice to communicate them, so I choose to show her.

My fingers tighten on her perfect ass before I start driving in and out of her pussy in fevered need.

She sobs into my ear, and I soak up every pleased sound she makes, committing it to memory.

Vowing to do this for the rest of our lives.

“Mine!” I growl, the sound almost inhuman as I bury my face into her neck and rock into her, hammering my cock harder and faster into her snug sex.

Kissing, biting, and licking her neck as I take her, pour myself and the desperation I’ve felt all week into her body.

She takes everything, clinging to me like a lifeline.

“Hound...” She pants, her nails digging into my back as her thighs begin to tremble around my waist. “Oh God, I’m so close—”

“Come for me, kitten,” I breathe into her ear, biting her earlobe as I impale her with my cock, my moves nearly brutal, and I feel it the second it happens for her.

Her breath catches in her throat before releasing in a scream.

I drive my cock brutally into her until I feel the threat of my own climax.

Her sex clenches around me, gripping my cock tight before releasing in pulsing waves as moisture floods between us.

I grip her ass, digging my fingers into her as my own climax tears through, and I roar as I flood her womb with my hot spend, further marking her as mine.

“I love you. God, I love you so much, Chelsea!” I growl as I thrust into her tightness, pouring everything into her. Taking everything she offers in return.

“I love you,” she pants into my ear, her body going pliant against mine. “I loved you from the moment I saw you.”

“It was the same for me, kitten.” I hug her close, holding us both up despite the weakness in my muscles. We’ve been apart for way too long, even consider creating space between us. “You’re mine.” I growl, tightening my hold.

Forever this time!

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Chelsea

The moonlight paints the garden in shades of silver and deep shadows that remind me of my husband's eyes.

Every rustle of leaf or quiet whistle of wind sends a jolt of adrenaline coursing through me. I crouch deeper behind the hydrangea bush, careful not to make a noise. Hours. I've been here for two freaking hours!

Patience has never been my strong suit, but after the stolen tomatoes and broken aloe leaves, it's become a matter of principle.

For two years, this garden has been my second home.

I've poured my heart and soul into transforming it from a desert of withering weeds to a green haven of vegetables and herbs.

The Rebels know to keep out my garden, and for their restraint, I often reward them with cut stems to gift their wives and girlfriends.

However, someone has been stealing my decimating my African violets, and tonight, I'll catch the butcher.

I'm starting to get bored when a shadow suddenly appears, passing through the small white gate.

My pulse starts racing as I watch a figure carrying a basket creep toward my flower

garden, quite confident in their steps.

They don't even hesitate before reaching out and pulling up one of the delicate little violet plants.

I gape at the horrifying scene, more surprised by the person's identity than what they're doing.

How could he!

I move slightly, and pebbles shift under my shoe. The figure freezes, his head snapping up and eyes scanning the darkness. He hesitates for a second, but seemingly assured that he's alone, he reaches for another plant.

Closer, I urge him.

Oh, he's not getting away unscathed this time.

A few days ago, I had Hound set a trap for me.

It had been our compromise when I'd wanted to go to Saint and demand an investigation.

The trap is a simple string tied to a bucket of water, waiting to drench whoever dares to maim my precious blooms. With Hound away, I've had idle days, and what better way to spend the time than lying in wait for the plant murderer to show up.

Now that he has, he'll get a taste of his own medicine.

I snort at the pun in my own thoughts just as he reaches out, fingers brushing against the velvety green leaf of a third plant.

My poor violets. He's not just butchering them this time, he's stealing the whole plant right out of the dirt!

I hold my breath in anticipation of justice, and I am not disappointed.

Suddenly the string snaps, and the bucket crashes down. I hear a startled yelp followed by a series of curses. I watch my plant assailant brushes a hand over his wet face as he blinks into the darkness. There is a grin on my face when I finally emerge from my hiding spot.

“Gotcha!”

His head whips around, and I am met by familiar eyes, ones I'd previously thought so sweet and thoughtful. Not anymore. Clearly, he'd deceived me about his true nature. He winces when I shine a flashlight in his face, feeling a sliver of satisfaction when I find him soaked to the bone. “Chelsea—”

“I can't believe you of all people would do this! You love the garden almost as much as I do. You're out here almost every day reading under the tree.” Tears spring to my eyes with my words, and even I can admit I feel unreasonably betrayed.

“I'm so sorry, Chelsea. I do love the garden. It's the perfect place to relax and unwind. But Rusty—” “Atlas stammers.

“Don't you drag that little angel into this, mister,” I say, crossing my arms over my chest. “You're lucky that was just water. Do you know how hard it was to salvage those violets after your last midnight raid?”

I wait, staring at my husband's junior enforcer.

Even though the man is older than Hound, he hasn't been with the club nearly as

long, so he doesn't have the same level of seniority that my husband enjoys.

Currently, he is looking more sheepish than I've ever seen him.

Despite being a quiet, reserved man, Atlas exudes a kind of steady confidence that makes you believe he can do anything without crossing the line into arrogance.

In a motorcycle club full of rough, but respectable men, he's generally regarded as the most trustworthy and reliable.

Though that's probably because he is one of the few bikers in the club who doesn't gossip like a teen girl with her first phone.

"I really am sorry, Chelsea. The last time the violets were damaged was because I'd brought Rusty out here with me to enjoy some sunshine.

I'd gotten lost in my book and wasn't pay close enough attention.

He's the one who damaged the flowers, but it was my fault," Atlas says, referring to his chubby ginger cat, the only animal allowed in the clubhouse and the MC's kind of unofficial mascot.

"I don't see Rusty anywhere tonight, so what is your excuse this time?" I demand, hands going to my hips.

Atlas gestures to the basket he'd been carrying that now sits at his feet.

"I know how upset you were about the damage. So I went to buy you replacements. It took me several days to find a garden center that had any in stock, and I had to go all the way down to Bloomington for them. I only just got back to the city and was hoping to get them planted before morning."

I'm about to reprimand him for pulling out my healthy, albeit nibbled, plants when a chuckle distracts me.

I look around, seeking out my husband where he's leaning against the small gate, lit by the overhead light and watching us with humor in his expression.

And just like that, I forget about the plant killer in front of me.

Bathed in the soft glow, Hound looks like something out of a fairytale. The yellow light highlights the sharp angles of his jaw and cheekbones. The moonlight glimmers in those deep-set eyes; a beautiful shade of gray, they sparkle with warmth as they watch me.

I blame it on the moon or the moment, but there's something captivating—spellbinding—about him tonight.

I always feel this overwhelming emotion whenever Hound is close, but tonight it feels amplified.

The need to climb the man like a tree takes root in me.

Maybe it has nothing to do with the moon and everything to do with the fact that Hound has been away on business for four miserable days.

"Sweetheart, I see you caught your vandal," he muses, his voice deep, rich, and warm.

"Looks like it," I say, pushing away from the garden as I approach him. Atlas and his flower thieving cat all but forgotten as I brush past him to get to my husband. "How long have you been standing there?"

“Long enough to know I need to tell Saint we have a talented new interrogator... Oh!” He laughs when I fling myself at him, wrapping my arms around his shoulders and burying my face in his neck. “Well, I missed you too, kitten.”

“You said you’d be gone for just two days,” I mumble into his skin, inhaling his scent like a woman deprived of oxygen.

His arms tighten around me. “I’m sorry. The mark was clever this time and kept evading me. I had to track him across the state.” I push back to look at him, and for the first time, see the fatigue in his eyes. “I’m here now.”

“Good,” I say, kissing his jaw. “Let’s head inside and...”

My voice trails off when I catch the dark, heated glint in his eyes.

All too familiar with his moods now, I know what it means.

My body can’t help but react as it always does when he gets this way.

With those dangerous eyes trained on me, I feel my sex pulse and grow slick with arousal.

Mortified, I look around to the spot where I left Atlas, but he’s gone along with his basket of butchered flowers.

“He left,” Hound says, drawing my attention back to him with a kiss to my neck. “Probably terrified of what you might do to him.”

“Oh, you can bet I’ll have him out here first thing in the morning repairing my flowerbeds and planting all of those violets,” I say, losing my train of thought and gasping when the hand on my waist drops to my ass. “But that’s tomorrow’s problem.

Let's go inside for a proper reunion."

"Hmm, we could do that," he concedes, dropping his mouth to my neck, and I have to bite hard on my lip to stop a whimper when he kisses the sensitive skin.

His hand slides under the dress I have on, and I swallow a moan when his finger traces the line of my panties, teasing my sex over the seam.

"Or you could let me fuck you here in your favorite place. Your pick."

"Oh!"

My eyes shoot over his shoulder to the dark door that leads back into the clubhouse. Although unlikely, someone could come out to smoke or something. Or Atlas could return with the violets and walk out to find my husband balls deep inside of me.

"Damn, you're impatient," I tease despite my own sex throbbing fiercely. Four days without my husband. Phone sex doesn't compare to the real thing, and Lord above, I want to feel him inside of me after being apart for so long.

Hound's mouth moves up to my ear, kissing me as he leans in. "You're going to be real quiet while I take you." His hand is already tugging my panties to the side, and I gasp when he slips his middle finger into my sex.

I bury my face in his shoulder and bite hard to muffle a sob.

"I'm going to fuck you where we stand, fill you with my cock, and rut you like an animal.

Then I'm going to fill you with my cum, and you're going to take every drop without making a sound.

When we're done, I'll carry you up to our place and do it all over again. ”

“Oh God, Hound... We shouldn't...” I start, but my hands are already dropping to his belt and unfastening it. “What if someone walks out and sees us?”

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“I’m not stopping. So don’t make a sound and alert anyone to our presence,” he says before fastening his mouth over mine.

We lick into each other’s lips hungrily, and for the moment, it’s just the two of us in the world.

His free hand drops to my tits, squeezing them needily as he fingers me.

I whimper into the kiss as I tug desperately at his zipper and nearly tear it off in my urgency.

I reach in to fist his hard cock, jerking his thick shaft in my hand, using his precum to slick the move.

“Fuck, kitten, just like that!” he breathes into the kiss, groaning when my thumb brushes over his crown.

“Need to be inside you now! With a growl, he pulls out his finger and grabs my right thigh, hiking it to his hip as he aligns himself with my pulsing sex. “Take my cock inside of you.”

I whimper as he slides slowly into me. “So big,” I moan. Two years later, and the size of his girth still shocks me as much as it brings me pleasure.

“Missed you,” he grunts into my ear as he starts pumping into me, his hand clutching my thigh firmly as he takes me.

Hound pushes me up against the small gate, and it creaks as he pounds his cock into me, his thrusts brutal and a testament to the need that's been building up for days.

I surrender to his touch, seeking pleasure and offering it in turn.

"Mine. Going to fill this pussy, plant a baby inside of you."

My heart stutters at his words. "I'm off the pill."

Hound makes a hoarse sound, and I feel his cock swell, stretching my walls as he thickens inside of me. "Fuck," he growls, pounding into me like a mad man and robbing me of words. My mind fogs, and I lose track of time and place. He's all I can see and feel.

He's all I want.

A family. Kids and a home with a small garden.

Not unlike the one I was raised in. I want all that and more with this man.

Hound and I have been talking about moving out to our own place and growing our family, but we've grown attached to the community at the clubhouse.

Now, I feel we're finally ready to make the move.

The thought fills me with warmth, and I tighten my hold on the man who stole my heart, letting him take and bring me pleasure. "I love you," I choke out as I feel myself edging closer to an orgasm. "I love you so much!"

The climax tears through me, wrecking me in the process.

I bury my teeth into his shoulder as waves and waves of pleasure roll through me.

Hound keeps a firm grip on me, driving his cock into my pulsing sex with desperate thrusts before he follows with a barely muted bellow.

“Mine,” he growls into my skin as he pumps his cock into me, filling me with his warm seed.

I sigh contentedly even as I feel some of his release drip down my thigh.

His thrusts slow before he goes slack against me.

We stay locked in an embrace as we often do after making love, with his half-erect cock still pulsing inside of me. “Were you serious?” I ask, rubbing the back of his shoulder as we listen to the sounds of the night. “About getting me pregnant?”

“Of course. I would never joke about something like that,” he says, placing a kiss on my neck.

“It’s about time we started our own family.

When I get back, we’ll start looking for places.

Somewhere with a nice garden and better security to keep wayward cats and their misguided owners from damaging any more of your plants.”

I chuckle, but something in his statement gives me pause. “Wait, you’re leaving again—”

“Sorry, I meant we’re leaving,” he says, pushing back to fix those gray eyes on me. “I spoke to Saint about taking a couple of weeks off. I figured we could use a trip. Just the two of us. Somewhere we can talk and start planning our family.”

I smile at him, nodding enthusiastically at his suggestion.

“We should probably get started on the family bit now,” I suggest, trailing a finger over his jaw.

My eyes widen in surprise when I feel him harden inside of me.

There is a wicked grin on his face as he leans down to kiss me, and there’s no helping it. “You’re insatiable.”

“Are you complaining?”

“Never.” I laugh, locking his mouth with mine in a searing kiss and letting him take me again, fill me with his promise of love, and then later, his seed. His breath is heavy against mine, heart beating rapidly in time with mine, and I realize that I’ll never stop wanting him.

Not in this life. Not in the next.

~The End

For more reads [click here!](#)

Up Next...

Marie With my job as a nurse in a senior living facility, my life is rewarding, if a bit boring.

All I want to do after a long day is go home and curl up on my couch with a bottle of wine and some trashy reality TV.

The last thing I ever expected to happen is to be kidnapped in a case of mistaken identity.

They thought I was the daughter of a notorious gang leader, a woman who sometimes visits my favorite resident.

They're furious when they realize their mistake, but I've seen their faces, so I'm a liability.

Tied up alone in a dark, dirty room with no means of escape, I'm on the brink of losing hope when a giant of a man bursts in, promising me rescue and protection.

When I realize he's a member of the Steel Rebels—the equally notorious motorcycle gang and my kidnappers' greatest rivals—I decide to trust him.

The Steel Rebels welcome me with open arms and promises of protection and vengeance.

But the more time I spend at the clubhouse, the more I'm drawn to the quiet, enigmatic man who rescued me.

His unwavering attention makes me feel safe.

But I want more than his gaze. I want his touch. I want his everything.

Atlas Ever since I rescued her from that dirty little room, I've wanted Marie.

But she isn't here of her own freewill. She's here because she is in danger.

It would be wrong to take advantage of her vulnerability.

The last thing she needs right now is an overgrown brute like me invading her space.

I know what people think when they see me; it's always the same.

They're impressed by my size and muscular physique.

But one look at my brooding scowl sends them running.

I'm too big, too quiet, too introverted.

I love my MC brothers, but I prefer to spend my downtime alone with my cat and a book.

Marie is outgoing, sweet, and so young. She has her whole life ahead of her and deserves someone who can give her the world.

That man isn't me, no matter how badly I want it to be.

I won't let my dark nature dim her beautiful light.

I can look, but I can't touch...until I do.

One touch, one taste is all it takes to have me questioning everything.

But is her desire merely fueled by her fear?

Once the danger is passed, will I be able to let her go?

Because a woman like Marie would never choose to stay with a man like me.