



Twister's Salvation

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Description: Welcome to Madison. The Saint's Outlaws just took the throne.

Twister didn't come to play nice. He came to take over. With the Saint's Outlaws MC at his back, he's ready to claim Madison, Wisconsin bar by bar, and block by block. But Tempy changes everything. His focus, his peace, and what he thought he wanted. In a city fueled by beer, cheese, and quiet corruption, Twister's about to learn salvation doesn't come easy... and neither does trust. Madison was his for the taking until Tempy made him want something more.

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Chapter One

Twister

I didn't come to Madison to make friends.

I came to take over.

"Pull around back!" I shouted and waved off Magnum as he coasted past the front of the building on his Dyna. "More room back there."

Magnum nodded and peeled around the block with Wheels and Gramps behind him.

I parked my own bike right out front. Centered, bold, and unapologetic. Let the neighborhood know the Saint's Outlaws were here and didn't give a shit who saw it.

The building looked like hell. Two-story brick and the kind that hadn't been power-washed since the '90s. A busted neon "BAR" sign hung crooked in the window. The street over, State Street, was full of college kids, grad students, and tourists, but this street? It had dust. It had cracks. It had potential.

Perfect.

I shoved open the heavy steel door, and the smell hit like a punch to the face: dust, mildew, and stale beer. I grinned. "Home sweet fuckin' home."

Swift was already inside with his sleeves rolled up, and his eyes scanned the place

like he was trying to figure out how many bottles of bleach it was going to take to clean the place.

“Main floor’s gutted,” he called out. “Upstairs needs work. Office in the back’s moldy as hell, but the bones are solid.”

“Good. We’ll gut it and rebuild.” I stepped through the doorway, and the creak of the warped floorboards echoed. “Start fresh.”

Wheels came in next, and he carried two toolboxes and a crowbar. “Got a stack of paint cans and a sledge in the truck. Hodge is unloading now.”

“You see the back alley?” I asked.

“Wider than expected,” Wheels said. “Clubhouse parking for ten bikes, easy. Maybe more if we squeeze.”

“I’m not squeezing shit,” I muttered. “I want every bike clean and lined. First impressions matter.”

Rev strolled in behind him, holding a rolled-up blueprint and a travel mug that probably wasn’t filled with coffee. “I mapped the street radius. We’ve got eight bars within a two-block radius. Plenty of options to get a drink if we don’t feel like being here. Though ours is the biggest property.”

“If only this place wasn’t a dump,” Podge grunted as he joined us. He flipped through a thick folder of permits and city forms. “But it’s ours now. Legal and clean.”

“About fucking time,” Swift added with a smirk.

The front door creaked again, and Gramps walked in, breathing hard like the stairs

outside had insulted him personally. “You boys better not expect me to sweep this place.”

“You’re the treasurer, not the maid,” I said.

Gramps flipped me off without breaking stride.

I stepped up to the bar, leaned my palms on the dusty wood, and looked around the room. Pool table sagged in the middle. One ceiling fan spun half-assed. A flickering light in the back hallway.

“I want it stripped, cleaned, and decent by Friday night,” I said.

“For who?” Hodge asked as he entered with a box of locks and chains. “We don’t know anyone here.”

“We will,” I told him. “By the weekend, half this block will know who we are, and the other half will be wondering how the hell they missed us.”

Chewy came through the back door next, Nugget and Sully behind him with duffels and supplies. Cord and Plug were already stacking cases of beer in the tiny walk-in cooler that hadn’t worked in years. The clubhouse was coming alive fast.

We moved like a unit. Everyone had a job. Everyone had a purpose. That’s what made us dangerous.

“What’s the deal with the upstairs?” Wheels asked as he wiped sweat from his brow.

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“Seven small rooms. One’s already got a mattress and,” Nugget paused, looking back at Sully, “shackles on the radiator.”

I blinked. “Shackles?”

“Deadass,” Sully said. “Bolted down and everything.”

Swift raised a brow. “That wasn’t in the listing.”

“No,” I said, and walked toward the back hallway. “But it tells me we’re not the first outlaws to use this place.”

“And we probably won’t be the last,” Hodge added.

The back office was mostly empty, with one half-broken chair, a desk that looked like it had been used as a battering ram, and a single file folder on top. I opened it.

Blank pages.

Except for one thing—a sticker, peeling at the edge.

The Saint’s Outlaws skull, grinning in black and silver.

I’d left it there six weeks ago when I came through solo to scout the property.

A promise to myself.

A mark.

A warning.

We were coming.

And now we were here.

There were three other rooms back here that I planned to split to make rooms for all of us to have our own space, and also a room to have Church. For the time being, we would use the main room for Church. Everyone would have their own room. Well, Cord and Plug were going to have to share a room. They would get their own room when they became full members, which was not going to be anytime soon.

I walked back to the main floor as every bootstep echoed.

“You all feel that?” I asked and turned slowly to face the club. “That shift in the air?”

Nobody answered, but they all knew.

“That’s what it feels like when we take root. When the city changes. When we fuckin’ take over.”

Chapter Two

Tempi

The beer lines were sticky again.

I groaned as I yanked the tap handle forward and got a foamy, half-ass pour that hissed like it resented me. The glass went into the rinse bucket with a clunk, and I

grabbed the hose to flush the tap for the third damn time this week.

Note to self: call the line guy. Again.

I glanced around the bar and mentally ticked off the list I always kept in my head. Mop the floor. Restock the cooler. Change out the light in the women's bathroom before someone left a Yelp review about peeing in the dark. Again.

Mornings at The Badger's Den weren't glamorous. They were quiet. Sacred, even. No music. No noise. Just me, the smell of beer, bleach, and a little bit of lemon from the cleaner I used to wipe down the bar top. A few hours of peace before the world came in smelling like cigarettes and bad decisions.

I flipped on the TV mounted in the corner, muted news highlights flashed across the screen, and I stepped back behind the bar. The Badger's Den wasn't fancy, but it was mine. Four years since Dad passed, and I was still keeping it alive on a mix of stubbornness and sheer spite. People liked to talk about how bars were a dying breed, but mine wasn't. Not in Madison. Not on State Street.

We weren't trendy. We were Wisconsin.

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Fried cheese curds. Bloody Marys that could feed a family. Badger games on every screen. And regulars who knew my name and I knew theirs.

I loved this place even when it drove me nuts.

“Hey, Tempi!” called Britta from the back hallway. “We outta lemons again?”

“Check the walk-in. If they’re not in there, we’re screwed until the delivery comes.” I grabbed the bar rag and started wiping down the back counter while eyeing the row of liquor bottles. I’d need to restock vodka before tonight. Maybe whiskey, too. Depends on how many of the Tuesday regulars rolled in looking for drama and cheap shots.

The bell over the front door dinged.

I didn’t look up right away. It was probably Randy from the butcher’s dropping off the jerky sticks for the Bloody Marys or one of the old-timers coming in to warm a stool before noon. Most of my daytime crowd didn’t demand much beyond a cold drink and a dry place to nurse regrets.

But the footsteps that followed?

They didn’t match.

Heavy. Measured. Like someone who knew exactly where he was going and didn’t give a damn if you liked it.

I looked up and immediately wished I hadn't.

He was tall, broad across the shoulders, and wearing a black leather cut with silver stitching that screamed dangerous and proud of it. His presence filled the room like a punch in the chest. Confident. Calm. Calculated.

And a patch I'd never seen before: Saint's Outlaws MC.

Shit.

This guy looked like trouble.

He took two steps inside and gave the place a slow, assessing look. Like he was taking inventory. Like he owned the place.

I think the fuck not.

Then his eyes landed on me.

"I need to talk to the owner," he said. His voice was deep, rough around the edges, with a tone that didn't ask so much as expected.

I arched a brow. "You're talkin' to her."

He paused, head tilted slightly, like he thought he'd misheard me. "The owner?"

"Yep." I leaned both elbows on the bar and smiled, slow and unimpressed. "Still me."

He blinked. "Huh."

"That a problem?"

“No,” he said, and narrowed his eyes. “Just not what I expected.”

I straightened and crossed my arms. “What exactly were you expecting? A guy in cargo shorts with a ‘World’s Best Bar Owner’ apron?”

He smirked. “Maybe.”

“Well, sorry to disappoint, biker man. You get me.”

He stepped closer and planted both hands on the bar. His fingers were rough. Knuckles scarred. Rings gleamed on a few of them. Nothing fancy, just sharp edges and brass.

His eyes looked me up and down. “Is that an offer, sweetheart?”

I rolled my eyes. “Hardly. What can I do for you?” I asked. I had heard all of the pickup lines before. This guy may have one of the most handsome faces I’ve ever seen, but that wasn’t going to fool me.

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“Name’s Twister,” he said. “President of the Saint’s Outlaws. We just set up shop down the street. And you are?”

I’d heard the rumble of bikes for three straight days. Seen the crew moving boxes, hauling tools, slapping stickers and skulls onto every flat surface they could find. I’d even spotted one of them peeing behind the dumpster in broad daylight.

Saint’s Outlaws weren’t subtle.

“I’m Tempi, and I’ve noticed you guys,” I said. “It’s been like living next to a Harley dealership on fire.”

That grin on his face widened. “Just came to introduce myself. Figured it was polite.”

“Uh-huh,” I said, not buying it for a second. “Let me guess, you want to ‘build a relationship’ with the local businesses.”

He tilted his head. “Something like that.”

“Well, I’m not interested.”

“You don’t even know what I’m offering.”

“I don’t need to. I’ve been running this bar long enough to know when someone walks in talking with their chest that they’re usually trying to bulldoze something.” This was, in fact, not my first rodeo.

Twister chuckled and leaned in like he enjoyed the resistance. “You always this feisty with your neighbors?”

“Only the ones who think they can waltz in and try to bulldoze me.”

“Feisty and observant,” he said. “Hell of a combo. But I’m not trying to bulldoze you. I just want to be... neighborly.”

I sighed. “Look. You do your thing, I’ll do mine. You keep your boys out of my bar if they can’t hold their liquor, and we won’t have any problems.”

Twister looked around again, like he was mapping escape routes. Or maybe planning a renovation. “Hell of a place you got here.”

“Thanks,” I replied. “It stays open because I know when to say no.”

“I can respect that,” he said.

It should’ve sounded like a compliment, but it felt more like a warning. The way his eyes locked on mine, sharp and unflinching, I got the sense he wasn’t used to being told no.

And maybe didn’t hear it very often.

I stepped back from the bar and tossed the rag onto the counter. “You done now, President Twister?”

“For now,” he said and turned toward the door. “But I’ll be back.”

“Don’t do me any favors.”

He paused, hand on the door, and gave me a once-over that wasn't disrespectful but sure as hell wasn't apologetic either. "I wasn't offering."

The bell dinged as he walked out, his heavy boots echoed against the tile.

And just like that, the temperature in the bar went up five degrees.

I stood there longer than I should've, with my heart thumping harder than I wanted to admit. Britta poked her head out from the back hallway with her brows raised. "Who the hell was that?"

"Trouble," I muttered.

She leaned on the doorframe. "Trouble in the hot, dangerous way or trouble in the someone's-gonna-break-our-windows way?"

"Could be both."

"Well," Britta said with a grin, "if you need someone to hold your earrings, I'm your girl."

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I laughed and shook my head. “I don’t need backup. Yet.”

But I had a feeling I might if their club was here to cause problems.

And Twister?

He wasn’t going to be easy to ignore.

Chapter Three

Twister

Sunlight bled through the busted blinds like a goddamn interrogation lamp.

I rolled off the mattress I’d thrown on the floor of one of the upstairs rooms and stretched as my bones cracked in protest. The room smelled like old paint, sweat, and fresh sawdust in a comforting, weird, broken kind of way. Like the start of something dangerous and real, but it was mine.

This was ours now. Time to make it feel like it.

Downstairs, the sound of boots, hammering, and the occasional curse echoed through the floorboards. They were good sounds. The boys were already at it. I pulled on my cut, ran a hand through my hair, and headed down.

The clubhouse was still a mess, but less of one than yesterday.

The main floor was wide open, brick walls on two sides, scarred hardwood floors, and that long, battered bar we'd all agreed to keep. It had character. The kind of bar that soaked in secrets.

Behind the bar was a doorway that led into a narrow galley kitchen that ran the length of the bar. We'd found ancient pots, three toasters, and something growing in the back of the fridge we still hadn't identified.

To the left of the bar, a hallway stretched toward the back and led to a small office and three other rooms. They'd once been God knows what—storage? Gambling dens? Hell rooms?—but we were turning them into six by busting and rebuilding the walls. Every brother deserved his own space, except the prospects. They could bunk up like summer camp.

“Watch your damn swing, Sully!” Magnum barked from down the hall, holding a pry bar and looking half-feral with sawdust in his beard.

“I was aiming at the wall, not your foot!” Sully yelled back, shirtless and sweating, with a sledgehammer propped against his shoulder.

“Same difference with your aim,” Nugget chimed in and ducked out of the office doorway with drywall dust coating his eyebrows.

Swift was at the far end of the hall, using a chalk line and a stud finder to measure where the new walls would be placed.

I stepped into the hallway and nodded. “Looking good. Any surprises?”

“Wiring's a little sketch in the far room,” Swift said. “But nothing Hodge can't handle.”

“Where is Hodge?”

“Down the hall, stripping out old closet doors with Wheels. Gramps is making a map of who gets what room.”

I snorted. “Gramps deciding who goes where? Seems like something I should be doing.”

“He doesn’t trust you to remember,” Swift said with a smirk. “He knows you’ll stick him in the room farthest from the bathroom, or maybe even the attic.”

Fair.

Gramps and I got along pretty well, but he sometimes struggled with being older than I was. He would forget that I was the one in charge and not him.

I walked back through the main area and hopped over a couple planks someone had laid across a sticky patch of stripped floor. Behind the bar, Cord and Plug were scrubbing the shelves like their patch depended on it. Which it kinda did.

“You two enjoying your bonding time?” I asked.

Cord looked up, flushed and sweating. “Yes, sir.”

Plug didn’t say a word, just kept scrubbing.

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“I want that kitchen gutted by dinner. We’re not running a diner, but I don’t want salmonella every time we make coffee.”

“Yes, sir,” Plug mumbled.

I grabbed a rag and wiped down the end of the bar, pretending to care about the dust, but my mind wasn’t really on the clubhouse.

It was three doors down on the corner of State Street and our street.

Tempi.

She’d gotten under my skin faster than I liked. Fire in her voice. Steel in her spine. And eyes that looked straight through bullshit without blinking. I hadn’t expected her. Hell, I hadn’t expected any of this. I thought we’d roll in, claim the city, and plant the flag.

Tempi? Didn’t expect her at all.

She was a wild card.

I didn’t trust wild cards.

Still... the way she’d leaned on the bar, calm and unshaken while calling me out without flinching? I’d replayed it more than once. Which was bullshit because I had more important things to think about than a bar owner with a sharp tongue and legs that made it hard to focus.

“Boss?” Rev’s voice pulled me out of my thoughts.

“Yeah?”

“Wanna come check the upstairs? We’re gonna start patching the north side and sealing off the back staircase.”

“Be right there.”

Upstairs, the seven rooms were mostly intact—dusty, old, with cracked paint and warped doors—but livable. Each one had a small closet, a window, and just enough space for a bed, dresser, and maybe a chair. Better than most crash pads we’d seen.

Wheels and Hodge were prying off closet doors with crowbars and yelling at each other about hinges.

“I said lift it, not rip it!”

“Same damn result!”

Gramps sat on an overturned bucket in the hallway with a clipboard in hand.

“You assigning rooms or writing a manifesto?” I asked.

He held up a floor plan. “You’re in the back room, Swift gets the one above the office, Hodge and Wheels take the east wall. Rest are first-come, first-claimed. Prospects get the closet.”

“There’s no closet,” I pointed out.

“Exactly.”

I chuckled and kept walking to check every room with a quick glance.

This place would shape up. It had the bones.

We just had to break a few first.

By sundown, the noise had tapered off, and the air stank of sweat, wood glue, and victory.

I sat on a barstool with a beer and looked around at the chaos.

Dust everywhere. Tools piled up. Nails scattered. But it was ours.

“Someone say dinner?” Nugget called out and stretched his back.

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“We got anything in the kitchen?” Sully asked.

“Unless you want expired ramen and mystery mustard, no,” Plug replied and rubbed his shoulder.

“Let’s head out,” Swift said and tossed a towel over his shoulder. “Find a bar. Eat something. Be seen.”

“Agreed,” I said and stood. “Let’s stretch our legs. See what Madison has to offer us.”

We locked up and stepped out onto the street as a crew. Twelve patched, two prospects, and all wearing cuts that still smelled fresh from the road.

We walked in a loose line, not trying to look threatening, just existing.

That was enough.

People moved aside. A few locals glanced up, paused, and kept walking. The city wasn’t used to us yet. They would be.

We hit the end of the block, and someone pointed. “There’s a bar.”

We all saw the sign: The Badger’s Den.

Three doors down from the clubhouse. Lit up. Alive. Music pumping through the glass. Laughter spilling into the street.

A woman stood out front smoking and saw us coming. She narrowed her eyes before flicking the cigarette away.

We filed in, one after another, and stepped into warm light and noise. The kind of place that made you feel like a regular even if it was your first time.

The guys spread out between the bar and the pool tables.

I stepped through last, letting the door close behind me.

The music dipped for a second. People noticed us.

But I wasn't looking at them.

My eyes went straight to the bar.

She was there.

Tempi.

Behind the counter, she was pouring a drink and laughing at something a customer said. Her hair pulled up, neck exposed, and sleeves rolled to her elbows like she was ready for a fight or a long night, maybe both.

And then she looked up.

Her gaze hit mine and was sharp as a blade.

She didn't flinch.

Neither did I.

Chapter Four

Tempi

I knew it the second the door opened.

The energy shifted.

It wasn't the usual bar crowd swagger. No bachelorette screams or sports bros smelling like cologne and Axe body spray. No, this was slower, heavier. Like a warning bell in the back of my mind that said, Pay attention.

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They walked in like they'd done it a hundred times. Patched up, broad-shouldered, carrying the weight of something built on the road. Leather, denim, heat, and purpose. That kind of entrance either meant trouble... or trouble worth watching.

I didn't need to guess who led them.

Twister.

He stepped through the door last and scanned the room like he'd ordered it off a menu and wanted to send half of it back. His eyes hit mine, and everything else went quiet for a beat. Like the noise in the bar dropped out. Like I forgot what I was supposed to be doing.

Then he looked away. Like it was no big thing.

I hated that I kind of wanted him to look again.

Britta gave me a raised eyebrow from the end of the bar, and I shot her one right back. She shrugged and already moved toward the end of the bar the bikers had taken over. Half the crew bellied up to the bar, dropping onto stools like they owned the damn place. The other half wandered toward the jukebox, arguing about AC/DC versus Johnny Cash like it was a holy debate.

Twister took a stool at the far end of the bar with another one of his guys. His hair was dark blond, and he had blue eyes like he'd seen too much. The guy next to him leaned in and said something to Twister that made him smirk.

They didn't look like your typical outlaw bikers.

But they sure as hell didn't look tame either.

I stayed put at the other end of the bar and wiped the counter while doing my best to look occupied. But I wasn't missing a thing. Especially not the way Twister kept glancing down the bar at me when he thought I wasn't looking.

He thought wrong.

Britta strolled over to their end, towel over one shoulder, and her smile was cool and unreadable. "What'll it be, gentlemen?"

The guy next to Twister answered first. "Whiskey on the rocks."

Britta nodded, then looked at Twister.

He didn't answer right away. Instead, he glanced back toward me again. Slow, deliberate. "How about her?" he asked with his voice just loud enough to carry.

Britta snorted. "That is not on the menu, honey. Beer or whiskey?"

Twister grunted, but his smirk didn't budge. "Whiskey." He sat back a little, rested his forearm on the bar, but I didn't miss the way his body angled just slightly toward mine. Didn't miss the way his eyes lingered on me every couple of minutes. Like he was trying to figure out a puzzle he hadn't decided whether to play with or burn to the ground.

I didn't like it.

I also didn't hate it.

Someone from the back called for Swift to come over for pool. That guy turned out to be the one next to Twister.

Twister turned then, putting his back to the bar and leaned an arm across the top of it. He watched the room. Watched his guys getting loud over cues and dollar bills and what sounded like a bet involving hot sauce and losing dignity.

I knew the look on his face. Pride and protection. He wasn't just the one in charge. He was the one they all looked to. That kind of weight didn't come from noise. It came from history.

He wore it like it fit.

I moved closer to him when a regular signaled me. I poured a vodka soda for the regular and cashed him out.

I then said something I shouldn't have. I was doing a good job ignoring him, but something I didn't understand made me call out to him. "Don't you guys have your own bar?"

Twister turned slowly, and his eyes dragged across the room before landing on me. He didn't rush to respond. "We're working on it, and the bar is just going to be for the club," he said, voice lazy but edged. "The building has good bones; we're just trying to find them."

I scoffed and leaned back against the back bar. "That's pretty accurate for the old Sam James building."

He tilted his head just a little. "You know the place?"

"I'm not new to Madison," I said and met his stare head-on. "I've lived here my

whole life.”

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His gaze dipped for a second. I saw it, how he clocked my jeans, my not-so-tiny waist, and the way my tank top clung like second skin. But his eyes came right back to mine like he hadn't done it.

He had.

"Is that so?" he drawled.

I pushed off the back bar and stepped closer, but not too close. "My dad bought this place the month before I was born. I've spent pretty much every day of my life here. Hell, I even went to UW for college. I've never been more than a few miles from this place at all times." I let that settle. "I was raised within these walls," I added. "Downtown's been my playground for years."

He studied me for a long second. No sarcasm this time. No smirk. Just something close to respect. "Maybe I want that same thing," he said quietly.

I felt my breath catch a little.

The thing about men like him? You expect the cocky, the smart-ass, the push. But that?

That was honesty.

That was dangerous.

"Well," I said and tried to keep my voice even, "it's not always as fun as it looks."

“I’m not here for fun,” he replied.

I didn’t know what to say to that, so I didn’t.

Behind him, one of his guys knocked over a stool and yelled something about spilling whiskey being a party foul. Laughter erupted, loud and easy.

Twister glanced back, then turned to me again.

“You own this place yourself?” he asked.

I nodded. “Yup, that’s what the paperwork says. Britta is my right-hand gal, though. My dad passed a few years ago.”

“Sorry to hear that.”

“Thanks,” I said, genuinely surprised by how much I meant it.

He didn’t ask more. Didn’t press. Just let it be.

Which, somehow, made it easier to say, “You guys planning to hang around Madison?”

His mouth twitched. “We’re not going anywhere.”

I raised an eyebrow. “That a promise or a threat?”

“Maybe both.”

I laughed, and he smiled, not the smirky one. A real one. Brief, but there.

It looked good on him.

Too good.

The jukebox kicked on again, this time blasting old Skynyrd. The guys hooted. The pool game kicked up again. And Twister leaned back against the bar like he belonged there.

He said he was here to stay, but I had heard that before.

As long as he didn't bring any trouble to my door, I was good if he stayed.

One thing was for sure—I wasn't going anywhere, either.

Chapter Five

Twister

The longer we stayed in The Badger's Den, the more the place filled up. Not packed, but steady. Locals came in and eyed our crew with a mix of curiosity and caution. We weren't being loud yet, but we took up space, and people noticed.

Rev nudged me from two stools down. "Hey, Prez, either order some damn food or we need to find somewhere that serves more than whiskey."

I turned my head and spotted Tempi behind the bar, moving fast but smooth. Her dark hair was pulled up in a messy knot with tendrils escaping near her neck. Her tight black ribbed tank top and jeans fit like they were made just for her curves. She had a sharp look in her eye that made it clear she didn't take shit from anyone.

I cleared my throat and leaned forward. "You got food here, doll?"

Tempi didn't miss a beat. She reached under the bar, pulled out a laminated single-page menu, and slid it toward me. "May not be a lot, but it's all fucking delicious."

I picked it up and gave it a scan.

Fresh Cheese Curds. Deep Fried Cheese Curds. Soft Pretzel with Beer Cheese. Loaded Nachos. Fries. Disco Fries. Wisconsin Cheeseburger. Cheese Curd Bacon Burger. Grilled Ham and Cheese.

I let out a low whistle. “You guys like cheese around here?”

Tempi rolled her eyes as she dried a glass. “You’re in Wisconsin now, Twister. Cheese and beer are king.”

I chuckled and looked over the menu. Yeah, it wasn’t a huge menu, but every single thing on it sounded good. Bar food done right.

“How about you surprise me with enough food to feed all of these assholes?”

Tempi pursed her lips and gave the crew a look. “You just want apps?”

I shrugged. “Do ten burgers, but cut them all in half. Throw in some curds and fries. Mix it up.”

I was footing the bill like usual, but I wasn’t looking to drop a few hundred on dinner. We still had to pay for drywall, a new back door, and a fuck ton of other things.

Tempi gave me a short nod. “You got it. Britta!” she called over her shoulder. “Got a big order!”

From the kitchen doorway behind the bar, Britta hollered back, “On it!” and disappeared through swinging doors. Tempi rattled off a list of food, and Britta said ‘aye’ to each thing.

Tempi got back to work. She checked in on a table of regulars, poured a few beers, and cracked a joke with an old guy in a Packers cap who seemed to be part of the furniture. I sipped my whiskey and leaned on the bar as I watched her move.

She didn’t rush. She didn’t panic. She just worked. Like this was hers, because it was. I

respected that. Admired it, even.

I'd worked my whole life to get to that place. To own something and to build it brick by brick. That's what the clubhouse was going to be, and I dared anyone to take it from me.

Britta started passing plates out from the kitchen pass-through, and Tempi brought them over one by one. Cheese curds, fries, a tray of pretzels with beer cheese so thick it clung to the spoon.

"Food's up!" she called.

The guys swarmed the bar like it was a buffet at a bachelor party. Sully and Nugget grabbed cheese curds, Hodge immediately claimed the pretzel plate, and Plug damn near elbowed Cord for the disco fries.

Tempi slipped down to my end of the bar with her arms crossed as she watched the chaos unfold.

"More?" she asked.

I looked down the bar. The guys were tearing through everything like wolves, and it was only a matter of time before they started licking the plates.

"Another round, doll."

Tempi turned and hollered toward the kitchen. "Same again, after the burgers come out!" Then she turned back and leaned toward me with her hands braced on the bar. "Another whiskey?"

I nodded and slid my empty glass toward her.

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As she poured, she asked, "So, what's your plan?"

"For?"

She smiled, with a half-laugh playing under her breath. "You being in Madison. Just gonna be a menace to society, or maybe contribute to downtown?"

I snorted. "Got a plan. First, we're going to get the clubhouse set up."

"And then?"

"Rage room."

She blinked. "Um, what?"

That was the usual reaction.

"Looking at a place on the east side of town," I said. "Half a warehouse we're looking to rent. You come in, get a pair of overalls, goggles, and a sledgehammer. Walk into one of the rooms and smash the shit out of whatever you can for thirty minutes. Old TVs, glassware, lamps, whatever we can stock."

Tempi stared at me like I had three heads. "You're joking."

I shook my head. "Not at all, doll. They're popular in bigger cities. It's a solid stress reliever."

She reached for a towel and wiped the bar slowly while still eyeing me. “Well, I’ve never heard of anything like that, but I can say there’ve been days I’d love to smash the shit out of things.”

Britta came out of the kitchen again with more cheese curds, hot and golden brown with steam rising from the basket. She set them down in front of me.

I plucked one and popped it in my mouth.

It squeaked against my teeth as I chewed.

I paused mid-chew with brows pulling together. “I can’t even remember what we were talking about because the cheese in my mouth issqueaking,” I said to Tempi.

Tempi laughed. “That’s because we have nothing but the freshest cheese curds here. And when they’re not fresh anymore, they get breaded and fried. It’s the life span of a curd.”

I grabbed another one. “It’s fucking delicious but also kind of fucking weird.”

She looked around and lowered her voice. “Don’t let the regulars hear you say that. You’ll get carried out and banned for life.”

I popped another curd in my mouth. “Then I guess I better just keep eating and hope I become a regular.”

Tempi gave me a look that was curious, skeptical, and amused. “Yeah, we’ll see if that happens.”

The next round of food came out. Britta brought out the ten burgers, all cut in half and arranged on trays with pickles and crispy fries. The guys descended on them with all

the grace of a biker mosh pit.

I grabbed one half before they vanished. The burger was damn near perfect, juicy, and dripping with cheese and bacon. The bun was toasted. The cheese curds stacked inside didn't hurt either.

I leaned back on my stool and looked around as I chewed.

The Badger's Den wasn't fancy, but it didn't need to be. Dark wood floors, aged but solid. The walls were lined with old neon beer signs: Leinenkugel's, Miller Lite, and Pabst. A jukebox sat near the door and glowed blue and green while blaring rock from the early 2000s.

There were three pool tables in the back, two dartboards, and a handful of high-top tables scattered between the bar and the front windows. Everything had that lived-in feel, scuffed but clean, worn but loved.

It reminded me of the first MC bar I'd ever stepped into.

Swift walked over and dragged his hand through his hair. "Guys are wanting to check out the rest of the area," he said. "Ready to head out?"

I nodded and shoved the last bite of burger in my mouth. I chased it with the last of my whiskey and pushed the empty glass toward the edge of the bar.

Tempi walked over, receipt in hand, and dropped it on the bar in front of me with a flick of her fingers. "Your drinks are on the house," she said, "but that food doesn't grow on trees."

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I glanced down at the total and let out a low whistle. “That’s it?”

She shrugged. “Those have been the prices for years. That’s what keeps the regulars coming back.”

I pulled out my wallet, peeled off five fifties, and slapped them on the bar. “Keep the change, doll. That food’s worth way more than what you’re charging.”

She raised an eyebrow and scooped up the bills. “See you around, biker. Good luck with... everything.”

The guys were already filing out. Wheels shoved Plug toward the door while Hodge carried out a tray of fries, and Nugget was singing something off-key that might’ve been Bon Jovi.

I hung back for a beat, then slid off my stool.

Tempi was talking to an older customer now and laughed at something he said. She looked relaxed and easy, like this was the world she belonged to and had no intention of giving up.

She turned and caught me looking.

Her eyes locked with mine.

Neither of us said a word.

I nodded.

She nodded back.

And then I turned and walked out.

But that look?

It stayed with me all the way down the block.

Chapter Six

Tempi

The bar always got a little quieter once the doors were locked.

Not silent. The ice machine still rattled. The old fridge behind the bar hummed like it was fighting for its life. A neon sign buzzed in the window even after I'd shut the switch off. It was too stubborn to die.

But after a packed night like this one, it felt like the whole place let out a long breath the second the last person left.

I tossed a bar rag over my shoulder and grabbed a tray of empty pint glasses to take to the sink. Britta was sweeping the floor near the back tables, and her ponytail bounced with each pass of the broom. She had swapped her apron for her oversized hoodie and rolled the sleeves up so she could clean without dragging them through puddles of spilled beer.

"You good back there?" I asked.

She nodded without looking up. “Yup. Just trying to figure out what the hell someone spilled under this table. It smells like licorice and regret.”

I chuckled and rinsed the glasses, stacking them one by one on the drying rack. “Could be that weird shot the college kids kept ordering last week. The one with the gummy bears in it?”

“Oh yeah.” Britta groaned. “I forgot about that disaster. I swear we should ban anything that comes with a candy garnish.”

“We’d lose half our Thursday business,” I said.

“Fine by me,” she muttered.

We worked in companionable silence for a few more minutes, Britta wiping down tables and chairs while I organized the bar, refilled the straw container, and checked the inventory. It was second nature by now. We didn’t need to speak to know the rhythm.

Then, as I leaned down to grab a few beer bottles from the cooler, Britta’s voice floated over the bar.

“So...” she said slowly, like she was stretching the word into a full paragraph, “those motorcycle guys.”

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I popped up with a bottle in each hand and arched a brow. "What about them?"

Britta propped the broom against the wall and sauntered over. "They were fun. Loud, but not disrespectful. Tipped well."

I shrugged. "Guess they know how to act."

She gave me a look. "You were talking to one of them a lot."

"Twister," I said without thinking.

Britta tipped her head to the side. "You did find out his name. Odd, but not too far off base for an MC guy."

"I didn't ask his name," I said, and grabbed a rag to wipe down the top of the bar one last time. "He told me."

Britta rolled her eyes and flitted her hand at me. "Details, girlfriend. I saw the way he was watching you the whole time. I think you should see what it's like to spend some time with a biker."

I scoffed. "I'll pass, thank you very much. I have my hands full enough with the bar."

She leaned her elbows on the bar and gave me that look, the one that meant she wasn't letting this go.

"Girl, this place runs like clockwork. You should take some time for yourself."

I grabbed the dirty towels and headed toward the kitchen. "This place runs so well because I'm always here."

Britta followed me through the swinging doors.

"And because you are always here. Take us out of the bar, and this place will fall down," I continued.

"I mean," she drawled, "you're not wrong, but that doesn't mean you can't spend time with the biker when the bar is closed. You know, Mondays... and then three a.m. to eleven a.m."

I snorted and dropped the towels into the hamper. "Cool. I just won't sleep so I can chase after Twister."

Britta folded her arms over her chest. "I don't think you'll have to do much chasing. I think you'll just have to crook your finger, and that man will be all yours."

I rolled my eyes and flipped off the lights in the kitchen. "You got all of that just from watching him talk to me for a couple minutes?"

We walked back out to the front of the bar. Britta ducked behind the counter and grabbed her purse from under the register.

"You can tell a lot about a man by the way he looks at you," she said and slung the purse strap over her shoulder. "And I saw Twister wanting to do more than just talk to you."

I pointed to the front door. "Girl, I think you must be so tired you're delirious. Get your butt out of here so we can both go to sleep."

She laughed and headed to the door with me following close behind. She pulled it open, and there was Tyson, her older brother, standing on the sidewalk with his hands in his hoodie pocket.

“You do know you can come inside, right?” I asked, holding the door.

Tyson shook his head. “I’m good waiting out here for Britta.” He looked over at her. “Good?”

Britta nodded. “Yup. Lead the way home, big brother.”

They said their goodbyes, and I locked the door behind them with a soft click.

Then it was just me and the silence.

I flipped the remaining neon signs off one by one, Old Milwaukee, Pabst, Spotted Cow, until the room was bathed in shadows. I double-checked the front deadbolt, then walked to the back of the bar and made sure the side exit was locked tight.

The back stairwell creaked under my boots as I made my way up to the second floor. I reached the top, fished out my apartment key, and pushed the door open.

“Home sweet home,” I whispered, stepped inside, and locked it behind me.

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I dropped my keys on the little entry table that wobbled when you looked at it wrong and kicked off my shoes with a sigh.

The apartment wasn't fancy, never had been, but it was mine. Two bedrooms, a narrow galley kitchen, one small bathroom, and a living room that was part rustic, part boho chaos. A tapestry my dad bought me when I was sixteen hung over the couch. Books stacked on side tables. A big cushy armchair in the corner with a quilt that smelled like lavender and dust.

It had its creaks, its scuffs, its quirks. But it was home.

I'd lived here my whole life. For the first twenty-six years, it had been with my dad. Now it'd been four years on my own.

Some nights, the silence hurt more than others.

I padded into the kitchen and filled a glass with cold water. The glass sweated in my hand as I leaned against the counter and stared out the window.

The bar sat on the corner of State Street and College. In summer, the crowd was a mix of locals, tourists, and working-class folks escaping the heat with cold beer. But once fall hit, the students flooded in. Loud, energetic, always broke.

I liked the rhythm of it.

But winter?

Winter was my favorite.

Snow covered the streets like powdered sugar. The chill in the air felt like a fresh start. Sure, it could be brutal with frozen pipes, slush, and bitter wind that cut right through your coat, but there was something honest about winter. No pretending. Just surviving.

I couldn't imagine living somewhere that didn't have seasons.

All sun, all heat, all year? No, thanks.

I finished my water, rinsed the glass, and set it in the sink.

Lights off. Apartment quiet.

Time for bed.

I peeled off my clothes and changed into my pajamas. Cotton shorts in a soft teal and a white tank top that had definitely seen better days but was too comfy to toss.

I piled my long black hair into a messy knot on top of my head, let out a breath, and crawled into bed.

The sheets were cool. My comforter soft. Everything familiar.

Outside, a motorcycle engine revved somewhere in the distance.

Not unusual. But this time, it made me think of Twister.

And that... was unusual.

Chapter Seven

Twister

Monday morning smelled like dust and concrete.

I stood in the middle of the warehouse with Swift, Wheels, Hodge, Podge, and Gramps, watching the real estate agent fumble with the lights like she'd never seen a switch before.

The place was colder than I remembered. Big, open, and echoing with every step. It had been a month since I first walked it solo, but now that I had my guys here, the space felt smaller. Not physically, hell, the building was huge, but with five patched members and a future riding on it, the walls felt like they were closing in.

"This is the main floor," the agent said cheerfully, finally getting the flickering overhead fluorescents to sputter to life. "Two offices in the back, a reception area, and that corner was used as a waiting room by the last tenant."

We followed her as she pointed toward a cluster of rooms in the far corner. Nothing about them screamed drage room to me. Hell, they barely screamed useful.

The walls were drywall and thin. The carpet was stained. And the tile in the bathroom looked like it hadn't seen bleach since Obama was in office.

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“I know what you’re thinking,” I said and glanced over my shoulder at Swift and Wheels.

Wheels scratched his beard. “We’re gonna have to gut every inch of this.”

“Yeah,” Swift muttered. “Everything’s too soft. We need concrete, containment, and some real structure. No drywall for people to put fists through.”

Hodge walked into one of the offices, tapped the wall, and raised an eyebrow. “This wouldn’t survive a toddler with a bad attitude.”

Podge walked past him and eyed the back wall with mild disapproval. “Reception area could be useful. But we’d have to reframe it all. You don’t want customers wandering into danger zones.”

Gramps, surprisingly quiet, was the one who said it aloud. “We’d be tearing this place down to the studs.”

I nodded. “Exactly.”

The real estate agent blinked. “Well, that’s... one way to look at it.”

I turned to her. “It’s the only way to look at it.”

She pasted on a realtor smile and clasped her hands. “Well, if you’ve got a vision for it, that’s what matters. And you’re getting this at a steal. The city’s been wanting someone to do something with this property for years.”

“Yeah, well,” I muttered, “we’re good at doing what others won’t.”

We spent the next hour walking the perimeter, opening every closet, storage door, and hatch. The place wasn’t falling apart, but it had seen better decades. The walls would need demo. The bathrooms would need to be rebuilt entirely. The floors had dips in a few places. But the bones were good, solid concrete slab foundation, exposed steel beams up top, and easy access to loading docks.

“I like the space,” Hodge said, and ran a hand along a concrete support column. “We can do something with this.”

“I just don’t know if we should do it all ourselves,” Podge added. “It’s gonna take months.”

“We already started the clubhouse,” Wheels reminded him. “And we’re getting through that faster than expected.”

“Yeah, because half the guys are pulling double-duty,” Gramps said. “But we can’t stretch ‘em thin forever.”

That’s when I asked what had been on my mind for days. “Gramps,” I said, “we gonna hold out money-wise?”

He didn’t flinch. Just gave a sharp nod. “You’re good.”

I raised an eyebrow. “That’s not a number.”

“You want a number, I’ll get you one. But unless you start buying Lamborghinis and putting mansions on every continent, we’re good.”

A few of the guys chuckled.

Hodge smirked. “He ain’t wrong.”

I shoved my hands in my pockets and nodded. “Still feels like I’m bleeding money.”

“You are,” Gramps grunted. “But this whole setup was your idea. And you planned for this. Hell, Hank Bonds set you up to do this.”

My grandfather. Good ol’ Hank. He’d owned and operated the country’s largest landscaping empire. A billion-dollar green front for a laundering operation that made Wall Street look like child’s play.

When he died, the business died with him. But not before he scrubbed the money and handed me a trust so thick I’d need generations of reckless children to spend it all.

Or, apparently, a motorcycle club.

“I know what you guys want,” Gramps continued. “You want to say you built this with your own hands. You want to lay the bricks and paint the goddamn walls.”

“We’re proud bastards,” Podge admitted.

“I get that,” Gramps said. “But we gotta be smart. If you hire a crew to handle the big stuff—demo, framing, electrical—you free up the club to lock down our place downtown. You make sure the clubhouse gets finished. The city sees us as a fixture, and not some transient crew of nomads.”

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I ran a hand over my jaw, thinking.

It wasn't a bad suggestion.

"We can still do the finishing touches," I said. "Paint. Build the rage rooms out once the framework's up. Customize each space. But yeah... letting someone else take on the heavy lifting might be worth it."

Swift grunted. "You sure about that? Letting outsiders near anything to do with club property?"

I shrugged. "We'll be here every damn day they are. We'll control what they see, what they don't. And we'll vet every name on the crew."

Hodge crossed his arms. "We vote?"

I nodded. "We vote."

"Then I'm in," Swift said. "With the right oversight."

Podge and Wheels both nodded.

"Me too," Gramps added.

That was enough for now. We'd bring it to the table at church to make it official.

The realtor came back toward us, clipboard in hand, her eyes hopeful. "Well? What's

the verdict?”

I looked at the guys. They all gave a nod.

I turned back to her. “We’ll take it.”

Her eyes lit up like Christmas morning. “Wonderful! I can have the paperwork ready within the hour. You want to come by the office, or should I send it digitally?”

“Send it,” I said. “We’ll sign and send it back.”

She shook each of our hands too long, too eager, but I played nice. It was a small city. No sense making enemies when we could keep everything smooth.

Once she was gone, we stepped outside into the morning sun. Bikes glinted in the light, lined up along the curb like a declaration.

I looked back at the warehouse. It was ugly beige with peeling paint and a cracked window near the top. “We’re gonna need to spruce up the front,” I muttered.

Swift grunted and pulled on his gloves. “That’s something we can hire out. Get a real designer. Make it look like a business people actually want to walk into.”

Wheels snorted. “Rage room with curb appeal. That’s a new one.”

I smiled and could already picture it. “We’ll call around. Find someone who gets the vibe we’re going for.”

Gramps nodded and scribbled some more on his notepad. “I’ll reach out to a few people.”

We climbed onto our bikes, and the engines roared to life one by one.

As I slid on my sunglasses, I looked back at the warehouse again.

It didn't look like much now.

But it would.

We were gonna turn that shell into something unforgettable.

A place to let it all out.

A place to break shit without breaking yourself.

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And just like that, our next step as the Saint's Outlaws: Madison Chapter locked into place.

Chapter Eight

Tempi

The clink of clean glass against clean glass was one of my favorite sounds.

There was something calming about it. Just me, the bar, and a few dozen pint glasses still dripping from their last run through the washer.

Eleven fifteen. We'd been open all of fifteen minutes.

Britta wouldn't roll in until three, and the regulars never started filing in until at least four. Mornings were mine except for the one-off customer who wandered in. I could get things done without yelling over jukebox music or dodging darts.

The quiet didn't last.

The front door creaked open, bringing with it the sound of the street, distant traffic, the hiss of a city bus, and the jingle of someone's bike bell.

"Tempi!" a familiar voice called. "The prettiest bartender on State Street."

I didn't even have to look up.

I rolled my eyes and reached for another glass. “You say that to all the bartenders, Frank. Even Mick over at the Salty Badger.”

I looked up just in time to catch Frank Osborn grinning like the devil in a Packers windbreaker, while his big hand gestured behind him to Nick Hamlet, who followed him inside like a quiet shadow.

“I just call ‘em like I see ‘em,” Frank said and slid onto his usual stool at the bar.

Nick sat beside him with a nod. Less flashy, but still sharp. I’d seen them both more times than I could count. City guys, not politicians exactly, but they had their hands in city council meetings, real estate committees, and zoning boards. They didn’t own Madison, but they knew who did.

“What can I get you?” I asked.

“Wisconsin Amber for me,” Frank said.

“Same,” Nick added.

I grabbed two chilled pint glasses from the cooler and poured. The foam rose just high enough to crown the amber-colored beer before sliding it across the counter to them.

They didn’t drink right away. That was the first clue.

Frank leaned in slightly. “So, how’s business?”

I shrugged. “Can’t complain. Locals are still thirsty, and the cheese curds are still squeaking.”

Nick chuckled quietly, but Frank just kept looking at me with that smile that never

quite reached his eyes.

“You had a full house the other night,” he said, grabbing his beer but still not taking a sip. “Heard it was loud in here.”

I kept my face blank and picked up another glass to polish. “We had a good crowd, yeah.”

“Bikers, right?” Nick added, voice casual but too smooth. “The Saint’s Outlaws?”

My hands didn’t stop moving, but my gut tightened just a little. “Yeah, they came in,” I said with my tone even. “Had some food and a few drinks.”

Frank nodded. “You talk to them much?”

I set the polished glass down gently. “Not really. They were having a good time, but nothing out of line. Paid their tab and tipped well.”

There was a beat of silence. The kind that had weight.

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Frank's fingers tapped on the bar. "You know anything about 'em?"

That's when it hit me; they weren't making conversation. They were digging. Friendly smiles, casual tone, but their questions were all aimed in the same direction.

I gave a shrug and turned to wipe down the back bar, giving myself a second to think. "Not really. Just that they came in for burgers and whiskey. Didn't cause trouble."

I saw Nick exchange a look with Frank in the mirror behind the bar.

Frank leaned in slightly. "They're not from around here. You know that, right?"

"I figured," I said, keeping my voice neutral. "Didn't really seem like Wisconsin born and bred."

"They're setting up shop," Nick added. "Clubhouse and a business. A whole operation."

I turned back toward them. "Yeah, I heard."

Frank tilted his head. "You okay with that?"

I blinked. "What does that mean?"

"Just asking," Frank said, and lifted his beer finally to take a sip. "Seems like a big shift for downtown. New faces, new muscle. Not everyone likes that."

I placed both hands flat on the bar, smiling lightly. “Isn’t Madison all about welcoming everyone? I’m pretty sure there’s a billboard that says so.”

Frank let out a chuckle, but it didn’t sound amused. “You got a sharp tongue, Tempi. Just like your old man.”

“Must be genetic,” I drawled. I normally liked Frank and Nick, but right now, they were rubbing me the wrong way. I grabbed another glass to polish.

They fell quiet for a moment while they both finally drank their beer. The tension didn’t break. It just shifted, thinner now, like fishing line stretched tight.

Nick leaned forward. “Just... keep your eyes open, alright? If you hear anything about what they’re doing, who they’re meeting with, what they’re planning, maybe pass it along.”

I kept my expression flat. “I’m just a bartender.”

Frank smiled, too wide. “Exactly. Bartenders hear everything.”

I didn’t reply.

“We all gotta look out for each other,” Nick added. “Especially now.”

I gave a tight nod. “Sure.”

They finished their beers in silence. When they stood, Frank pulled out his wallet and dropped a few bills on the bar, more than needed, but not generous enough to feel like a bribe.

Nick adjusted his jacket and looked at me again. “Just be careful, Tempi. You don’t

know what kind of people you're letting into your place."

"Thanks for the warning," I said evenly.

They left with a nod. Frank gave a parting wink before the door swung shut behind them.

I stood there for a moment with my heart ticking a little faster than I liked and a polished glass still in my hand. I set it down and reached for another, but my focus was gone.

They weren't just nosy.

They were warning me.

Or threatening me.

And I didn't like either version.

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The Badger's Den was my home. This place was my roots. People came in, drank, talked, and left their stress at the door. That's what it was supposed to be.

But this?

This was something else.

I shook it off and got back to work, but I couldn't shake the weird feeling crawling up my spine.

Frank and Nick might've smiled like neighbors.

But I'd just seen the wolf behind the grin.

And it was watching.

Chapter Nine

Twister

The main room of the clubhouse buzzed with the low rumble of voices. Boots scuffed concrete floors, and the occasional clink of a beer bottle. We'd dragged in the biggest goddamn table I had bought a month ago. It was custom-built from reclaimed wood by some old-timer up north, and the guys sat around it in mismatched chairs we'd scrounged up. A Saint's Outlaws flag hung behind me. Just the way we liked it.

I stood at the head of the table and gave the room a once-over. "Alright, let's bring it

in.Church is in session.”

The conversation dimmed like someone turned down the volume knob.Swift leaned back in his chair with his arms crossed, and a smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth.Wheels had a beer in one hand and a rag slung over his shoulder.Hodge leaned forward with his forearms on the table, and his usual scowl was carved deep.Podge had his damn notebook open like always, pen ready to scratch notes we probably didn’t need, but he took anyway.Gramps sat next to him, sipping black coffee like the eighty-year-old soul he claimed to be, even though he was barely fifty.

“First up,” I said and slapped my hand on the table.“We need a name for the rage room.”

Groans and chuckles rippled around the table.

“Here we go,” Swift muttered.

“I’m serious,” I shot back with a grin.“We’re not gonna open the doors to some half-assed named place.It’s gonna be our main cash flow, so let’s make it count.”

Wheels grinned.“What about Smash Shack?”

“Sounds like a burger joint,” Hodge grunted.

“Or a brothel,” Nugget laughed.

“Rage Relief,” Podge offered.

“Sounds like a pain med commercial,” Swift fired back.

Laughter broke out.

“Breakers,” Magnum suggested and twirled a toothpick in his mouth.

“Too generic,” Gramps said with a shrug.

“Demolition Den?” Cord tossed out from the side, then raised his hands. “I know, I know. I’m not patched, but come on.”

“Let the kid talk,” Gramps said. “Good idea or bad, everyone’s got a mouth.”

“Wreckless Abandon,” Hodge said slowly. “You know, play on ‘reckless’ with a ‘w’.”

“Kind of hard to know unless they see it spelled out, don’t you think?” I asked.

Rev tapped his fingers against the table. “Saints’ Smash? Keep it in the family.”

“Smash City,” Swift said with a smirk. “Straightforward and kinda badass.”

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“Rage Against Boredom,” Wheels said, clearly proud.

“You’re cut off,” Podge told him.

I laughed. “Alright, alright. Enough throwin’ spaghetti at the wall. Let’s vote.”

Hands raised around the table as I called out the final contenders: Saints’ Smash and Smash City. It was dead even.

I leaned forward and braced my hands on the table. “Looks like it’s down to me.”

The room waited. I gave it a beat, then nodded. “Saints’ Smash. Feels right.”

Swift nodded approvingly. “Clean. On brand. I like it.”

“Alright,” I said. “Next. Buildout. We going full DIY, or we hiring some muscle?”

“Do it ourselves,” Hodge said immediately. “Keep outsiders out.”

“That’ll take months,” Podge pointed out. “And we’ve got enough on our plate with the clubhouse still under construction.”

Gramps cleared his throat. “We’ve got the cash. You boys want this done in under six months, you better think about hiring out the big shit. Demolition. Framework. Electrical. Then we go in and make it ours.”

“We can be there the whole time,” I added. “Supervise. Make sure no one pokes their

nose too far in.”

Swift nodded. “That makes sense. We don’t need a bunch of drywall dust clogging up our engines while trying to drywall at midnight.”

“Vote,” I said.

Hands rose, and they were more than enough to carry it.

“Alright. Demo and structure go to outside help. Finish work and design, that’s on us.”

Podge scribbled in his notebook and mumbled to himself.

“Anything else on the table?”

Silence.

I leaned against the table edge and scanned the room. “How do we feel about Madison so far?”

Wheels lifted his bottle. “City’s nice, beer’s cheap, women are hot. What’s not to love?”

“People watch us,” Hodge said. “Noticed that last night and this morning. Eyes on us, and not just curious ones.”

“That’s good,” Swift said. “Means they’re already worried.”

Magnum snorted. “Or it means we’re about to have company.”

“Let ‘em come,” Rev murmured. “Steel sharpens steel.”

I looked around the room. The boys were grinning. Calm. Ready. Comfortable in the chaos.

“Clubhouse is almost done,” Podge noted. “Drywall’s up on the main floor. Painting starts tomorrow. Upstairs, we’re halfway through flooring. Bedrooms will be done before the week’s out.”

“Three more weeks and this place is home,” Swift added.

“It’s already home,” I said. “Just needed the walls to catch up.”

Chairs scraped back as guys stood, conversations sparking up again. Church was done.

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Swift stayed seated, with his arms still folded. He looked up at me, and his eyes were steady.

“You did it, brother.”

“Didn’t do shit alone,” I said, and clapped a hand on his shoulder. “But yeah...feels good, doesn’t it?”

He grinned. “Feels like family.”

I nodded and let the hum of brotherhood sink into my bones.

“It’s only the beginning.”

Chapter Ten

Tempi

The sun was finally out, melting away what little chill had clung to the early hours of the morning. I stepped out the back door of the Badger Den with two hefty trash bags in hand, and the scent of fried food and beer clung to me like a second skin. The dumpster sat under the faded sign that used to say “Deliveries Only,” though no one paid attention to it anymore.

I hoisted the bags into the dumpster and gave it a hard slam shut, then brushed my hands off on the thighs of my jeans.

“You own this place, and you still have to throw the garbage out?”

I jumped, spinning around so fast my heart slammed into my ribs.

Twister.

He leaned casually against the alley wall, with his arms folded across his chest like he'd been lounging there for hours, not like he'd just startled me into almost flinging myself into the dumpster.

“You always scare girls by the dumpster?” I shot back with one hand on my hip as I tried to calm the adrenaline spiking through me.

He chuckled. The low sound curled down my spine. “I was walking by and saw you hefting those bags in. Thought I'd stop by and see how you were doing.”

My eyes traveled over Twister's face and body. Hot didn't even begin to cover it. He was wearing that same white shirt from the other night. The soft fabric stretched across his chest and biceps, while his leather cut hung over it like it belonged there more than skin. Faded jeans, perfectly broken in, and black motorcycle boots that looked like they'd stomped through every fight he'd ever won. Add in that short dark hair, square jaw, and those gray-blue eyes that looked like storm clouds waiting to roll in, and yeah, Twister was a whole damn problem.

“Just tossing the trash out,” I said and gestured at the now-closed dumpster. “You're the third guy who's just stopped by to see how I was doing in the past two days.” I stepped toward him, watching the corners of his lips twitch. “Are you going to warn me to stay away from someone now?”

He raised an eyebrow. “No clue what you're talking about, doll. You got someone bothering you?”

I squinted up at him. “They weren’t bothering me exactly...”

Twister tilted his head.

“It was just Frank and Nick wanting to know if I knew anything about...” I winced. Crap. I really needed to think before I opened my mouth.

“Anything about what?” he asked, the warmth in his voice cooled just a notch.

“Nothing. It’s nothing,” I said quickly, already backpedaling.

“If it’s nothing, then why not just tell me, doll?”

I crossed my arms. “It isn’t anything you need to worry about, Twister. I should really get back inside in case anyone came in. Britta won’t be here for a couple of hours,” I said and tried to wave it off.

But I could feel it shift between us. His expression hardened, his stance a little more rigid.

“What did they ask you if you knew about?” he said, voice low and firm.

I sighed. This was exactly what I’d hoped to avoid. “They just wondered if I had heard anything about you and the club,” I admitted. “They were just being curious, I think.”

His brow furrowed. “Curious about me and my club? They can easily come to the clubhouse and introduce themselves. Why ask you about us?”

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I didn't have an answer to that. I thought it was weird too.

"That all they say about me?" he asked.

I wrinkled my nose. "I mean...they just said to be careful about who I let into the bar, and that we should all look out for each other."

Twister chuckled, but it was dry. Flat. "Beware the outsiders new to town."

I shrugged and mentally tried to give them the benefit of the doubt. "Maybe they were just trying to look out for me."

His lips thinned. "They always looking out for you?"

That stopped me. Not really. Frank and Nick were friendly enough, but I couldn't remember the last time they came into the bar just to check in. Maybe the occasional beer, but they weren't exactly protective big brothers.

"I mean, not really, but it wasn't completely out of the ordinary for them to...be interested."

Twister scoffed. "Where can I find Frank and Nick?"

Uh-oh.

"No, no," I said quickly and stepped in his path. "Don't be upset about this, Twister. I'm sure it was just them trying to protect me and make sure I'm okay."

His eyes pinned me. “Where can I find them?”

I groaned. “F & N Bikes. Keep heading down the street and you’ll find it.” I knew there was no point in trying to argue with him. “But don’t do anything... mean.”

He grunted and stepped back. His eyes narrowed slightly. “Later, doll.”

He turned on his heel and started walking away. His boots thudded against the pavement with purpose. Only, he didn’t head toward F & N Bikes.

“Wrong way!” I called after him.

Twister lifted a hand and called back over his shoulder. “Nah, it’s not, doll. Need to head back to the clubhouse first.”

And then he disappeared around the corner.

Oh boy.

I might’ve just unleashed a pissed-off biker on Frank and Nick.

Chapter Eleven

Twister

Downtown Madison buzzed around me like a damn hornet’s nest. Horns blared, college kids darted across the street without looking, and tourists fumbled with phones and bratwursts. But I wasn’t paying much attention. My boots hit the pavement like they had something to say, and right now, I was feeling every ounce of the frustration building in my gut.

Frank and Nick.

Those two jackasses weren't just being nosy; they were being strategic. Going around, poking at Tempi, trying to sniff out who we were and what we were about without having the balls to come ask me themselves. I didn't do passive-aggressive. I didn't do whisper games. You wanna know something? You ask me. You don't drag a woman into your curiosity just because she's behind a bar and smiles pretty.

Tempi didn't need to be stuck in the middle of some territorial pissing match.

I yanked open the door to the clubhouse and let it slam behind me. The main room still smelled like new drywall and paint, but it was shaping up. The long table we'd bolted to the floor was surrounded by mismatched chairs. Temporary until the real ones arrived.

"Swift!" I bellowed.

Footsteps from above.

"Hodge! Magnum! Church call, right fucking now."

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Swift came bounding down the stairs two at a time, his cut flapping behind him. "Somebody light your fuse, Prez?"

Hodge followed, all slow swagger and resting murder face. The man didn't talk much, but he didn't need to. His presence said it all: dark jeans, black boots, plain black tee under his cut. Dude was a fuck-around-and-find-out poster child.

Magnum came from the garage side and wiped grease off his hands with a towel. "What's the play?"

"We're going for a walk," I said and headed for the front door again.

"Hell yes," Swift grinned and cracked his knuckles. "I don't care where we're going; I know that look on your face. We're about to kick some ass."

Hodge slid his sunglasses over his eyes without a word.

"Where we going?" Magnum asked, voice low.

"First, we're gonna talk," I said. "Then if they don't want to listen...we'll see where it goes."

Magnum chuckled behind me. "This is gonna be fun."

We stepped out onto the sidewalk like a goddamn wall of leather and attitude. Four patched-up, pissed-off bikers strolling down State Street wasn't a sight most people forgot. We moved like we owned the pavement.

Swift adjusted his shades. “You wanna clue us in before we get there, Prez?”

“Frank and Nick,” I said. “From the bike shop down the street.”

Hodge grunted. “The fuck’s a Frank and Nick?”

“They own F & N Bikes,” I explained. “Apparently, they paid Tempa a visit yesterday, asked her if she knew anything about us. Warned her. Told her to keep her eyes open.”

Magnum whistled low. “They haven’t even met us yet.”

“Exactly,” I muttered. “They’ve got no idea who we are, but they’ve already got an opinion. That tells me they’re either scared, jealous, or hiding something.”

Swift smirked. “I vote for all three.”

We passed Badger’s Den. The lights inside were low, but I didn’t look in. No need to stir Tempa up again. She’d already warned me not to start shit, but I wasn’t starting it. I was just finishing it.

A block later, we hit the corner and waited at the light. Cars zipped by. A city bus rumbled past. People stared, then looked away just as quick.

Once the light flipped, we crossed.

F & N Bikes stood two stores in. The exterior was clean, modern, big windows, sleek black and silver sign with minimalist lettering. Try-hard trendy bullshit.

Magnum squinted up at it. “Could you imagine thinking riding a bicycle is fun?”

Swift snorted. “No motor? No soul.”

We pushed inside. A chime announced us like some dainty tea party guests. The air inside smelled like rubber and citrus cleaner. Bikes lined the walls. Road bikes, mountain bikes, and those overpriced electric hybrids that made you look like a lazy asshole with too much money. Shelves were stacked with helmets, gloves, water bottles, and whatever other overpriced shit cyclists needed to feel superior.

Hodge wandered over to a matte black bike with thin tires. “This thing’s almost the price of a fucking Harley.”

“And you can only go ten miles an hour on the damn thing,” Swift said, pretending to twist an imaginary throttle. “Give me a Harley any day, brother.”

A guy behind the counter glanced up, and his eyes widened behind his wire-rimmed glasses. He wore a branded F & N polo and looked like he might wet himself. “C-can I help you?”

I strolled forward and leaned against the glass counter. “We were just looking for Frank and Nick. Wanted to introduce ourselves. Be neighborly,” I drawled.

The guy nodded fast. “Y-yeah. I’ll get them.”

He disappeared into the back. Muffled voices followed, low and rushed.

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A minute later, two men came out.

Frank was in his mid-fifties, with short-cropped gray hair and a slight belly that hung over his belt. He wore a flannel and jeans that didn't quite fit right. Nick was wiry, maybe early forties, with narrow eyes and a receding hairline slicked back with too much gel.

They looked about as tough as a pair of wet noodles.

"You must be Frank and Nick," I said, standing tall and casual. "Twister. This is Swift, Hodge, and Magnum. We run the Saint's Outlaws MC here in Madison."

Frank cleared his throat. "Can we help you fellas?"

"Just thought we'd drop by and say hey," I said smoothly. "We're setting up shop down the block. Figured it's good to meet the neighbors."

They didn't say anything.

Nick shifted his weight. "You...uh, you guys run the motorcycle club?"

I nodded. "That's right."

Frank frowned. "We've heard some...things."

I tilted my head. "Oh yeah? Like what?"

Frank folded his arms. “Just...people are concerned. About changes. This area’s been stable for a long time.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Stable?”

“This part of town, State Street, it’s got a rhythm. Businesses know each other. We look out for one another.”

Swift leaned in. “And you think we’re not about that?”

Nick stammered. “We don’t know what you’re about. That’s the point.”

Frank’s eyes flicked to mine. “We’re just making sure the neighborhood doesn’t become something it’s not.”

I smiled, but it wasn’t warm. “We’re just a motorcycle club, Frank. We drink some whiskey, ride some bikes, and we’re opening a rage room to let people smash the shit out of stuff for fun. Doesn’t sound too threatening to me.”

Frank looked like he’d swallowed a lemon. “Just... don’t bring trouble.”

“Funny thing,” I said, and stepped forward just a hair. “We don’t bring trouble. But we don’t shy away from it either.”

Magnum chuckled low. “Especially when people go around trying to stir it.”

“We’re just being careful,” Nick muttered.

I grunted. “You picked the wrong bartender to start that shit with.” I held up a hand and tried to keep my tone easy. “Look, we’re not here to start something. But next time you have questions about me or my crew, ask me. Don’t go sniffing around someone

who doesn't deserve the heat."

Frank didn't answer. Neither did Nick.

We stood there in silence for a beat too long.

"Anyway," I said and stepped back. "Nice to meet you boys."

We turned and walked out, boots thudding on the polished floor.

Back out on the sidewalk, Swift let out a low whistle. "I didn't like those fuckers."

"Me either," I muttered.

Magnum shook his head. "That shop's too clean. Too polished. And those two? Slimy."

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Hodge didn't say anything, but his jaw was clenched.

I didn't know what Frank and Nick were up to, but I knew it wasn't good.

And I'd be damned if I let them make Tempi, or anyone, a pawn in their little game.

Whatever was going on, I'd find out.

And when I did?

They'd wish they'd stayed out of my path.

Chapter Twelve

Tempi

Wednesdays were usually slow.

Dinner brought a small rush, but otherwise, it was just a steady trickle of regulars and tourists who stumbled in by accident or fate. I didn't mind. The quiet nights were when I got the most done, restocking the beer coolers, reorganizing the glassware, and tightening up inventory sheets.

At nearly ten, Britta was in the back flipping burgers for a group of college kids who came in hungry and half-drunk. I'd already poured them three rounds, and they were too focused on trying to beat each other in darts to cause trouble. Maggie nursed her brandy old fashioned at the end of the bar, like usual, chatting with anyone who came

within a foot of her stool. The neon glow from the beer signs bathed everything in a warm and familiar haze.

I was wiping down the bar for the third time when the door creaked open.

I didn't look up right away. A few more swipes, and I'd have the wood gleaming. But then the door clicked shut, and the sound of boots against the floor made me glance up.

Twister.

Alone.

Lord, help me.

Same cut. A blue shirt stretched across that broad chest. Same faded jeans hugging thick thighs and strong legs. The same black boots I'd noticed the first time he walked in here. But now, under the golden bar light and the low hum of country music in the background, he looked downright dangerous.

Panty-melting dangerous.

He walked like he owned the world. Slow, confident, and unbothered by the few curious glances tossed his way. He took the same seat at the end of the bar—the one he always seemed to favor.

I tossed my rag behind the bar and grabbed a fresh napkin. I strolled his way like I wasn't just thinking about how his arms looked like they could throw me over his shoulder with zero effort.

I set the napkin in front of him. "What'll it be?"

His lips quirked. “Whiskey. On the rocks.”

“Same thing you had last time,” I murmured.

He shrugged one shoulder. “Figured I’d stick with what works.”

I grabbed a clean glass and dropped two cubes in. “Seeing you twice in one day,” I said as I poured. “Special occasion?”

“Felt like a drink.”

I handed him the glass and leaned just slightly against the back counter. “The bar not set up in the clubhouse yet?”

“Oh, it’s set up,” he said, and took a sip. “And the guys are definitely using it. I just wanted a drink without all the bullshit that comes with it.”

I tucked the bottle back in its spot. “Already sick of club life? You haven’t even been in town two weeks.”

He grinned. “I’ll never get sick of club life, doll. I just need a little peace and quiet sometimes. Helps me think.”

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“Lucky you,” I said, glancing around. “Tonight’s pretty slow.”

“Exactly what I was hoping for.”

Maggie waved me down, and I headed to refill her drink. A minute later, Britta hollered from the kitchen that food was up. I hustled the plate out to the kids at the table, then slipped behind the bar to serve two new customers.

All the while, I could feel Twister’s eyes on me.

I wasn’t imagining it. Every time I moved, and every time I bent down to grab something, turned to check a bottle, or leaned over the register, I could feel the heat of his gaze. But he didn’t call me over. Didn’t try to talk. He just sipped his drink and watched everything with that calm, dangerous air he always carried.

I filled his glass twice more, both times without asking. He gave me a low thanks each time, and that was it. No chatter. No flirting.

So he really had come in just to think.

Fine.

But I couldn’t stand watching him sit there without food. He was built like a damn Norse god, and there was no way that kind of body ran on whiskey alone.

I ducked into the kitchen.

“Hey, Britta,” I called. “Need one Wisconsin Burger. Double patties, cheddar, mayo, onion rings, curds, full monstrosity. And fries.”

Britta gave me a side-eye from the grill. “He ordered something more than a drink?”

“Nope.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Girl, it’s about damn time a man catches your attention. I’m pretty excited that it’s a hot biker.”

I rolled my eyes. “No one has caught my attention.”

“Right,” she muttered. “And I’m the new pope.”

She pointed the spatula in the direction of the bar. “You want that man, and I am saying right here and now that you better let that man taste the rainbow.”

I blinked at her. “Is that some new slang I haven’t heard?”

She shrugged. “Nah. Just heard a Skittles commercial earlier. Guess it stuck with me, but it works. Let that man have a little taste of Tempi.”

I laughed and shook my head. “How about you just make him a burger, and he can taste that, okay?”

“You’re no fun,” she pouted, but she flipped the patties and got to work.

I returned to the bar and made the rounds until Britta called that the food was up. I grabbed the plate and brought it over to Twister.

He looked at the monster burger and then at me. “What’s this?”

“You need to eat.”

He tilted his head. “Why?”

“Because I’m a responsible bar owner,” I said. “And if you want another whiskey, you’re going to have to eat something.”

He studied the plate. “That is more than something, doll.”

“Yeah, it is,” I said. “But I promise it’s delicious.”

He picked up a fry and popped it into his mouth. “I never doubted that it wasn’t. You working all night?” he asked as he chewed.

I nodded. “Till close.”

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I left him to eat, refilling drinks and chatting with Maggie, who always had stories from her teaching days. By the time I returned to Twister, his plate was clean and his drink nearly gone.

I poured him another without asking.

“Last one,” he said, and pulled the glass toward him. “Need to be able to walk back to the clubhouse.”

I leaned on the bar, teasing, “I can always walk you to your door.”

He took a slow sip. “I’ll manage.”

We were quiet for a moment. Then I said, “Did you take a walk to F & N Bikes?”

He nodded. “Yup. I just wanted to introduce myself, as they seem to be wondering about me. Told them they might as well get their information from the horse’s mouth.”

“You didn’t,” I laughed.

He smirked. “Not in those words. But they know who the club is now.”

“That sounds...ominous.”

“Not really into dumbasses talking about me behind my back. Gave them the chance to ask me face to face.”

“And did they?”

“Nah. Not really. Think they were a little intimidated by Swift and Magnum.” He smiled. “And Hodge.”

I held up my hand like I was measuring someone tall. “Is that the one who’s like seven foot tall?”

Twister nodded. “That would be him, doll.”

“Yeah, I’d be a little wary of him too.”

“You should come by the clubhouse sometime. Meet all the guys. See what we’re building,” he offered.

“I already met all of them,” I said. “Did you forget when you guys took over the bar last week?”

“Yeah, but I mean really meet them. See what we’ve done with the place.”

I nodded. “Sure, sure. When I’ve got a second, I’ll be there.”

He gave me a look. “Something tells me you don’t mean that.”

I laughed. “Guess you’ll just have to wait and see.”

A group of students paid their tab and left, and I went to clean their table. But I could still feel Twister’s eyes on me. The whole damn time.

And I tried not to think about it.

Tried not to think about how he showed up alone. How he came in just to sit in my bar. Tried not to imagine him without his clothes on.

Yeah, I was a bit of a goner.

He didn't want me.

He just wanted a drink.

A little peace and quiet.

And my bar just happened to be the nearest place to get it.

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That was all.

Right?

Chapter Thirteen

Twister

I should've gone home.

She worked confidently. Comfortable.

Pouring drinks, chatting, and laughing. Her voice rang out above the low thrum of conversation, warm and strong. She stopped to talk to a woman, then took plates back to the kitchen. Then she was back, slinging beers and wiping down the bar.

She didn't sit still for a second.

I sipped my drink and watched her. Every move. Every flick of her fingers. The way her hips swayed slightly when she walked. I told myself it wasn't creepy. I was just...interested. That's all. Admiring from afar.

At least until some guy reached across the bar and touched her hand.

My jaw clenched. It wasn't even sexual, just some drunk guy trying to get her attention. But still. I didn't like it.

Tempi pulled her hand back, not flinching, not scared. Just...annoyed. Like she was used to it.

I hated that.

Two in the morning came fast. The bar thinned out until it was just me, Britta, and Tempi left. The woman had stumbled out an hour earlier, and the college kids had long since wandered off.

Tempi was behind the bar rearranging bottles and wiping things down with the same focused energy. Britta was leaning against the counter, sipping something dark from a red cup.

“You can head out, Britta,” Tempi said. “Not much left to clean tonight.”

Britta raised an eyebrow, flicked her gaze toward me, then smirked. “I think that sounds good to me. See ya later, you two.”

She grabbed her purse from under the bar and headed for the door.

The second it shut behind her, the silence settled.

Tempi glanced at me. “You gonna finish that drink, or should I put it in a to-go cup for you?”

I chuckled and raised the glass. “If I finished it too fast, I wouldn’t have had a reason to stick around.”

Her eyes met mine. “Why did you need to stick around?”

I shrugged and stared into the last inch of whiskey. “Not really sure why,

doll.Something just...”

She tilted her head.“Just what?”

I didn’t answer and downed the last of the whiskey.I watched her as she continued to clean.The way her fingers moved across the bottles, the way her brow furrowed as she realigned the shelf.

I stood up and made my way to the jukebox in the corner.Flicked through the songs until I saw an icon labeledTempi’s.

Of course she had her own playlist.

I tapped it.First song:Break Inby Halestorm.

I pressed play.

The slow, haunting intro poured into the bar and wrapped around us like smoke.I turned around.Tempy was standing on the other side of the bar, closer than before.

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“What are you doing?” she asked.

I didn’t know. I was just going with it.

I held out my hand. “Dance with me.”

Her eyebrows lifted. “We’re closed.”

I looked around the empty bar. “Yeah. And?”

She didn’t move.

“Dance with me,” I repeated, firmer.

“Twister,” she started like she was going to say no.

I didn’t give her the chance. I stepped forward, wrapped my arm around her waist, and pulled her close.

She came willingly.

“It’s just a dance, Tempi,” I whispered.

She relaxed against me. Her head tilted up, and her hand rested on my chest. We swayed to the rhythm as her body fit perfectly against mine. The world faded. There was only the music, her warmth, and the steady beat of my heart that was suddenly thudding like a war drum.

“How did you find my playlist?” she asked softly.

“You labeled it Tempi, doll. Pretty easy to find.”

She laughed, and the sound curled around me. “You’re about to see how much I love Halestorm.”

“Does that mean you’re gonna dance with me for longer than one song?”

She didn’t answer. Just leaned into me.

The song ended.

The next one started.

A little more upbeat, a little more rock. I’m Not an Angel.

“What song is this?” I asked.

“I’m Not an Angel,” she murmured.

We kept swaying. Closer now. Slower. Her cheek brushed against my shoulder, and my hand slid lower on her back.

“The next one,” she whispered, “we’re not gonna be able to dance to.”

“Oh yeah?” I smirked. “Why not?”

She tilted her head up and smiled. “I’ll let you find out on your own.”

Sure enough, the moment I’m Not an Angel faded out, a heavy drumbeat kicked in.

I laughed. “Yeah, pretty sure headbanging is the only thing we could do to this one.”

Tempi grinned, lifted her hand, and flashed the rock and roll horns. “The Steeple’s one of my favorites,” she said.

“Got a little rock and roll in you, huh?” I murmured. “I like it.”

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Her eyes locked on mine.

“Twister,” she whispered.

That was it.

The pull between us snapped tight. Magnetic. Unstoppable.

I leaned in and kissed her.

Her lips were soft, warm, and hesitant for half a second, then she melted into me. Her arms slid around my neck. My hands flattened against her back. We kissed like we needed it. Like the last week had been building to this moment and neither of us had the strength to fight it anymore.

When we finally pulled apart, we were both breathing hard.

She looked up at me with her cheeks flushed and lips parted. “Twister...”

I saw the confusion in her eyes. The war waging between logic and want.

I felt it too. The unknown. The damn whirlwind of emotions that made zero sense.

“I know, doll,” I said softly. I pressed one more kiss to her lips. Slower. Reverent. Then I stepped back, just enough to let air pass between us. “Make sure to lock up.”

“Okay,” she whispered.

I looked at her one last time.I wanted to stay.

Fuck, I wanted to stay.

But I couldn't.

We both needed to figure out what the hell this was.

She knew I wanted her.

Now she had to decide what she was gonna do about it.

I walked to the door, opened it, and stepped outside.The air was cooler than I expected.I turned back and looked through the window.

She was still standing where I'd left her.

"Lock the door," I hollered.

She startled, then rushed forward and clicked the deadbolt into place.

We stared at each other through the glass for one beat.Two.

Then I nodded and turned down the street.

Headed back to the clubhouse.

This wasn't something I planned.

Wasn't something I expected.

But it sure as hell was something I couldn't ignore.

Chapter Fourteen

Twister

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The smell of fresh paint and sawdust clung to the air like proof of progress.

It felt good, real good, to see the place coming together. Brick by brick, piece by piece, we were claiming Madison. Quietly. Steadily. And so far, we hadn't had any pushback. That should've been my first clue. Peace never lasted.

The knock on the door was sharp. Three firm raps. Not the kind of knock that said neighbor with a pie or Amazon delivery. It was official.

I raised a brow at Swift and headed toward the front door.

I pulled the door open and found exactly what I expected.

A man in a stiff blue windbreaker stood with a clipboard clutched in one hand and the city emblem on his chest. Behind him were two cops, one tall and bored-looking, the other already sizing me up like he wanted to write a report about it.

"Can I help you?" I asked, voice flat.

"Morning," the windbreaker guy said. "I'm Harold Denton with the Madison Department of Licensing and Inspection. I'm here about the work being done on this property."

"It's a renovation," I replied. "Nothing outside the law."

He clicked his pen and scribbled something on the clipboard. "You filed for a basic occupancy permit, but what we're seeing here qualifies as commercial

development. Extensive structural changes, new electrical, plumbing—we've got reports of major modifications."

"You've got reports? From who?"

He didn't answer that. Just flipped a page.

"You don't have the right permits, and without those, all work must be suspended effective immediately."

I didn't move. "You showing up with cops is how you do business around here?"

The taller cop shrugged. "Standard protocol when revoking site activity with suspected code violations."

Bullshit.

"You hear that, Swift?" I called over my shoulder. "We're suspected of...what was it again, Denton?"

"Code violations."

Swift walked up beside me and wiped his hands on a rag. "That's funny. We're pretty damn good at following rules when we want to."

"And right now, we are," Hodge said, appearing behind us like a fucking shadow. He stood there, arms crossed, face unreadable. Exuded that don't fuck with me energy like a damn cologne.

Denton cleared his throat. He wasn't totally rattled, but he wasn't entirely comfortable either.

“I’m not here to debate,” he said. “Just here to inform. If any work continues before the permit situation is resolved, there will be citations, fines, and possibly criminal charges for willful violation of municipal law.”

“What part of the work is the issue?” I asked. “We didn’t move the bones of this place. Just cleaned it up and made it usable.”

“The city received complaints—”

“From who?” Swift interrupted, voice sharper now.

Denton glanced at his clipboard. “That’s not public information.”

“That’s a convenient answer,” I muttered.

“Regardless,” Denton continued, trying to keep the upper hand, “as of now, you are ordered to cease all construction activity until further notice. I’ll leave a formal notice taped to the door. You’ll find all the appeal procedures there.”

He turned, motioned for one of the cops to follow, and walked back toward the cruiser parked half on the curb.

“So that’s it?” I asked the other officer who lingered. “We just sit on our hands and wait?”

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The cop gave a shrug. “You got the appeal process. Or you can hire a local contractor who knows the hoops. That’s what most folks do.”

Yeah. Most folks who weren’t being deliberately targeted.

The bored-looking cop taped the notice on the door and then made his way to the cruiser.

The cruiser rolled off a second later.

The silence that fell after the car disappeared wasn’t peaceful. It was pissed-off quiet.

“Well,” Swift muttered, “wasn’t that a steaming pile of horseshit.”

“You think it was Frank and Nick?” Wheels asked, coming around the corner with his nail gun still slung at his side.

“I don’t think. I know,” I said. “They’re the only ones who don’t seem to like us setting roots here.”

Hodge rubbed the back of his neck. “And they’re doing it smart. Not coming at us themselves. Making it look like it’s coming from the city.”

Rev scoffed. “Cowards.”

“This isn’t over,” I said. “We’re not halting shit. We just have to be smart. Real smart.”

“We hiding the tools then, Prez?” Swift asked. “Or we gearing up for a different kind of build?”

I looked at each of them. One by one. Saints. My crew. My brothers.

We came to Madison to take the city, not rent a corner of it.

“We’ll play it calm for now,” I said. “Make a few calls. Find out what kind of inspector Denton really is.”

“And if he’s dirty?”

“Then we do what we do best,” I said, voice dropping low. “Expose the rot and burn it out.”

We didn’t get chased off.

Not by red tape, not by pencil pushers, and sure as hell not by a couple of bike shop pricks who didn’t have the balls to face us head-on.

The war had officially started.

And they had no idea who they just fucked with.

Chapter Fifteen

Tempi

“Go.”

I shook my head and leaned on the bar. “We’re busy.”

Britta scoffed and dramatically waved a hand around the nearly empty bar. “Girl, do we need to get your eyes checked or something? Two frat guys are playing pool, and Josh is watching the Brewer game on the TV. Yeah, so busy.”

I crossed my arms. “But what if it gets busy?”

“If I miraculously get slammed with customers, I will call you,” Britta said with a sigh. “You’re going down to the Sam James building, not Timbuktu. Go see the biker boys’ clubhouse.”

“I don’t think he would like you calling him biker boy.”

She rolled her eyes. “He won’t know unless you tell him I call him that. Go.”

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“I can’t go in my work clothes.”

Britta looked me up and down, one eyebrow raised. “Do you even have clothes that aren’t work clothes?”

I mean...not really. But I had some work clothes that were better than others. Tonight’s outfit was bottom of the barrel: baggy jeans, a black T-shirt, black Converse, and my hair was piled on top of my head like a cinnamon bun gone rogue.

I imagined Twister in his cut, looking all hot and sexy like he always did, and groaned. “I’m not going,” I blurted.

Twister was drop-dead gorgeous, and well...I was just drop-dead.

“Get out of your head, Temp, and go on the facts.”

I rolled my eyes. “The facts are I’m chunky and look like I need a shower.”

Britta grabbed a glass and filled it with ginger ale. “You’re not chunky; you are all sexy curves, and you can take a shower to fix the other problem.” She took a sip of her drink. “Now, run upstairs, shower, change, and haul your cookies down the street to the clubhouse. I promise I’ll be fine by myself, and if I need you, I will call.”

“I shouldn’t be leaving you alone.”

Britta pulled out her phone, swiped a few times, and held it to her ear. A moment later, it rang loudly.

“What’s up, B?”Tyson answered.

“Hey, brother,” Britta called.“I’m trying to get Tempi to go ride the local biker, and she won’t go unless you come over here and watch me like someone’s going to kidnap me.”

“Kidnap you?”Tyson chuckled.

Britta smiled.“Ain’t gonna happen because I like my cupcakes and cookies too much.Just get here so Tempi can go for a ride on her biker.”

“Britta!”I hissed.Thank God there wasn’t anyone within earshot.

“I’ll be there in twenty.That soon enough?”Tyson replied.

“Perfect,” Britta said sweetly, then ended the call.She wiggled her fingers at me.“Now go run upstairs to shower and get dressed.”

“This is crazy,” I muttered.

“You are crazy,” she corrected.“Goodbye, Tempi.Enjoy your biker.”

She turned and winked at me over her shoulder.

I threw my hands in the air but headed upstairs anyway.There was no sense in arguing with Britta when she got like this.

I opened the door to my apartment, kicked it shut behind me, and headed straight for the bathroom to turn on the shower.Steam began to fog the mirror almost instantly.

I went to my closet and surveyed the situation.It was basically a collection of jeans

and T-shirts. I had two button-down blouses, but the last time I wore one was to my dad's funeral. That was not the energy I wanted tonight.

Comfort. That was key.

I grabbed my Def Leppard shirt and my favorite pair of jeans. Moving to my dresser, I opened the top drawer. I could get a little racy with my underwear, though. The odds of Twister seeing them were slim, but hey, a girl could dream.

I grabbed the teal and black lace set, then headed to the bathroom.

I peeled off my clothes and stepped into the shower. It was an everything shower, deep wash, exfoliate, shave...everywhere. I didn't think anything was going to happen with Twister, but it never hurt to be prepared.

After scrubbing, shaving, and rinsing off twice, I stepped out and wrapped myself in a towel. I blow-dried my hair, skipped makeup—I didn't wear it anyway—and got dressed. Once my shoes were on, I headed back downstairs.

Tyson was sitting at the bar with a burger and a beer.

"You clean up good, boss," he called as he popped a fry in his mouth.

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I rolled my eyes and grabbed my wallet from under the bar. "I don't know how long I'll be. Make sure you call me if you need me."

Britta waved me off. "I am not going to need you. The whole Badger football team could walk in the door, and I would still not call you."

I laughed. "Yeah, because you'd be too busy to do anything but sling beers and cheese curds."

She blew me a kiss and turned back to Tyson.

I stepped outside and paused, looking up at the sky. It was just after eight, and the sun was still hanging on. I took a deep breath and started walking down the street.

Never in a million years did I think this is what I'd be doing on a Thursday night.

"You have lost your mind, Tempi," I muttered.

This was nuts. I should go back to the bar. Who did I think I was, just waltzing into the Saint's Outlaws clubhouse?

I spotted two guys standing outside and stopped in my tracks.

"I can't do this," I whispered.

I was just about to turn around when I heard it.

“Tempi!”

Of course. Of course he would walk out right when I was ready to bolt.

He nodded to the guy next to him and made his way toward me. I didn't move.

Twister looked like sin on two legs in his leather cut, white shirt stretched over his chest, jeans riding low on his hips, black motorcycle boots...drop-dead gorgeous didn't even cut it.

His eyes roamed over me, and I felt the heat crawl up my neck.

“Where you headed, doll?” he asked and stopped just in front of me.

I opened my mouth but nothing came out. I was stuck in place.

He didn't wait for an answer. “Why don't you come on in and check out the clubhouse?”

“Oh, uh, well, sure,” I said.

He grabbed my hand and led me forward. The outside of the building still looked mostly the same, but the inside...

He opened the door and pulled me in.

“Welcome to the Saint's Outlaws, doll.”

The place was nearly finished. Exposed brick walls, polished floors, long wooden bar. A few guys sat at tables, nodding greetings. One guy gave me a two-finger salute from the pool table.

We walked through the common room, and Twister gave me the tour. Upstairs, he pointed to the bedrooms that still needed some work done, but they were totally livable. Downstairs, he showed me the rooms they were working on and something he called Church.

We ended up back at the bar. A guy with “Prospect” on his cut placed a beer in front of Twister.

“What can I get you?” the prospect asked.

“Uh, I’ll just have a Coke. Not really much of a drinker.”

He nodded.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

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He glanced at Twister, who gave a small nod.

“Cord, ma’am.”

“Nice to meet you, Cord.”

He nodded again and went to pour my soda.

“You own a bar, but you’re not a drinker?” Twister asked.

Cord set my soda in front of me and then disappeared.

I took a sip and shrugged. “Happens when you’re around something all the time. Britta barely eats burgers anymore after making them constantly.”

“Yeah, I guess that makes sense, doll.”

“So, when are you guys going to be done with the renovations?” I asked.

Twister grunted. “We’ve been a bit derailed. Had some city inspector drop in today and drop a bunch of violations on us this morning.”

My jaw dropped. “Are you serious?”

Twister nodded. “As a fucking heart attack, doll. Guy was so full of shit. He didn’t even come in to look around. Said there were some public complaints against us and then said the permits we applied for don’t apply to the work we are doing.”

“Did he tell you what permit you needed?”

He shook his head. “No, and it wouldn’t really fucking matter because I didn’t apply for any fucking permits. This is our home that we’re fixing up. Pretty sure building a few walls, slapping some paint on them, and putting in new floors doesn’t need permits with the fucking city.”

“Maybe it’s all a technicality,” I said. “I’ve dealt with the city before, and it was all pretty easy. I had to change the ownership of the bar into my name, and it was totally painless. I’m sure this is all just a misunderstanding.”

Twister sipped my beer. “Gramps is looking into it. He lives for paperwork and numbers. We’ll get it figured out.”

I set my drink down. “You know what I think you need?”

“What do I need, doll?” His eyes connected with mine, and my heart fluttered.

I cleared my throat and took a quick sip of my Coke. “Have you had a chance to explore Madison more?”

He shook his head. “Not much time. Clubhouse and Saints’ Smash has kept us busy. And now with this permit violation shit...”

“The what?”

“Saints’ Smash,” he said with a grin. “That’s what we’re calling it.”

I laughed. “That’s actually kind of brilliant.”

I drained my Coke. “It seems like you have a bit of time now. How about a guided

tour?”

He raised a brow. “From you?”

I smiled. “Why not?”

Chapter Sixteen

Twister

She smelled like vanilla and wind.

Tempi's arms were wrapped tight around my middle, and her cheek rested between my shoulder blades. The city blurred around us as we rumbled down State Street. The buildings on either side were glowing with that soft, sleepy amber from streetlamps and neon signs.

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I'd given her my helmet, even though she'd protested, and now her hands were clutched in the front of my cut like her life depended on it. Felt good. Natural. Like she belonged there.

She hadn't said much since we pulled away from the clubhouse, but she pointed things out with little taps to my shoulder and soft yells over the roar of the engine.

"That building there used to be a theater. Closed down last year."

"That bakery? Best apple fritters in Madison."

"Avoid that alley. Smells like puke and regret."

I laughed more than I thought I would. The shit day I'd had started to bleed away with every block we passed. Every breath of hers against my back. Every time her thighs squeezed tighter when I hit a bump.

We looped around Capitol Square. The gold dome gleamed like a crown in the twilight. She pointed out more spots: a coffee shop with crooked tables, a record store with a basement bar, and the co-op she volunteered at when she was nineteen.

She knew this city like the back of her hand. And I was learning it through her.

We turned onto East Washington, and the air changed. A little grittier, a little more industrial. The buildings grew boxier. Less fancy architecture, more concrete and glass.

I pulled into the cracked lot in front of the warehouse we'd locked down for Saints' Smash. Killed the engine. Her arms lingered around me.

"You okay, doll?" I asked.

She didn't let go.

"Just...that was my first ride," she said, her voice muffled against my back.

I twisted in the seat and looked at her. "You telling me I popped your bike cherry?"

She laughed with her cheeks pink. "You're such a guy."

"Damn right." I reached behind and gave her thigh a squeeze. "And you held on real good. Natural, even."

"I didn't have a choice," she teased. "You drive like you're running from the law."

"Nah. That's Magnum's job. I'm the careful one."

She rolled her eyes and finally slid off the bike. I followed and planted both feet on the pavement. She looked up at the dark warehouse with her arms folded over her chest.

"This is where it's gonna be?" she asked.

I nodded. "Saints' Smash. Fully operational in six months if the permit gods don't come after this place next."

She turned to me. "That really has to be a misunderstanding."

I sighed and ran a hand down my face. “Had an inspector and two cops show up today. I don’t really know how that can be a misunderstanding. Something tells me we pissed off someone we shouldn’t, or it’s Nick and Frank.”

She frowned. “That sounds like complete and total BS. Maybe they had the wrong building,” she tried to reason.

“Our address is right on the paper, doll.” I sighed and cracked my neck. “But we’ll take care of it.”

She nodded and rubbed her arms when her body shivered just a little. The wind had picked up.

“Cold?” I asked.

“A little. I was good on the bike, being next to you.” Her cheeks turned red, and she looked back at the warehouse. “This Wisconsin weather can change on a dime. I should be used to it after all these years.”

I walked to my saddlebag, popped it open, and pulled out the zip-up sweatshirt I kept stashed for longer rides. Black. Worn. Smelled like exhaust and leather. “Here.”

She took it and tugged it on. The sleeves were long on her arms, and she zipped it halfway up. She wrapped her arms around herself and tugged it tight.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

I stepped closer. “Better?”

“I’ll live,” she said, though a shiver racked through her.

I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her into my chest. She didn’t resist. In fact, she sank right in. Fit against me like a damn puzzle piece.

Her head rested against my chest. My chin dropped to the top of her head.

“What are we doing, Twister?” she asked softly.

I tilted my head and pretended not to understand what she was really asking. “Trying to keep you warm, doll.”

She pulled back just enough to look up at me. Her eyes caught the moonlight and held it. “No, I mean us. What is this? Part of me thinks you like me, but then there’s another part that thinks this is just...”

“Just what?”

Her voice dropped. “A game.”

My jaw tightened. I slipped a hand under her chin and tilted her face up. “It’s not a game. I do like you. Hell, Tempi, I think about you way more than I should.”

She blinked. “You sure?”

I nodded slowly. “You completely blindsided me. I came to Madison with one goal: set up the Saints. Handle business. You? You weren’t even on the radar. But now...”

“Now?”

“Now I can’t stop thinking about you.”

Her lips parted. Her breath hitched.

I leaned down, and she rose up on her toes.

The kiss hit like a fuse lit.

Soft. Then sharp. Hot. Wild.

Her fingers gripped my cut and yanked me closer. My hands slipped under her shirt, skimming her skin until I found the lacy edge of her bra. I cupped her breast, and she gasped as her hips pressed into mine.

“Fuck,” I groaned against her mouth.

She moaned and clung tighter.

We broke apart, panting.

Her eyes met mine, dark with need.

“Goddammit, Temp, you can’t look at me like that. Not here.”

She smirked and kissed me again, this time slower.Deep.Thorough.

“Yeah,” I muttered when we finally stopped.“That totally makes up for the shit day I had.”

She giggled and brushed her nose against mine.“Glad to be of service.”

I tugged her into another hug.Tight.Steadying.

“I should get you home, doll,” I murmured.

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“I should get back to the bar to help Britta,” she sighed. “Her brother came over to give her a hand, but he thinks that he’s just hired muscle rather than actually helping her sling drinks.”

“Seems like he has his priorities straight.”

“Men,” she muttered. “Take me back to the Badger’s Den, Twister. It’s like I’m Cinderella, and the bar is my pumpkin.” She stepped back. “Or maybe your bike is the pumpkin.” She laughed. “Either way, I should get back.”

“Your chariot awaits, doll.” I helped her onto the bike and got on in front of her.

The ride back through Madison was quieter. The bars were closing. The streets were deserted, but she still clung to me like she didn’t want to let go.

Didn’t help that I didn’t want her to let go either.

The ride ended too soon, and we were back near her bar.

I parked at the curb and left the engine idling.

She slid off and turned to me. I went to get off too, but she stopped me with a hand on my chest.

“I’m going to need you to stay on your bike,” she said.

I cocked my head. “Oh yeah?”

She stepped closer, and I put a hand on her waist. “You get off that bike, and I won’t be able to keep my hands off you. And as much as I think I’d like being an exhibitionist with letting you have your way with me right here or in the bar, I don’t think I will.”

I chuckled. “Am I supposed to know what the hell you’re talking about?”

She grinned and pressed a kiss to my lips. “I’m rambling. See you later?”

I cupped her cheek. “You’ll see me tomorrow, doll. Promise.”

She nodded, and her eyes were soft. “Later.”

She stepped into the bar, and the second the door shut, I heard a cheer go up inside.

I shook my head, chuckled, and revved the bike.

As I pulled away from the curb, one thought echoed loud and clear: I was totally and completely gone.

And I didn’t hate it.

Chapter Seventeen

Twister

Friday was supposed to be smooth.

We had the contractors in early at the warehouse working on demolition, Swift and Wheels doing inventory for the rage room, and I was getting ready to ride out and pick up a custom Saint’s Outlaws neon sign we ordered for the front entrance.

Everything was lining up.

Until the brick flew through the goddamn window of the clubhouse.

I heard the crash before I saw the glass. Loud. Violent. Like a damn gunshot inside the clubhouse.

“Motherf—” I bolted from the office with my boots slamming against the half-finished hardwood floor.

“Prez!” Rev yelled from across the room.

Glass sparkled across the wood floors, and a jagged hole was punched through the front window. A brick sat in the middle of the common room like it belonged there.

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It didn't.

The note tied to it made that crystal clear.

Wheels yanked the paper off, and his fingers curled tight. He read it, then looked at me, jaw clenched.

"You better read this."

I snatched the note. Leave. Or you'll regret it.

No signature. No bullshit. Just that.

"Anyone see anything?" I barked and scanned the clubhouse. Sully and Chewy were checking the front entrance. Swift was already pulling up the surveillance feed on his phone.

"Black car," Gramps said, pointing at the grainy footage over Swift's shoulder. "No plates. Couldn't see a face."

"Cowards," I muttered, crumpled the note, and tossed it on the table.

"What do you want to do?" Swift asked.

"Lock the place down." I ran a hand over my jaw. "Nobody comes in or out unless I clear it."

“And what about the new sign?”Wheels asked.“We still picking it up?”

“No,” I said.“Fuck the sign.We’ve got bigger problems now.”

The tension in the air was thick, like a thunderstorm had rolled through the building.The rest of the guys were quiet.Alert.Every single one of them waiting for the next move.

“Push,” I called.“Do a sweep around the block.Take Rev with you.Look for tire marks.Maybe someone saw who did this.”

“On it,” Push nodded, and was already moving.

“Swift, you’re with me.We’re going to the Den.”

Swift arched a brow.“You think they’re gonna target the bar next?”

“I don’t know,” I said honestly.“But Tempi’s there.And I’m not taking any chances.”

The Badger Den was steady when we rolled in.Mid-afternoon crowd.A few couples, a pair of college girls sharing loaded fries, and some guy reading the paper like it was 1985.

But all I saw was her.

Tempi was behind the bar with her hair down today.It curled around her shoulders, wild and soft.She wore a red tee tied at the waist and ripped jeans.It was like her curves were poured into every inch of them.

My body reacted before my brain caught up.

“Prez,” Swift said under his breath. “You good? You’re staring at her like she’s your next breath.”

I didn’t bother denying it. “Nothing is going to happen to her,” I said more to myself than to Swift.

We headed to the bar.

Tempi looked up and smiled at Swift with that easy one she gave to customers, until her eyes landed on me. Then it shifted. Softened. Warmed.

“Hey,” she said and set napkins in front of Swift and me. “Didn’t expect you in the middle of the day.”

“Plans changed.”

She nodded and reached for a towel to wipe down the bar. “Everything okay?”

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I leaned in slightly. “We had a visitor this morning.”

Her hand paused mid-wipe. “Visitor? The inspector again?”

I shook my head. “Worse. Someone threw a brick through the front window.”

Her brows shot up. “What the hell?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Note attached told us to leave. Or else.”

“Jesus, Twister,” she gasped. “This is getting crazy. What on earth is going on?”

I didn’t want to scare her. But I wasn’t going to lie either.

“We’re working on figuring it out, doll. I just wanted to make sure you are safe here,” I said softly.

She blinked. “You’re asking if I’m safe? You’re the one getting bricks chucked through your windows.”

“You run the bar alone half the time,” I pointed out, “and the shit happening to us is just down the street.” There was a tiny piece of me that hoped this was just some dumb kids playing a prank on us. I knew it wasn’t, but it would be a hell of a lot better if it were.

“I’ve got Britta.”

I gave her a look.

“Okay, fine,” she said. “I’ve got Britta and Tyson now. I’ll call him to see if he’s up for being security for a few days.”

“That’s better.”

She leaned closer, and her voice dropped. “Is this about someone not wanting you here?”

“Looks that way, but we don’t know much.” I wished I knew a hell of a lot more than we did. We were in the fucking dark on pretty much everything.

“Well, they’re gonna be real disappointed,” she said. “Because I don’t see you packing up anytime soon, right?”

My grin was automatic. “Damn right.”

Swift cleared his throat beside me. “I’ll give you two a minute. Go do something somewhere else,” he muttered. Swift and I had been friends for years, and this was the first time I had ever shown interest in a woman for more than just a one-night thrill.

Tempi watched him walk away, then turned back to me. “You’re not just here because of the brick, are you?”

“No,” I admitted. “I wanted to see you. Make sure you were safe.”

Her cheeks pinked, but she didn’t look away. “I should have had you come in last night, right?”

“I would not have said no, doll.”

She tilted her head, the teasing edge back in her voice. “You’re here now, right?”

“Yeah, Tempi, I’m here.” I lowered my voice more. “It’s taking everything inside of me to not haul you over this bar and have my way with you.”

That flustered her. She ducked her head, then turned and grabbed a soda from behind the bar.

“I was thinking about...” she trailed off. She popped the cap and handed it over.

“Thinking about what, doll?” I asked.

“About kissing you.”

“Me too. All the fucking time,” I confessed.

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Her eyes met mine. “You planning on doing it again?”

“If you let me.”

Her smile turned wicked. “Maybe later.”

I knew I had shit to deal with back at the clubhouse, but fuck if I didn’t want to deal with any of it. “Give me a couple of hours, and I’ll be back, yeah?”

“I’ll be here, handsome.”

I couldn’t resist her. I couldn’t walk out of here without tasting her again. I leaned forward, and my lips brushed against hers. I didn’t care who saw. Tempi was the only thing I was thinking about.

She gasped and leaned into me. “Are you sure you need to leave?” she whispered.

I smiled against her lips. “Yes, but I’ll be back.” I pulled back and took a twenty out of my pocket. I dropped it on the bar and looked over at where Swift had wandered. His back was to me, and he was pretty much just staring at the wall. I let out a whistle to get his attention, and he turned to me.

“You done?” he called.

I chuckled and headed toward the door. “I’ll be back, Tempi,” I called.

The walk back to the clubhouse was silent, even though I could tell that Swift wanted

to say something. We got to the front door and I turned to him. "Say it," I said.

He held up his hands. "I ain't got nothing to say."

"Spit it out," I growled.

He looked at me. "You think now is the best time for this?"

"What?"

"Hooking up with some chick when we've got a shit storm headed our way?"

That irritated me. "She's not some chick," I growled. "And we can handle whatever shit comes our way. It doesn't matter if I'm with Tempi or someone else. I am focused on the club."

Swift nodded. "Well, then, good. You're the prez, and you know what you're doing. Carry on." He held up a finger. "Though I will say, since this is your stance on the whole Tempi thing, don't fuck it up."

"First you didn't think it was a good idea for me to be with Tempi, and now you're telling me not to fuck it up?" I laughed.

Swift shrugged. "I was never against you being with Tempi, I just think the timing sucks."

I couldn't disagree with that. "I can handle Tempi while figuring out who is targeting us."

Swift nodded. "Good. See if you can get me her friend's phone number then."

“Britta?” I asked.

Swift nodded. “If that’s her name.”

I shook my head. “I’ll see what I can do.”

We walked into the clubhouse and soon discovered whoever had thrown the brick was like a damn ghost.

I wasn’t surprised when Push and Rev told me that it seemed like everyone had gone temporarily blind. Everyone on the block had said they didn’t see a thing.

Bullshit.

We were so far behind on knowing who was behind this shit, and none of us knew how to get ahead.

A couple hours passed with nothing new to report. No strange cars, no shady figures, no more bricks. But none of us relaxed.

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I headed back to the Den and sat in my usual spot. I had a constant view of Tempi, and I could see who came and went out of the bar.

Britta came out of the kitchen and shot me a pointed look. "You sticking around for the rest of the night, biker boy?"

Tempi snorted.

I leaned against the bar. "That a problem?"

Britta shrugged. "Only if you distract my boss too much."

Tempi rolled her eyes and threw a bar rag at her. "Go do inventory."

Britta saluted with two fingers and sauntered off.

Tempi glanced at me. "She's not wrong."

"About what?"

"You being a distraction."

"I can behave," I said.

"I don't want you to," she confessed and then sauntered down to the other end of the bar. She was teasing me, and damn if I didn't fucking love it.

Later that night, the Den emptied out again, but I didn't leave. Britta was quick to take out the trash, and then she was out the door.

Tempi locked the doors, flipped the CLOSED sign, and turned off the main lights. A soft hum of music played from the jukebox.

I was perched on one of the stools and watched her move closer to me.

"You staying the night?" she asked casually.

"I wasn't planning to," I said. "But if you're offering..."

She turned toward me. "You gonna help clean if you stay?"

"Absolutely not."

She laughed. "At least you're honest."

I stood and gathered her in my arms. "Thought maybe we could do something else."

"Like what?"

"Like this."

I kissed her again.

And this time, she kissed me back like she'd been waiting for it all day.

I hooked my hands around her waist and lifted her onto the bar like she weighed nothing.

She let out a soft gasp, and her legs parted instinctively to cradle my hips as I stepped between them.

Her eyes locked on mine with her pupils blown wide, and her lips slightly parted. I could feel the electricity between us, crackling like a live wire, damn near humming under my skin.

“You sure about this?” I murmured and brushed my knuckles along her cheek.

She grabbed the collar of my cut and tugged me closer. “I wouldn’t have let you get this far if I wasn’t.”

That was all I needed.

I crashed my mouth to hers and swallowed her moan as her hands threaded into my hair, nails scratching lightly against my scalp. I kissed her hard and deep, letting her taste how badly I wanted her, allowing her feel it in every press of my mouth and twist of my tongue.

Her legs wrapped around my waist. I pulled her tight against me and ground up into her so she could feel what she was doing to me. She whimpered against my mouth, and that little sound nearly unraveled me.

“Fuck, doll,” I growled as my lips moved to her jaw, then lower to her neck. I bit down gently, right at the curve where neck met shoulder, and her body arched into mine.

“Twister...” she breathed, and I could barely handle how sexy my name sounded coming from her lips like that.

I peeled her shirt off with a quick yank, revealing a black lace bra that looked like it was made to be torn off. I didn’t, yet. I wanted to savor this. Her. Every damn inch.

“You’re beautiful,” I said roughly as my eyes roamed over her flushed skin.

Her cheeks flamed. “You’re just saying that because I’m half-naked on the bar.”

“I’m saying it because it’s the truth.” I dipped my head and kissed her collarbone, then lower as my tongue traced a path between the curve of her breasts. “And I’ve wanted

to do this since the second I walked into your bar.”

Her fingers gripped my cut tighter as I popped open the button of her jeans and slid the zipper down. She lifted her hips for me without hesitation, and I worked her jeans down just enough to slide my fingers beneath her panties.

Soaked.

She was already soaked for me.

“Fuck, Tempi,” I rasped and dragged my fingers through her heat. “You’re killin’ me.”

“Then do something about it,” she panted.

I did.

Two fingers slid inside her, and my thumb circled her clit as her head dropped back. A low, needy moan spilled from her throat. She rode my hand with a desperation that was all instinct, no hesitation. I watched her fall apart, every flutter of her lashes and hitch in her breath making my cock ache behind my zipper.

“You’re gonna come for me right here, doll,” I said against her neck. “Right on my fingers. I want to feel it.”

“Twister, oh,” she cried out and clenched around me. Her body shuddered as she came. Her thighs trembled, and I kept working her through it until she was breathless and sagging against me. She looped her arms around my shoulders and sighed deeply. “My god,” she whispered.

I kissed her again, slower now. Deeper. One hand cradled the back of her head while

the other gripped her ass.

“Need you,” she whispered against my lips. “Now.”

I undid my jeans with one hand and shoved them low enough to free my cock. I hissed when the cool air hit me. I didn't need to look to see the hunger in her eyes. I could feel it in the way her hands slid down my chest and her legs tightened around my hips again.

I lined myself up and dragged the tip through her folds, teasing her. Her whole body arched forward and was desperate for more.

“Don't tease,” she gasped.

I pushed inside her in one long, slow stroke.

We both moaned.

She was tight. Hot. Fucking perfect. Her fingers dug into my shoulders as I held her steady and drove into her again, harder this time. The bar creaked beneath us, and her back arched with every thrust.

“God, you feel good,” I groaned, and my forehead pressed to hers. “So fucking good, Tempi.”

She clung to me and rode every thrust like she couldn't get close enough. Her thighs gripped my sides. Her lips brushed mine, again and again, broken little kisses between gasps and moans.

“Harder,” she whispered. “Don't hold back.”

I gritted my teeth and obeyed.

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My pace turned brutal as my hips snapped into hers. The slap of skin echoed in the empty bar. Her cries spurred me on, low, breathless, and desperate. She met every thrust like she was starving for it, and like this was the only thing keeping her tethered to earth.

I slipped a hand between us and found her clit again, circling it in time with my thrusts. Her entire body clenched around me, and I knew she was close.

“That’s it, doll,” I growled. “Come for me again.”

She broke.

Her scream was muffled against my mouth as she shattered for the second time. Her body spasming around me. I followed her over the edge with a roar and emptied into her with a final thrust as my entire body shook from the release.

We collapsed together, panting, sweat-slicked, and hearts pounding.

She tucked her face into my neck. “Well...that was definitely not how I expected the night to end.”

I let out a low laugh, my arms still wrapped around her. “Me either. But I’m not complaining.”

She kissed my throat, soft and sweet. “Neither am I.”

I held her there, still buried inside her.

Fuck, that was incredible.

Chapter Eighteen

Tempi

I should've been tired.

After everything that went down last night, my body should've felt like it'd been through the wringer. But instead? I felt... light. The kind of light that came from doing something wild and not regretting a single second of it.

Twister had been a distraction. A big one. One with strong hands and a mouth that made me forget my own name.

But he was also exactly what I needed.

I padded through the bar in my slippers, with the morning light slanting through the front windows and catching the dust motes in the air. Halestorm was blaring from the jukebox, with the volume turned up just loud enough to make it feel like the world couldn't touch me in here. Not today.

I danced behind the bar, rag in hand, wiped down the counters, and hummed along to I Miss the Misery. My hips swayed with the music, and I didn't care if anyone walked in and saw me. This was my space. My bar. My rules.

And right now, my rule was to dance like no one's watching and revel in knowing I had the hottest night of my life less than six hours ago.

I spun in place, tossed a towel onto my shoulder, and grabbed a stack of clean glasses. I lined them up with more precision than necessary, but my brain was buzzing

too much to care. I couldn't stop replaying everything. His hands. His mouth. The way he'd said my name like it was something precious.

A creak echoed from the stairs.

I froze mid-dance move, and my eyes darted to the doorway leading to the apartment upstairs.

Heavy footsteps.

A second later, Twister appeared, dressed and shrugging into his cut like some kind of outlaw god just descending into my little world.

My heart stuttered.

He looked like sin and salvation all at once.

"Woke up alone," he said, his voice still rough from sleep.

I turned back to the bar with a smirk as I wiped the counter. "I would've been able to lay in bed with you if someone would've cleaned up the bar last night."

He chuckled, and it rumbled low in his chest. The sound slid over my skin like a warm palm. "You saying I was a distraction, doll?"

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“Massive one,” I teased.

He rounded the bar and didn’t stop until he was right in front of me. His arms looped around my waist, and he pulled me close.

“I regret nothing,” he whispered.

And then his mouth was on mine.

God, he kissed like he meant it. Like he didn’t care if the sun rose or the world ended, as long as I kept kissing him back.

I did.

My arms slid around his neck, and his hands gripped my hips. We pressed against each other. Our tongues tangled, and our hearts raced. My back hit the bar, and he leaned into me, his mouth devouring mine until I had no thoughts left. Just heat.

We pulled back, breathless.

“Now that,” he murmured as he brushed his nose against mine, “is the kind of good morning I was looking for.”

I laughed, and my breath was shaky. “I still need to finish cleaning up.”

He pressed one last kiss to my lips. “Then I’ll leave you to it, doll. I need to get back to the clubhouse and figure some things out.”

I sobered. “Like the brick flying through your window?”

His jaw tightened. “Yeah,” he said. “I’m sure it’s Nick and Frank being assholes. We’re gonna pay them a visit.”

I frowned. “I just don’t see them doing that. It feels... off.”

He studied me. “You really think you know those two tools?”

I shrugged. “I mean, no, we’re not doing shots and spilling secrets, but I wouldn’t peg them for throwing bricks through windows either.”

He scoffed. “I hope for your sake we find out Nick and Frank aren’t behind it.”

I reached up and cupped his cheek. I pressed a kiss to his lips. “Me too.” I knew that Twister would figure out whoever was behind it and take care of it.

He pulled his phone from his pocket and tapped at the screen. “Give me your number, doll. I’ll call you later.”

I rattled it off, and he punched it in. “Later, doll.”

Then he walked toward the front door but stopped when something on the ground caught his eye. He bent down and picked it up. “You dropped this?”

I wiped my hands on the towel and tilted my head. “Um, no. I would’ve seen it when I swept earlier.”

He turned it over in his hands. “Then what the hell is this?”

My stomach flipped. I walked around the bar and joined him at the door. “Open it.” It

wasn't anything that was mine.

He didn't hesitate; he tore the envelope open and pulled out a ripped piece of paper.

His jaw clenched as he read aloud. "You made your choice. Ready for the consequences?"

My blood went cold. "Oh my god," I whispered.

I snatched the note from him and read it again.

"What choice did I make?" I breathed, as my fingers trembled slightly.

His voice was rough. "Me, doll."

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He took the paper from my hand and shoved it into his cut's inner pocket. Then he was dialing again. He stepped toward the windows, his back rigid. "Send two guys to the Den. Now." He ended the call without another word.

"What was that about?" I asked.

Twister turned to me and pulled me into his arms. I let him. I was confused and scared, and being with Twister was the only thing that made sense.

His arms wrapped around me tight, like he was trying to shield me from the world.

"Until we figure out what this note means, doll, you're not going to be alone. If I can't be with you, one of my guys will."

I rolled my eyes, though my chest felt heavy. "I think you're overreacting a little. Nothing's going to happen to me."

He looked down at me, serious as hell. "Yeah? I thought the same thing before our window got smashed."

I bit my lip.

He had a point. And while my gut said this was just someone being a jackass, I couldn't shake the ice that had crept into my veins when I read that note. "Where are you going if two of your guys are headed down here?"

He kissed me softly. "To find out who sent the damn thing."

A knock rattled the door.

Twister turned and pulled it open. Swift and Gramps were standing there, both of them scowling.

“What the fuck is going on?” Swift asked as they stepped inside.

Twister nodded for them to follow him toward the bar. He filled them in, fast and clipped, about the note and what it said.

Gramps’ face darkened. Swift’s jaw worked like he was grinding his molars to dust.

“I’m taking Wheels, Hodge, and Podge with me,” Twister said. “We’re gonna go have a nice little chat with Nick and Frank.”

I blinked. Podge? Hodge?

I filed the names away for later. They sounded like cartoon characters, not bikers.

“Gramps is staying,” Twister added. “Swift, you too.”

Gramps nodded and slid onto a barstool like he’d done it a thousand times before.

“I don’t want her alone, not for a second,” Twister said.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out. My head was swimming. This was all too much, too fast.

Twister turned back to me and grabbed my hand, pulling me close. “I’ll be back as soon as I can be, doll. Swift and Gramps will make sure nothing happens to you.”

I nodded slowly. “Um... okay. But who’s going to make sure you’re okay?”

That earned me a chuckle from both Swift and Gramps.

“That’s why he’s taking Hodge and Podge with him, sweetheart,” Swift said. “Nothing can get past those two hardasses.”

“They’ve got that twin telepathy shit,” Gramps added.

My eyes widened. “They’re brothers?”

Twister nodded. “Yeah. Swift and Gramps can give you the rundown on everyone while I’m gone. That’ll be your entertainment.”

I wasn’t sure I could handle entertainment right now. My brain felt like it had been dropped in a blender.

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I looked up at Twister.

This man I hadn't known that long, and yet...

"Promise you'll be careful?" I asked softly.

He nodded, pressed one last kiss to my lips, then whispered, "I'll come back to you."

Then he was gone; the door clicked shut behind him.

The silence that followed felt deafening.

Gramps slid onto a barstool and leaned on the bar. "What do you need to know, sweetheart?"

I blinked.

Guess it was time to hear some stories.

My eyes drifted to the front door.

And the empty space Twister had just left behind.

"We might as well start with you," I said, leaning on the bar with a smirk. "Why do they call you Gramps?"

Gramps tilted his head with an amused glint in his eye, sharpening.

“You good if I grab a drink?” Swift cut in as he stepped behind the bar like he’d done it a hundred times before.

I waved him off casually. “Help yourself.”

It was weird sitting on this side of the bar with someone else behind it. I was used to running the show, not lounging like a customer. Swift moved with ease, like he’d done this before. He scanned the fridge behind the bar.

“Snacks?” he asked and grinned like a kid who knew he was pushing his luck.

I rolled my eyes but couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled out. “There should be some cheese curds and beef sticks in there. Help yourself.”

He yanked the fridge open, rummaged through cans and condiment tubs before pulling out two packages and holding them up like treasure.

Gramps chuckled beside me. “I’m old, sweetheart. Gramps is pretty self-explanatory, isn’t it?”

I gave him a once-over and raised an eyebrow. “You can’t be more than fifty.”

Gramps barked out a laugh, low and rough like gravel. “I’ll let you keep thinking that.”

Swift dropped the beef sticks and cheese curds onto the bar with a thud and ripped open the packaging. I reached in and grabbed a cheese curd and tossed it in my mouth. Salt and a hit of nostalgia filled my senses.

“What about you?” I asked and pointed at Swift with a beef stick.

He shrugged like it wasn't a big deal. "I'm just fucking fast, Temp. Whether it's on my bike, in a car, or even on fucking foot."

"Well, that makes sense." I snorted. "These two names I can wrap my head around," I muttered. "What are some of the other guys'?"

Swift leaned an elbow on the bar, chewing thoughtfully. "Rev is the chaplain. Was a reverend before he took up the club."

My jaw actually dropped a little. "Really?"

Gramps let out another chuckle. "Yeah, sweetheart. Though that's about all any of us know."

A reverend turned outlaw biker? That was a story I didn't expect. My brain immediately started pulling possible reasons: scandal, loss of faith, maybe revenge. Something dark had to be buried in there.

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Swift grinned at my expression. "I can see you trying to figure him out, Tempi, and I doubt you'll ever get the answer. We've been trying a while."

I shook my head slowly, still chewing, still thinking. "That's wild."

Gramps grabbed a beef stick and leaned back on the stool like we were just shooting the shit on a lazy afternoon. "The club's full of stories like that."

It hit me then just how much I didn't know about these guys. They moved like a unit, tight and quiet, but there were layers under all that leather and ink. And I was only starting to scratch the surface.

"How did you guys all get to be... here?" I asked, motioning around the bar, the city, everything.

Gramps traded a glance with Swift, then shrugged.

"We were all nomads for the Saint's Outlaws," Swift said, and leaned his hip against the bar. "Didn't have a home charter, but we were patched in. Rode where the club needed us. Twister and I've known each other since we were kids and always stuck together. I knew he wanted to start his own chapter someday. Shit lined up right, and Madison was it."

I leaned in, hanging on the pieces of their story he handed me.

"The rest of the guys? We knew 'em from the road. Years of riding, running jobs, helping out other chapters. Word got out that Twister was settling down, planting

roots, and one by one, they called in and asked where to show up.”

Gramps smiled faintly. “We figured out the ranks, recruited a couple of prospects, and hauled our asses here once the ink dried on the building papers.”

I blinked. “Wait, you guys bought the Sam James building?”

“That we did,” Gramps said, his tone light, but there was pride there. “Twister did, to be exact.”

I blinked again. Twice. “Wow.”

That place had been sitting empty for years, but the bones were solid, and downtown real estate wasn’t exactly on clearance.

Gramps caught the look on my face and laughed. “You gotta get a better poker face, sweetheart. You’re gonna have to talk to Twister about how he managed that one.”

I smirked. “Am I also going to have to ask him how he got his name?”

Swift didn’t miss a beat. “Yup.”

I popped another cheese curd into my mouth and chewed slowly as I side-eyed the both of them. The list of things I didn’t know about Twister was growing by the second. And so far? Every answer only made me want more.

Maybe I didn’t know him at all yet.

But I was starting to really want to.

Chapter Nineteen

Twister

The roar of my engine cut through the quiet morning like a damn war drum. The streets of Madison were waking up slowly, but I was already fired up. That note shoved under Tempi's door was a warning and a threat. I didn't take kindly to either.

I pulled into the clubhouse lot and parked. Dust kicked up as my boots hit the pavement. Nugget was leaning against the wall outside, smoking a cigarette like he hadn't slept.

"Everything good with Tempi?" he asked and flicked ash to the side.

"She's fine," I replied, my voice low. "Got her watched. Now it's time to handle the ones behind the bullshit."

Nugget nodded. "Hodge and Podge are already inside waiting for you."

I pushed open the heavy clubhouse door and found them seated at the table, chewing on breakfast sandwiches like it was just another day. Hodge wiped his mouth with the back of his hand when he saw me.

"You look like you're ready to set something on fire," he muttered.

"Not yet," I said. "But I plan to get close."

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Podge leaned back in his chair. “We doing this?”

“We’re doing this,” I confirmed. “Grab your cuts. We ride in five.”

They didn’t ask questions. Just got up and followed.

We fired up the bikes and took off. The ride to the bike shop was quick. I was too damn keyed up. Brick through our window. Threat under Tempi’s door. Same fucking message from different messengers.

We parked in front of the bicycle shop with a rumble that shook the sidewalk. The place looked just like last time. Glass front, cheap decal on the door, and a wide-eyed kid behind the counter who looked like he’d just pissed himself when he saw us.

I stepped inside first. Podge followed, and the moment the door clicked shut behind us, he reached up and locked it.

Click.

The kid’s eyes went wide as dinner plates.

“Get your bosses,” I said and leaned across the counter. “Then take the rest of the day off.”

He didn’t argue. Didn’t breathe. Just nodded and scurried into the back room like a rat escaping fire.

Footsteps.Voices.Then Nick and Frank appeared.

This time, they didn't have that cocky edge.No puffed chests or smug smiles.

Just sweat and dread.

“Morning, boys,” I drawled and straightened up.“We need to talk.”

Nick glanced at the locked door, then at Podge and Hodge, then back to me.“Listen... if this is about the—”

“It is,” I cut in.“Exactly about the fucking brick that came through our window.That note Tempi got shoved under her door.Same chicken shit tactics.Same vibe.”

Frank swallowed hard.“We didn't...”

Hodge moved around the counter without a word.Frank and Nick backed up so fast they almost tripped over themselves.

Nick made a break for it, bolting left, aiming for the back room like he was gonna teleport out of this situation.

Hodge was faster.

He grabbed Nick by the back of the shirt and slammed him up against the wall hard enough to rattle the damn drywall.

“Where the fuck you think you're going?”Hodge growled with one arm pressed across Nick's throat.

Podge moved to Frank, who made the smart move of not running.Though it did look

like he was about to piss his pants. Neither of these assholes was as tough as they thought they were.

“I, I, I didn’t—” Nick stammered.

“Start talking,” I said and stepped in closer. “You throw the brick?”

“No!” Nick cried, and his eyes were wild. “We didn’t! I swear, we didn’t want to do any of this!”

Frank was standing frozen near the counter, pale as a ghost.

“Then who the fuck did?” I asked.

Silence.

I stepped forward, placed both hands on the counter, and slammed one flat against the surface. The crack echoed like a gunshot.

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“Tell me who the fuck they are!” I shouted.

Frank flinched. “We-we-we can’t tell you,” he stammered.

“Wrong answer,” I barked. “You’re playing games with the wrong club.”

Nick was trembling. “Please... please, man. We didn’t want to be part of this. We were told to send messages. We didn’t know it would escalate like this.”

“Who. Are. You. Working. For?” I demanded.

Nick squeezed his eyes shut, then blurted, “The Ledger!”

Hodge froze. Podge straightened behind me.

“Please don’t kill me!” Nick whimpered. “We’re not doing this to you. We’re just, just relaying messages. Orders.”

I turned to Podge. “The Ledger?”

He raised a brow. “Whatever the fuck that is.”

I looked back at Nick. “Who is The Ledger?”

“We don’t know!” Nick shouted, still pinned. “No one knows who they are. They’re just... there.”

“Not good enough,” I snapped. “Then how do you know to fuck with us? You just wake up and decide to play messenger boy for the bogeyman?”

“No!” Nick shouted. “We get messages. Emails. Letters. Weird shit. Always anonymous. Started ten years ago. At first we thought it was some prank, you know? But when we ignored them... things happened.”

Frank stepped forward. “Bad things,” he added. “Our store got trashed one night. We lost all our suppliers. Got shut down for fake zoning issues.”

“Yeah,” Nick said quickly. “Health violations that didn’t exist. Fire inspections we didn’t know about. All fines. All pressure. They make it so hard to breathe, man.”

I looked at Hodge. That last part hit a little too close to home.

“So what?” Podge said. “You just get these messages and roll over like puppies?”

“What would you do?” Nick shouted, wild. “We tried fighting back. We stopped responding for a while. Next thing we know, one of our suppliers’ trucks gets hijacked. Full shipment gone. Next week? IRS audit. Just shows up. Fucking scary.”

I stared at him. “You seriously don’t know who’s behind it?”

“No,” Frank said. “They don’t show their faces. Ever. They don’t ask for money. They just... push. Control.”

“And now they want us out of Madison,” I murmured.

Nick nodded frantically. “They told us to scare you off. Said you were stepping into something bigger than you realized.”

“You should just leave,” Frank said quietly. “Find another city. It’s not worth it.”

“Not worth it,” I repeated, eyes narrowing.

They didn’t know a damn thing about me.

“The only city I give a shit about right now is the one where she is,” I said coldly.

Frank frowned. “You mean Tempi from the bar?”

I smiled then, slow and deadly. “If I were you, I’d be real careful about what words you use when talking about her.”

Nick whimpered.

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I stepped forward. “Let me make something crystal clear. You throw another brick, send another note, or even look at Tempi the wrong way... you’re gonna have a hell of a lot more to worry about than this Ledger bullshit. You’ll have me. And you don’t want that.”

They both nodded, eyes wide, and their heads bobbed like fucking bobbleheads.

“We good?” I asked.

“Y-yeah,” Nick said.

Frank mumbled something that sounded like agreement.

I glanced at Hodge and Podge. “Let’s roll.”

Podge unlocked the door. Hodge gave Nick one last glare before letting him go.

We stepped out into the sunlight.

The moment the door shut behind us, I felt like I could breathe again.

“That was fucked,” Podge muttered.

Hodge grunted. “That Ledger shit sounds like a cult.”

“Or worse,” I added. “But we’re not running.”

“No,” Hodge said. “We’re not.”

We straddled our bikes and fired up the engines.

And as we rode back to the clubhouse, one thing became clear:

Whoever this Ledger was, they thought they could scare us.

They were wrong.

They hadn’t met the Saint’s Outlaws yet. Not really.

And I wasn’t going anywhere. Not while Tempi was in this city. Not while someone was threatening her.

Chapter Twenty

Tempi

The bar was quiet.

That kind of quiet that only settled in after hours, when the floors were mopped, the chairs flipped, and the world outside faded into the hum of neon lights and the faint scent of whiskey and citrus cleaner.

I wiped down the bar with slow, lazy strokes and let the last Halestorm song echo from the old jukebox. My hips swayed to the beat, and a smile tugged at the corners of my mouth.

Twister was coming.

Swift and Gramps were out front waiting for him. Once he got here, they would leave.

I'd worked in a daze all day, floating on the memory of his mouth on mine, his hands on my body, the way his voice had turned rough and possessive when he promised he'd come back.

"I'm leaving! The hot bikers said they would walk me home," Britta called from the entryway.

I turned toward her, caught her smirk, and rolled my eyes. "Try to behave," I laughed.

She gave me a knowing wink. "I will as long as you manage to make it to your bedroom this time, babe."

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“Bye, Britta,” I drawled. “And I am never telling you anything ever again!”

“Sure, sure,” she laughed. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The bell jingled, and then it was just me again.

For about three seconds.

Boots sounded against the hardwood floor behind me.

My pulse jumped.

“I didn’t even hear the door open,” I said without turning around.

“I ducked in when Britta walked out,” Twister rumbled behind me.

I turned, and my breath caught. Jesus.

Black jeans, cut thrown on over a white tee that was already clinging to his chest like a second skin. His hair was a little damp, shower-fresh, but his eyes? Wild. Hungry.

He didn’t say anything else. Just walked toward me.

I dropped the rag on the counter and met him halfway.

He stopped a foot away.

I stepped into him.

“You came,” I whispered.

“Told you I would,” he said, low and rough.

My hand slid up his chest. “I kept the bar warm for you.”

He growled, just once, then grabbed my waist and hoisted me onto the bar top.

Twister’s grip on my waist was solid, commanding, but there was a reverence to the way he lifted me, like I wasn’t just some girl he was screwing around with.

Like I was something more.

I landed on the bar top with a soft gasp, and my knees spread to frame him instinctively. My hands clutched at the collar of his cut and yanked him toward me.

“I missed you today,” I whispered.

He didn’t answer with words.

He crashed his mouth to mine, all heat and hunger. His tongue swept into my mouth like he owned it, and he had the right to explore every inch. I arched into him, and my thighs squeezed around his hips. I needed more.

His hands slid up my sides as he dragged the shirt up over my head and tossed it aside. His lips followed the line of my jaw, down the column of my throat, and his hot breath skimmed my skin. I trembled as he found the soft spot beneath my ear and bit, just enough to make me whimper.

“You taste like heaven,” he growled, his voice thick with lust. “And I want all of it.”

My fingers fumbled with the hem of his shirt, desperate to feel him skin to skin. He helped me and pulled it over his head in one fluid motion. His chest was broad and firm, inked and beautiful, and I couldn't help but run my hands over every ridge of muscle.

“God, you're unreal,” I whispered.

His mouth curved against mine. “I could say the same, doll.”

His hands were everywhere. Sliding down my back, gripping my thighs, squeezing my hips like he didn't want to let go. I clutched him just as tightly, and my nails dug into his shoulders.

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The kiss turned urgent.Desperate.Like we were both chasing something we couldn't name.

His fingers slid beneath the waistband of my shorts and tugged them down.I lifted my hips in response and let him peel them away.I was wearing nothing underneath.

He groaned, low and primal, and pressed his forehead to mine.

“You're gonna ruin me, Tempi.”

“Then let me,” I whispered.

His mouth found mine again, even hungrier than before.My body arched into him as his hands roamed, possessive, greedy, familiar.The heat between us built like wildfire, and when he pushed me back gently, he laid me down against the cool surface of the bar, and I shivered from the contrast.The wood was smooth beneath my back, but cold enough to make me gasp when it met my skin.

Thank God for a big bar.

I was never going to look at it the same way again.

Twister stood over me like a storm about to break, his body casting mine in shadow as his hands framed my hips.My legs parted for him instinctively, like my body already knew what came next.

He popped open the button of his jeans, and they dropped to the floor.He kicked off

his boots.

We moved together as I turned to lay horizontally on the bar, and he climbed up between my legs.

“I need you,” I whispered. My voice was ragged and hungry.

His eyes locked on mine, wild and intense. It was like he could see straight through my skin to the ache beneath it. His hand slid up the side of my neck. His fingers were rough with calluses but gentle in the way they cupped my jaw.

“I’m yours,” he said, and God, the way he meant it shattered something in me.

The words hovered between us.

Then he kissed me.

Not soft. Not sweet.

It was claiming and desperate and filled with everything we hadn’t said until now.

His mouth crushed mine, and his tongue swept deep as I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and pulled him closer. His weight settled over me and pressed me into the bar as he devoured my mouth and ground against the apex of my thighs.

He stared down at me like I was something sacred. Like I was his.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” he murmured and trailed kisses down my neck. Between my breasts and over the curve of my ribs. His hands were everywhere, steadying my hips, brushing the inside of my thighs, stroking my skin like he couldn’t get enough.

“Please,” I breathed, lifting my hips to meet him. “Twister—”

He growled low in his throat, and when he pushed into me, it wasn’t rushed. It was deep, slow, and deliberate. Like he needed me to feel every inch of him.

I gasped and clutched his shoulders. My back arched off the bar, and his hand slid behind me to cradle the back of my neck, keeping me close.

His forehead dropped to mine. “You feel like heaven, baby.”

We moved together like we’d been made for this. His thrusts were strong and steady, while his hands gripped my thighs as he drove deeper. All I could hear was his breathing and his voice in my ear, “Tempi...”

God, the way he said it.

Like a prayer. Like a promise.

I was already there, shaking apart beneath him, and my nails dug into his shoulders as pleasure surged. He kissed me through it, swallowed my cries as I came undone, and then chased his own high with a deep, desperate groan that made my whole body clench again.

He collapsed against me, and his weight ground me in the best way.

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We stayed like that, sweaty, breathless, tangled up on the bar as the world slowly came back into focus.

I ran my fingers through his hair and was still stunned by how easily he'd wrecked me in the best way possible.

"I'm never wiping this bar down again," I muttered.

Twister chuckled, low and rough, and lifted his head just enough to look at me. His grin was wicked and satisfied, but his eyes? Still soft. Still mine.

"Good. I plan on doing this again."

"You all right?" he finally asked, voice low and rough from everything we'd just done.

I nodded against him. "Yeah. Better than all right."

He exhaled hard, and the sound rumbled against my cheek. "That's good, doll. I wasn't planning on this," he said and brushed a strand of hair away from my face. "Didn't think I needed anything or anyone. I've been leading the club, setting up shop, focused as hell... and then you." He looked at me like I was something holy.

My throat tightened. "Twister..."

"I'm serious, Tempi. You...you make me want things I thought I buried a long time ago. You calm the storm in my chest, even when I'm pissed off."

A laugh slipped out of me. “Wow. So romantic.”

He grinned. “I’m working on it.”

I shifted and leaned in to kiss him. His hand came up to cradle the back of my head, and he held me to him like he couldn’t get close enough.

When I pulled back, his eyes locked on mine, fierce and unflinching.

“I’m not just here to mess around, Tempi. I don’t do casual. Not with you.”

“Me neither,” I whispered, breathless. “I don’t think I could if I tried.”

He nodded once, then leaned in and brushed his nose against mine, soft and slow. Tender. “You saved me,” he murmured. “You didn’t mean to, probably don’t even realize it. But you did.”

A lump swelled in my throat, thick and aching.

“I didn’t think I believed in that shit,” he went on. “Salvation. Redemption. Whatever you wanna call it. But then you walked into my life, and suddenly...it didn’t seem so far off.”

My chest cracked wide open.

I curled tighter against him, heart thudding, soul bare.

And for the first time in a long time, I didn’t feel like I had to protect it.

Chapter Twenty-One

Twister

The day dragged on like a bad hangover.

After the run-in at the bike shop yesterday, I got back to the clubhouse with my jaw tight and my fists clenched after leaving Tempy with Cord to keep an eye on her. My mind was chewing on the word Ledgerlike it was poison. Whoever they were, they didn't like the Saint's Outlaws being in Madison, and they weren't subtle about it. Bricks through windows. Notes to Tempy. Threats. Shadow shit.

Not my favorite kind of game.

I gave the guys the rundown of every word Frank and Nick stammered out. Swift paced the length of the room like a caged animal, and Wheels was already firing off texts to some of his off-the-grid contacts. Hodge and Podge took turns spitballing theories, some realistic, some straight out of a conspiracy podcast.

Later that day, Swift and Rev came back from checking in with a former alderman with a gambling problem. They pulled me into church.

"You're not gonna like what we heard," Rev said.

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“Try me,” I grunted.

“There’s chatter about The Ledger being tied to old money in Madison,” Swift said. “Like real old. Political dynasties, real estate, university donors, backroom handshakes, kind of shit.”

“So not just small-time thugs?” I asked and arched a brow.

“More like ghost kings,” Rev said. “No faces. No names. Just whispers.”

“Perfect,” I muttered and scrubbed a hand over my face. “Fucking ghost stories.”

“They don’t play fair,” Swift warned. “If they want us out, they’ll dig in. Could be the start of a war.”

“I don’t care who they are,” I said. “We’re not going anywhere.”

They nodded.

“No one is going to push us out of Madison. The club stays here, and this is where Tempi is. We’re fucking cemented here no matter fucking what.”

That was that.

A couple hours passed. The clubhouse was quieter than usual. Most of the guys had either gone to check out State Street or were tucked away in their rooms. I sat at the bar for a while, chain-smoking like I was twenty and angry at the world again.

Then the front door creaked open behind me.

Boots.Soft ones.

Tempi.

I turned around, and there she was, wearing tight jeans, a faded hoodie that had the bar's name across the chest, and a look in her eyes I couldn't quite place.

"Thought I'd come see the biker in his natural habitat," she joked and stepped inside.

I shut the door behind her and locked it."Glad you did."

Her eyes scanned the place."It's quieter than I expected."

"Saturday night," I said."Some of the guys are out, others are asleep or buried in porn and whiskey."

She grinned."Charming."

I nodded toward the stairs."Wanna come up?"

Her answer was to walk ahead of me and start climbing the stairs.

My room was simple: bed, dresser, blackout curtains, a few spare shirts tossed in a chair.I shut the door behind us and leaned against it for a second, and just watched her.She moved around like she belonged there.

"Tempi," I said.

She turned."Yeah?"

“What are you really doing here?”

Her smile faltered just a little. “I think I’m trying to figure out what the hell this is.”

“This?”

“You and me,” she said, and crossed her arms. “I don’t do half in. I don’t do games. And I’ve been trying really hard not to let myself fall into something I don’t understand, but then you go and kiss me like I’m the only woman in the world, and now I can’t think straight.”

I swallowed hard. “It’s not a game. I thought we worked that out?”

“Then what is it?”

I stepped toward her, slow and steady, until there was barely space between us. “It’s me waking up with you in my bed and not wanting you to leave. It’s me going out to punch ghosts and shadows because some asshole threatened you. It’s me not wanting to be anywhere except where you are.”

She blinked fast. “Oh.”

I reached up, tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. “That answer your question?”

Instead of replying, she kissed me.

Not rushed. Not wild. Just slow, warm, and full of meaning.

I shrugged off my cut and pulled my shirt over my head.

We moved to the bed like we’d done it a hundred times. My hands slid under her hoodie, skimmed up her sides, and memorized every curve. Her fingers traced the tattoos on my chest and followed the lines like they told her a story.

Tempi’s hoodie fell away first, revealing the thin tank she wore beneath. My hands slid under it, my thumbs skimmed her waist, and my palms curved along the dip of her waist. She lifted her arms, and I pulled the tank top over her head. I tossed it somewhere behind me. She wasn’t wearing a bra.

I stilled, just for a second, taking her in.

She watched me as her lips parted and her chest rose and fell. There was a vulnerability in her eyes I hadn't seen before. Not fear. Not nerves. Just... openness. Like she'd finally decided to stop fighting whatever this was between us and let it happen.

"Tempi," I said softly and let her name sit between us.

"Yeah?" Her voice was a whisper.

"This isn't just sex."

She nodded slowly. "I know."

I brushed my lips over hers, soft, unhurried. A promise. She melted into me, and her hands moved over my chest, tracing the ink, and her fingertips dragged over old scars, muscle, and years of hardened edges that she seemed to soften with a single touch.

There was no rush. No frenzy. Just a simmering, aching pull between us that got stronger with every kiss, every breath, every look.

When we were both bare, I leaned back on the bed and drew her down with me. Her hair tumbled over her shoulders as she straddled my waist, and her hands rested on my chest. For a moment, we didn't move. Just stared at each other.

"We're in deep," she said quietly and brushed her fingers over my jaw.

I nodded. "Yeah, doll. I think I was the second I saw you."

She bent down and kissed me again. Slow and sensual like she had all the time in the world. I slid my hands over her thighs, up her back, and held her closer. Our bodies

aligned, and the heat coiled between us like a fuse about to spark.

When she finally sank onto me, it wasn't fast or hard. It was deep. A slow, sensual slide that made us both gasp. Her hands braced on my chest, and mine anchored her hips as she moved with a rhythm that was all her own—steady, aching, consuming.

I watched her lose herself in it. In me. Her eyes fluttered closed, and her mouth parted with a soft moan as her hips rocked against mine. Every roll of her body pulled me deeper. Every kiss sent electricity racing through my veins.

“You feel like everything,” I murmured against her throat.

She opened her eyes, and her gaze locked with mine. “So do you.”

It wasn't just the way we fit together. It was the way she looked at me. Like I wasn't just a man in her bed, but the man she was starting to trust with her heart.

She leaned down, and I kissed her again. Her body trembled above mine, and I felt her tighten, her breath hitching as she neared the edge. I held her closer and whispered her name. “Tempi, come with me,” I said, voice thick with emotion. “Right here.”

She did. So did I.

Together.

She collapsed against me, her cheek pressed to my shoulder, and our bodies tangled slick with sweat. I rolled us slowly, keeping her close, and let her settle against my chest as the aftershocks pulsed between us.

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For a long time, we just lay there.

Our breathing synced. Our hearts slowed.

And for once in my life, I wasn't thinking about the club. Or danger. Or how we were going to fight our way through Madison.

All I could think about was her.

Tempi.

The way she felt in my arms.

The way she fit into my life without even trying.

She hadn't saved me. I didn't need saving.

But damn if she didn't make me want more.

More mornings like this. More nights like this.

More of her.

Always her.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Twister

Tempi was still barefoot, curled up on the worn leather couch in my office with her knees tucked under her. She had her phone in one hand and a half-empty mug of coffee in the other. Her hair was messy, her hoodie mine, and I wanted nothing more than to crawl onto that couch with her and shut the rest of the world out.

But that wasn't how things worked, not when you wore a patch.

"I gotta call church, doll," I said, and adjusted my cut over my shoulders. "We need to regroup. Gramps and Wheels think they found something."

She lifted her gaze to mine and offered a small smile. "I'll be okay. You're in the same building."

"You sure you don't want to hang in here?" I asked, tipping my chin toward the door. "Cord can just stay by the door. He's got a big mouth, but he's reliable."

She stood up and stretched, with the hoodie riding up enough to show a sliver of skin. "Nah, I'll hang out by the bar. I've got WiFi, snacks, and soda. What more could a girl want?"

I smirked. "Me?"

She rolled her eyes and leaned up to kiss me. "You're a given."

"Cord'll keep an eye out," I told her as I opened the door. "He's posted by the door."

"I'll be fine," she promised.

I walked her out to the main bar and glanced at Cord. "She doesn't leave your line of

sight.Got it?”

Cord nodded.“Got it, Prez.”

I brushed a kiss over her hair.“Yell if anything feels off.”

Tempi gave me a thumbs-up, already moved behind the bar like it was hers.

I headed to the back where the clubroom sat, our Church.Doors closed.Phones off.Just business.

Inside, Swift, Wheels, Hodge, Magnum, Sully, and the rest of the brothers were already seated around the long table.

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“Talk,” I said and dropped into my chair.

Gramps leaned forward and tapped a folder in front of him. “We found a name. Maybe. Old political money. Think... legacy donations, silent land investments, dark money PACs. Name’s Hollis Kettler.”

“Kettler?” I repeated. “Am I supposed to know who that is?”

Swift shrugged. “Word was he got out of politics, moved to Oregon, and went quiet. But he still owns property all over Wisconsin. Some of those properties? Show up in the paper trail tied to fake businesses we think are connected to The Ledger.”

Swift sat forward. “And guess who funded some of those businesses early on?”

“Kettler,” I muttered. “Son of a bitch.”

“It’s just a theory,” Sully added. “But if it’s true, this dude has money, connections, and a reason to want people like us out of Madison.”

“Why?” I asked. “What threat are we to him?”

Wheels shrugged. “Gentrification. Investment. People don’t like clubs; they bring heat, headlines, and noise. Maybe we’re just inconvenient.”

“Or maybe it’s more than that,” Swift muttered.

Before I could ask what he meant, a scream ripped through the building.

Tempi.

I was out of my chair before anyone else moved. “Move!” I barked, already sprinting toward the bar.

We burst out of the hallway just in time to see Cord hauling ass through the open front door. Glass crunched under our boots. The front window was shattered, jagged edges of broken glass still hanging from the frame.

Tempi was behind the bar, sitting on the floor, holding her arm.

“Fuck!” I dropped to my knees beside her. “Tempi. Doll. Talk to me.”

“I’m okay,” she whispered, though tears welled in her eyes. “It was just glass. I think.”

“Chewy, Nugget, Hodge, Magnum, GO!” I roared. “Cord’s already after the guy. Don’t come back without him.”

They didn’t even nod, just sprinted out the door like bloodhounds on a trail.

Sully held up another brick wrapped in a scrap of paper. “We’ve got a note.”

“Read it,” I said, eyes still on Tempi’s arm.

Sully unwrapped it, grimaced, and read aloud: “This is your last chance. Leave or it all burns.”

Tempi flinched. I gritted my teeth.

“Bathroom,” I said, scooping her up. “We’ve got a med kit in there.”

“I can walk,” she said softly.

“I know you can.” I kicked the door open and set her gently on the counter. “But I need to take care of you.”

I grabbed the giant first aid box from under the sink. She eyed it warily.

“That’s not a kit,” she muttered. “That’s a trauma unit.”

I smirked. “You’d be surprised how often we need it.”

She hissed when I cleaned the cut on her arm. It wasn’t deep, but it was bleeding good. A piece of glass had nicked her just above the elbow. I kept one hand on her knee as I worked, just to keep her grounded. To keep me grounded.

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“You’re shaking,” I murmured.

“So are you,” she whispered.

I wrapped the cut with gauze and medical tape, then stood between her legs and wrapped my arms around her waist. Her head rested against my chest.

“I’m okay,” she whispered.

“I’m not.”

She looked up. “Twister...”

I leaned down and kissed her forehead. “No one gets to hurt you, doll. No one.”

“But it wasn’t personal.”

“Yes, it was. You’re mine. That makes it personal.”

Her lips trembled. “What now?”

“Now,” I said, jaw tight, “we hunt. And we burn down whoever’s behind this before they get the chance to touch you again.”

She nodded. I saw the trust in her eyes. The fear, too, but more than that, the fire.

She wasn’t going anywhere.

And neither was I.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Tempi

Swift was parked at the end of the bar like a bouncer with a resting murder face. Arms crossed, boots planted wide, and eyes scanning the empty room like someone might pop out from the ice machine and start throwing punches.

He hadn't said much since we got here. Just nodded when I handed him a mug of coffee and grunted something that I think was "thanks." Since then, he stood post like a silent, muscle-bound statue.

Britta, meanwhile, was the exact opposite.

She was perched on a stool near the register, one leg swinging, sipping soda from a mason jar and staring at me like I was about to burst into flames.

"You gonna tell me what's going on," she said, "or do I need to shake it out of you like a dusty rug?"

I sighed and wiped down the bar for the third time. "It's nothing."

"Tempi."

I froze at the tone. She didn't use that voice often. That voice was all business. Serious. Protective.

I set the cloth down and turned toward her. "There was another brick."

She blinked. “What?”

“Through the window. At the clubhouse.” I think part of the reason why Twister had been so annoyed was because they had just fixed the damn window.

Her jar hit the bar a little harder than she meant to set it. “When?”

“Last night.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“I’m fine,” I added quickly.

“Don’t do that.” She stood and walked toward me, brows furrowed. “Don’t downplay it. Don’t act like it’s fine. Are you hurt?”

I hesitated. “A little.”

Britta’s hands clenched at her sides. “Tempi.”

“I’m okay. I just caught some glass.”

“Where?” she demanded.

I rolled up my sleeve and showed her the edge of the bandage on my arm.

She hissed. “Son of a bitch.”

“It’s not deep,” I said. “Twister cleaned it up, patched it.”

She paced away a few steps, then turned around. “Do you know how lucky you are? That could’ve hit your face. Or your neck. Or your—”

“I know,” I said, softer.

She closed her eyes and exhaled through her nose.

“I don’t want you getting caught up in this,” I added. “I don’t want you in the

crosshairs.”

“Stop right there,” Britta snapped. “I’m already in this, Tempi. We run a bar together. I’m your best friend. You think I’m gonna sit on my hands while people start chucking bricks at the people you care about?”

I blinked at her.

“Yeah,” she said, voice quieter now. “I see it. I know this thing with Twister isn’t just some fun fling. He matters to you. Which means this isn’t just about the club anymore. It’s about you. And if you think I’m backing away from that, you don’t know me at all.”

Emotion clogged my throat.

Swift shifted at the end of the bar, but still said nothing. Silent backup.

“I don’t even know how to feel,” I admitted. “It’s all happening so fast. One minute I’m dancing to Halestorm, the next I’m getting bandaged up after some maniac tries to make a point with a brick.”

“Did they leave a note?”

I nodded. “Yeah. It said, ‘This is your last chance. Leave or it all burns.’”

Britta’s eyes widened. “Okay, that’s some movie-villain bullshit right there. What the hell.”

I shrugged. “Twister has guys trying to track it down. Someone named The Ledger might be involved. It’s...messy.”

“No kidding.”

I looked down at my hands. “I didn’t expect any of this when he walked into the bar that day.”

Britta’s tone softened. “Nobody ever expects it. The moment something, or someone, shakes your whole world up, it never comes with a warning label.”

Swift finally spoke, his voice deep and calm. “He’s not gonna let anything happen to her.”

I looked up in surprise.

He met my eyes. “He’d die before he let anyone touch her again.”

Britta studied him for a long moment, then nodded slowly. “Okay then.”

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Silence settled for a beat.

Then Britta straightened and grabbed her drink. “Well, if someone tries to throw a brick through this bar, I’m grabbing the bat from the back office and breaking knees.”

Swift smirked. It was subtle, but it was there.

“I mean it,” Britta added. “Try me.”

I couldn’t help but laugh, and the tightness in my chest eased just a little.

The world was still uncertain, and danger hadn’t backed down. But I wasn’t alone in it. Not anymore.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Twister

Leaving Tempi never sat right with me. Not even for a minute.

She was still tucked in her bed, curled up like the past few days hadn’t changed everything. But they had. For her. For me. For all of us.

I watched her for a second as the morning light leaked around the edges of the blackout curtain. Her hair was a mess. My shirt was slipping off her shoulder. And all I wanted to do was crawl back in beside her and pretend like the world outside didn’t exist.

Instead, I pulled on my cut.

Tempi stirred, her lashes fluttering open. “You leavin’ already?”

“Yeah,” I said softly. “Church.”

She pushed up onto her elbows, blinking through the fog of sleep. “Is it about the brick?”

“Yeah.”

Tempi’s gaze flicked toward the window, and I could see it then, plain as day. She was scared.

Not shaking-in-the-corner scared. But the kind that got into your bones and made your stomach twist. The kind that came from knowing shit was out of your control.

I crossed back to the bed and leaned down to brush her hair back from her face. “I’ll come back, doll. I always come back.”

She caught my wrist. “What if they don’t stop, Twister? What if this just keeps getting worse?”

“They’re trying to rattle us,” I said. “Push us out. That’s all it is.”

“But they hurt me.” Her voice was barely a whisper.

My jaw clenched. “I know. And I should’ve seen it coming.”

“No, you’re not—” she shook her head. “You’re not responsible for that. I just... I feel like it’s only going to escalate.”

I bent and kissed her slow, pouring everything into it I didn't know how to say out loud. "Plug's outside," I murmured against her lips. "He'll hang out 'til I'm back."

Tempi let out a soft, frustrated sigh. "I should be upset that I have to have a babysitter, but I'm not."

"Yeah, well, I don't want you getting a brick to the head either."

That earned a half-smile, but it didn't reach her eyes.

I kissed her again, shorter this time, then headed down the stairs. Plug was already parked at the curb like a silent sentinel, his arms crossed, sunglasses on even though the sun was barely up.

"Keep her in your line of sight at all times," I told him.

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“Always,” Plug nodded.

I hopped on my bike and rolled out. The cool morning breeze was doing nothing to ease the weight sitting on my chest. The streets were still quiet, and Madison was not quite awake yet. But I could feel it buzzing under the surface. That tension. The kind that told you shit was brewing just out of sight.

When I pulled up to the clubhouse, it was already alive. Bikes lined the lot. Doors open. Voices low and clipped.

The clubhouse was buzzing by the time I walked in. Swift and Wheels were already in church, laptops out, papers spread across the table like a war room. The others trickled in, Gramps, Hodge, Podge, Magnum, Sully, Nugget, Chewy. Cord was still outside, standing watch.

“Everyone here?” I asked as I took my seat at the head of the table.

“Minus Plug,” Swift confirmed.

“Good.”

Wheels tapped his keyboard and flicked something to the big TV on the wall. A name appeared in bold: Elias Conover.

“Who the fuck is that?” Hodge asked, already scowling.

“Ex-politician,” Swift said. “Used to run a nonprofit for public safety initiatives. That

was the surface layer.Underneath?Shady as hell.Shell companies, tax dodges, off-books donations.Money moved in circles.”

“Where is he now?”I asked.

“No one knows,” Wheels answered.“He disappeared five years ago.Didn’t die.Didn’t move.Just... vanished.”

“He’s tied to The Ledger?”I asked.

“We think so,” Swift said.“We’ve been digging through every whisper, every name connected to blackmail, coercion, and old city money.Conover’s been linked to three of the names that disappeared from city planning over the last decade.”

“They go missing?”Magnum asked.

“Two retired early.One died in a car accident that didn’t make sense,” Swift muttered.“Airbags were disabled.”

Silence fell across the room like a fucking guillotine.

“So we’re thinking The Ledger is tied to the old money here in Madison,” I said.“And this Conover prick might be the brains of it.And those two other fucks.”

“Could be,” Wheels said.“But there’s no face to the operation.No one public.Everyone’s acting through layers.”

Podge leaned forward.“Then we peel the layers.”

“Exactly,” I nodded.“We start leaning harder.Tap deeper into our network.We find people who owe us.Scare the ones who don’t.”

“And if that doesn’t work?”Hodge asked.

“Yeah,” Chewy agreed.“We don’t have anyone who owes us in Madison.”

“Then we set a trap,” Swift said darkly.“Make ‘em come to us.”

“First step,” I said.“Find the fucking birdies delivering these messages to Nick and Frank.Someone has to be the middleman.”

Wheels tapped his laptop.“I’ll start working on it.”

Ledger wasn’t just noise anymore.It was a system, quiet, organized, and deadly.The kind of shit that didn’t blink when it threatened to set a town on fire.

My fists clenched.

They could come at me.They could mess with our businesses.They could even rattle the club.

But if they laid one fucking finger on Tempi again?

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There wouldn't be a Ledger left to hide behind.

Not in this lifetime.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Tempi

I wasn't gonna lie; having a Saint's Outlaw hanging around the bar like my own personal bodyguard should have made me feel weird. But today, Method was hanging out with me, and he wasn't chatty. Wasn't nosy. He just... observed. Like it felt like he could catch danger before it even showed its face.

And after the shit that went down at the clubhouse? That smashed window and the message scrawled on a brick? Yeah, I didn't mind one bit having Method or any of the guys within lunging distance.

I leaned over the bar and counted down the last of the singles in the till from last night. I had my playlist going low, Halestorm, because it was what I always listened to. I should broaden my horizons, but Halestorm just always hit. Just like Twister.

That man wrecked me in the best way. Slow, wild, messy, tender, and I didn't care what flavor it was. I just knew I wanted more.

"Need help with anything?" Method's voice came from across the bar. Rough. Flat. But not unfriendly.

“I think I got it,” I called back and tucked the bills into the drawer. “Unless you know how to scrub gum off the bottom of the bar without losing your soul.”

His mouth actually twitched. “Not in the job description.”

“Lucky you.” I rounded the side, and snatched up the spray bottle and rag. “Honestly, this place needs a good exorcism more than a mop some days.”

I dropped to my knees and reached under the side of the bar, while muttering a few colorful things about drunk college kids and their nasty habits. Honestly, it was just humans with some nasty habits.

After a few minutes of scrubbing, the offending wad of gum snapped off. “Got ya, sucker,” I crowed triumphantly.

Method chuckled.

“It’s the little things that can make or break your day,” I said with a wink. Getting the dried gum off the bar totally made my day.

Now I needed to clean up the rest of the mess from last night. As much as I liked having Twister here when the bar closed, I really needed to do the cleaning before letting him put his hands on me.

The man was a distraction with a capital D.

I grabbed a rag to wipe down the bar top, collected used coasters, tossed out crumpled receipts, and shook my head at the number of cocktail napkins scribbled with bad pickup lines and phone numbers.

I was just about to swipe one last soggy coaster off the polished wood when I saw it.

A plain white piece of paper.Folded in half.Not a receipt.Not a napkin.It didn't look like it belonged.

I froze.

“Did you set something down over here?”I asked, and I didn't look away from it.

“No,” Method replied from his perch.

I picked it up slowly.My fingers felt weirdly cold.

I opened it.

They're watching the club.

You're safer without them.

My stomach dropped.

“Method.”My voice cracked.

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He was beside me in an instant. “What?”

I held out the note to him.

He didn’t touch it, just read it while hovering close.

“Son of a bitch,” he growled. “Did you see who put that there?”

“No.” I looked around the bar, and my heart thudded in my chest. “I didn’t see anyone last night, but I honestly wasn’t focused on who was leaving garbage on the bar.”

He pulled out his phone. “Calling Twister.”

I wanted to say don’t. I wanted to downplay it. But the note was still in my hand. Still real. Still terrifying.

“Twister’s coming,” Method said after a tense moment. “Now.”

I nodded and leaned back against the bar, clutching the wood behind me for support.

Five minutes later, I heard the roar of a bike. Then the door swung open hard enough to rattle the hinges.

Twister.

He stormed in, eyes locked on me. “Tempi?”

“I’m okay,” I said quickly and held up the note.

He strode over, took it from my hand, and read it.

The muscles in his jaw went rigid. “Where did you find this?”

“On the bar. I was cleaning, and it was just... there.”

Twister cursed under his breath and folded the note with sharp, precise movements.

“They’re not just fucking with the club,” he said. “They’re trying to rattle you.”

“Well,” I muttered, “mission kind of accomplished.”

He stepped closer, cupped my cheek, and his thumb stroked beneath my eye. “I got you, doll. I promise. Nothing’s gonna happen to you.”

“I know,” I said softly. “But this is feeling bigger. Not just business rivalry or whatever.”

“It is,” he agreed, voice low. “We’re trying to dig into who’s behind all this. Swift and Wheels are chasing down some leads.”

“I’m guessing they didn’t leave business cards behind,” I joked.

That earned a flicker of a smile. Just a flicker.

“I’m not letting them scare you off,” he said. “You’re mine. They’re gonna figure out real quick that I don’t break.”

“You’re not scared?” I asked.

“I’m furious,” he said. “And yeah, I’m worried. But scared? Nah. They picked the wrong people to push.”

I took a breath and nodded. “Okay. So what happens now?”

“Now, I add more protection. Until we figure out who left that note, you don’t walk five feet without someone watching your back. I’ll rotate Method, Cord, Swift. Whoever’s free. When I can’t be with you.”

I opened my mouth to argue.

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The club needed to be focused on who was doing this, not just standing by watching me. I felt bad taking away from them.

He stopped me with a kiss. Just a soft one that was warm and steady.

When he pulled back, I let the words die in my throat.

I just nodded.

Because I trusted him.

And maybe that was the scariest part of all.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Twister

I hadn't even made it back to the clubhouse before I was dialing Swift.

"Call church. Now."

"You got it," he said without asking why.

He knew my tone.

Ten minutes later, the heavy wooden church door clicked shut behind me. The table was already surrounded—Swift, Wheels, Hodge, Podge, Magnum, Rev, and

Gramps.Method was staying with Tempi.Cord and Plug were holding down the watch outside.Sully and Chewy were missing.

I walked straight to the head of the table and slapped the note down dead center.

“Read it.”

Wheels grabbed it first and scanned the scrawl.““They’re watching the club.You’re safer without them.””He looked up.“Where’d this come from?”

“Tempi found it this morning,” I said, my voice low and lethal.“Left on the bar under a napkin.”

That note hadn’t just pissed me off—it rattled something deep.Someone had gotten close enough to Tempi to leave that message right under her nose, and we didn’t see it.That wasn’t just a threat.

That was a warning shot.

The room went silent.

“Motherfucker,” Hodge muttered, jaw tight.

“Exactly.”

Swift leaned forward and rubbed his jaw.“We’ve already had two bricks through our window, and now a veiled threat aimed at your woman.”

Podge slammed a fist on the table.“We need to hit back.Hard.”

“No.”I snapped my gaze to him.“We need to be smarter than that.”

Eyes turned to me, waiting.

“This ain’t some street-level beef.It’s calculated.Quiet.Wheels, what did you find out about any of the three names?”

Wheels straightened in his chair.“That old political family—Calhoun.Ezra Calhoun, specifically.Used to be a councilman in Madison.Retired a few years back, but his money?Still moving Foundations.Shell companies.Quiet donations to dead businesses.Ledger-type shit.”

Magnum let out a low curse.“You think he’s behind The Ledger?”

“I don’t know,” Wheels said, “but he’s in the mix.Every time I dig deeper, his name pops up in the shadow of something dirty.”

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“We got an address?” I asked.

Wheels nodded. “Estate on the west side. Private property. High walls. Cameras. Private guards. He’s locked down.”

Hodge cracked his knuckles. “Let’s go knock.”

“No.” I raised a hand. “Not yet.”

Rev arched a brow. “Then what’s the play, Prez?”

“We double our watch. Nobody rides solo. Nobody sleeps without steel on the nightstand. And Temp?” My jaw locked tight. “She’s never alone. Not for a second.”

“She with you now?” Swift asked.

I nodded. “Left her with Method. I’ll be back there tonight.”

Gramps leaned back, arms crossed. “You’re falling for her, he means.”

It wasn’t a question.

I looked him square in the eye. “Yeah.”

No one laughed. No one blinked. Because when the president caught feelings, it wasn’t casual.

It was real.

“We track every move. We follow the money. We bleed ‘em if we have to. But we don’t run. Madison is ours now,” I said.

Swift gave a sharp nod. “Agreed.”

Podge slammed his palm down again. “Then let’s make sure they know it.”

That’s when the door burst open.

Sully charged in with Chewy behind him. They were out of breath, and their eyes wide. “You’re gonna wanna hear this.”

My stomach dropped before he even said it. I knew it wasn’t going to be good. “Spit it out,” I growled.

“Nick’s dead,” Sully panted. “Frank’s gone. Shop was torched. Cops everywhere. They’re calling it an explosion.”

“Fuck,” Swift muttered, already pushing to stand.

Sully kept going. “Cops found what was left of Nick inside. Not much of him. Frank’s truck’s gone, and from what we gather, no one can find Frank.”

“They were on our radar,” I said flatly. “The Ledger knew we were on to them, and they cleaned house.”

Magnum stood. “That’s a message.”

“No,” I growled. “That’s a power move.”

Gramps's eyes narrowed. "They're not afraid to go loud when it suits 'em."

"This shit's accelerating," Hodge said. "They're moving fast now."

I looked around the table. "Then we move faster."

Church wrapped twenty minutes later with new orders, rotating patrol shifts, and tighter security on every inch of the clubhouse and Tempi's bar. No one questioned it. The air in the room wasn't panicked—it was focused. Deadly focused.

We were past playing defense now.

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I stepped outside, lit a cigarette, and stared down the street as smoke curled in front of my face.

Tempi was safe. Still mine.

But the cost of keeping her that way was rising by the day.

I dropped the cigarette and crushed it beneath my boot.

“Let ‘em come,” I muttered. “Let ‘em see what salvation looks like when you try to take it from me.”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Tempi

I dimmed the lights in the Badger’s Den until the overheads glowed like candlelight.

The chairs were flipped onto tables, floor swept, and the register locked. It was well past closing, but I wasn’t in any rush to leave. Method had done his walk-around and radioed that everything was quiet outside. He was sitting on his bike out front, stationed nearby in case anything went awry. But inside?

It was just me and Twister.

And right now, that felt like the safest place in the world.

The jukebox in the corner lit up. I walked toward it in my socks because I was just over wearing shoes for the night. My toes curled against the worn wood planks as I flipped through the songs. My fingers hovered when I landed on one of my Halestorm playlists. I tapped "The Silence" without hesitation.

The first haunting chords drifted through the air, slow, raw, almost too honest.

I turned around.

He was watching me from the middle of the bar, one hip leaning against a table with his arms crossed over his chest. His cut was off, tossed over a chair, and his black T-shirt stretched across his chest like it was part of him. His hair was damp from a shower, and curled slightly at the edges. And the way his eyes tracked me?

Like I was the only goddamn thing he wanted in this world.

"Dance with me?" I asked, my voice quiet but certain.

He pushed off the table and walked toward me with unhurried steps. Each one heavy, deliberate. Like he wanted me to feel him coming before he even touched me.

I did.

Twister reached me just as Lzzy's voice settled into the chorus. He didn't speak. He just slid one arm around my waist and tugged me against him.

We swayed together, my hands curling into the front of his shirt. My cheek pressed to his chest. His scent was clean, warm, and uniquely his: leather, cedar, and soap. I could feel the beat of his heart against my cheek. Steady. Solid. Mine.

"You okay?" he murmured against the top of my head.

“Better than okay,” I whispered. “You?”

“Getting there.”

He pulled back just enough to look me in the eyes. “You know what this is, right?”

“What?”

“This.” His hand brushed down my spine, resting low. “You and me. It’s not casual, Tempi.”

“I know,” I breathed. “You’ve mentioned it,” I laughed.

“I was just reminding you,” he said and pressed his lips to my forehead. “Cause I’m not planning on letting you go.”

The words sank into my bones, curling around every anxious edge in my chest. He wasn’t just saying it. He meant it.

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I kissed him.

Slow.Sweet.

But it didn't stay that way.

His hands slid down to my hips, fingers gripping tight as he walked me backward toward the bar.I followed willingly, and heat licked down my spine.When my back hit the wood, he leaned in, one arm braced by my side.

“You feel safe with me?”he asked low.

“Yes.”

“You trust me?”

I nodded, my breath hitching.“Yeah.”

His lips crashed into mine before I could say another word.

It wasn't rushed.It wasn't messy.

It was consuming.

Like we'd both been holding back and finally decided to let it all go.

My hands slipped under his shirt.He groaned against my mouth, and I smiled, loving

that I could pull that sound from him with just a touch.

Twister broke the kiss only long enough to tug his shirt over his head and toss it onto the barstool behind him. I ran my palms over his chest and traced his muscles and ink like I was memorizing a map. He didn't stop me. Just stood there with half-lidded eyes, like he was doing the same to me.

His hands slipped under the hem of my tank top and began lifting it. I raised my arms, heart pounding, and let him peel it off me. The second it hit the floor, his gaze dragged over me.

"You're beautiful," he murmured and brushed his lips across my collarbone. "Every part of you."

My bra joined the tank top, and then his hands were on my face, tender and slow, like I was something rare he didn't want to break.

"I want to take my time tonight," he said, his voice low and rough with meaning. "You good with that, doll?"

My breath caught. "Yeah. I want that too."

He kissed me again, softer this time, deep and unhurried, and my whole body melted into him.

Then, without a word, he reached down, laced his fingers through mine, and guided me toward the stairs. The lights from the bar faded behind us, replaced by the creak of old wood and the thud of my heart. Each step felt like we were crossing a line I wasn't going to come back from. And I didn't want to.

When we reached the landing, I pushed open the door to my apartment and backed

into the room to pull him with me. Twister shut the door behind us.

We finished undressing each other slowly while our hands roamed. We moved toward the bed like gravity was guiding us there. There was no rush. No frenzy. Just him and me, steady and deliberate.

He lay me back on the bed and crawled over me. One arm braced beside my head, and the other traced a slow path down my thigh. My breath hitched as I wrapped my legs around his waist and welcomed the weight of him.

When he entered me, it was slow and intense. My hands fisted in the sheets, then slid up into his hair as I tried to anchor myself to him as he moved.

“Tempi,” he whispered, like a prayer.

I answered with his name, and my voice broke around it.

Twister.

The world outside that room could burn, and I wouldn’t have noticed. The only rhythm I cared about was the one we made together.

He kissed me as he moved, his mouth finding mine again and again like he couldn’t bear the distance between us, not even for a second.

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And when we shattered together, it wasn't loud or messy; it was quiet, raw, and real.

Like coming home.

Afterward, he didn't move far. Just slid to the side and pulled me with him, my back to his chest, and his arms wrapped around me like he didn't plan to let go. Ever.

"Still feel safe?" he asked. His voice was a warm breath against the back of my neck.

I closed my eyes. "More than ever."

He kissed my shoulder and I smiled as I tucked myself tighter against him.

We didn't talk for a long time. We didn't need to. We just laid there in the hush of the room. Skin to skin, and wrapped in something that felt like more than lust. It felt like trust. Like something we weren't going to lose the second morning came.

But I still whispered it.

"I don't know what happens next."

Twister's hand traced a line down my spine, then curled around my waist like he was sealing the words in place.

"Whatever it is, we handle it together."

I nodded, and my eyes stung with something I didn't want to fight.

Yeah.

We were solid.

And I wasn't going anywhere.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Twister

Tempi had been curled into my side with her head tucked under my chin, and one leg thrown over mine like she belonged there, which she did. We'd spent the last hour tangled up in each other, raw and real. It wasn't just about sex anymore. It was about her. About us.

But the world didn't stop spinning just because I finally had something good.

She blinked at me through sleepy eyes. "I have a few questions."

"That sounds ominous. Should I put on clothes so you're not so distracted?" I joked.

That earned me a smirk. "You're a distraction with and without clothes, Twister. It doesn't matter."

I chuckled and brushed my thumb across her cheek. "Then I'll just stay naked." I had a few things I wanted to make clear to her, too. I leaned down and brushed a kiss to her lips.

She moaned and deepened the kiss but stopped it abruptly. "Nope, we need to put clothes on and get out of bed. I can't have a conversation with you when you're like this."

“Fine, fine,” I drawled and rolled out of bed. I tossed my T-shirt to Tempi and pulled on my jeans. I wasn’t going to get completely dressed, but I would at least put jeans on.

We made coffee and sat at her tiny kitchen table. It was going on ten, just before the bar opened.

“I’m not leaving Madison,” I said finally, my fingers wrapped around a mug. “No matter how bad it gets.”

She didn’t answer right away. Just watched me and waited for more.

“This club, this city,” I paused. “It’s not just about turf or power. It’s about building something real. We’re not like the ones who came before. We’re better. Smarter. And I’ll be damned if I let some masked cowards scare us off.”

“And me?” Her voice was soft. “Where do I fit in this future you’re building?”

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I stood, walked around the table, and pulled her to her feet.

I kissed her like I already knew the answer.

“You’re it, Tempi.”

She melted into me, sighing against my mouth. “Okay then.”

“Now it’s your turn,” I said. “What questions did you have?”

She laid her hand on my chest. “Don’t look so worried,” she laughed. “I just wanted to know about how you got your name and how in the world you were able to afford buying the Sam James building.”

“Uh, well,” I stalled. I had the answers to both questions, but I thought she was going to ask them. “How did you know I bought the Sam James building?”

She wrinkled her nose. “Gramps let it slip. He said I needed to ask you how you managed to make that happen.”

Fucking Gramps. The guy had good intentions, but sometimes he just needed to shut his mouth. “Well, I got an inheritance from my grandfather a few years back.”

She nodded. “And it was enough to put a down payment on the building?”

I cringed. “Well, it was more like enough to buy about twenty Sam James buildings,” I confessed.

Her jaw dropped. “Stop it,” she gasped. “You’re a bajillionaire? Who in the world was your grandfather?”

This is where things were going to get a little sticky. “Uh, Hank Bonds.”

She blinked rapidly. “Did you just say that your grandfather was Hank Bonds? As in Bonds Landscaping?”

I nodded. “That would be him. He raised me when my parents died when I was a baby.”

She shook her head. “I am so sorry about your parents, but that is insane that your grandfather was Hank Bonds. That explains how you are a bajillionaire. I don’t think there is a person alive who doesn’t know Hank Bonds. He had those cheesy commercials that just got stuck in your head.” She snapped her fingers at me. “For lawns that shine and hedges trimmed tight, Call Bonds Landscaping, done just right! From curb to yard, we do it all, big or small, just give us a call!” she sang. “I used to get that jingle stuck in my head at least once a day.”

“That isn’t the first time I have heard that, doll.”

She reached up and trailed her fingers down my cheek. “I want you to know I’m with you for your hot body, amazing sexual prowess, and your ability to make me feel safe. Not because you’re a bajillionaire.”

I let out a loud laugh. “Yeah, I wasn’t really worried about you being with me for my money since you just found out a minute ago I even had money.”

She winked. “Touche.”

“What was your other question?” I asked.

She laughed. “Why is your name Twister?”

See, that was the one I wasn’t looking forward to answering. I cupped my hand to my ear. “What was the question?”

She rolled her eyes. “Spill the beans, why you’re Twister, handsome. I need to get downstairs to open the bar soon.”

“You could just go open the bar, and we can talk about this later,” I offered.

“Oh no, no, no. I need to know right now because you keep skirting around the answer.”

I sighed. “One night when I first joined the Saint’s Outlaws...” Jesus, was I really going to tell this story?

“Yes,” Tempi prompted.

“I played Twister.”

She rapidly blinked. “What?”

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“That’s it, doll.I played Twister.”

She shook her head.“I have a feeling there is more to this story.”

She was right.There was a tiny little detail I was leaving out.

She crossed her arms over her chest.“Spit it out, Twister.”

I threw my hands in the air.“I was naked!”

Her jaw dropped, and she fell into a fit of giggles.

Yeah, it was ridiculous.I had been young, dumb, and drunk on whiskey.

“Ha, ha, doll.Now forget I told you that, and kiss me so you can get ready for work,”
I ordered.

She couldn’t stop laughing but managed to press a kiss to my lips.“That is better than anything I imagined.”

I rolled my eyes and slapped her butt.“Get ready for work.”She squealed and headed to the bedroom.I followed behind her because what else was I supposed to do?

I watched her rummage through the closet, then padded into the bathroom with her clothes under her arm.The shower turned on, and it took everything in me not to barge in there and offer to wash her back, among other things.

I walked her to the stairs once she was dressed and gave her one last kiss. “I’ll be down soon. Don’t unlock the door until I’m down there.”

She gave me a salute and headed down the stairs.

I jumped in the shower and was shrugging on my cut when my heart stopped.

Glass shattered loudly, and a scream ripped through the building from downstairs.

I was already halfway down the stairs when the second crash echoed.

I didn’t stop to think, I just moved.

“Tempi!”

The bar was in chaos.

Two men in black ski masks were inside. One stood behind the pool table with a gun to Britta’s head, the other held a lighter above a puddle of what I instantly recognized as spilled liquor. Tempi was on the other side of the bar, surrounded by spilled liquor. If that asshole dropped that lighter, Tempi would be right in the middle of the fire.

Britta’s eyes were wide, furious, and terrified at the same time. Tempi was frozen behind the counter with her hands raised and her mouth parted in horror.

“If you move,” the gunman barked to me, “she dies.”

I held up my hands slowly, and my heart thundered in my chest. “Let her go,” I said evenly.

The guy with the gun sneered. “You should’ve left when you had the chance.”

“Look, we don’t need this shit. Put the gun down. Walk away. No one has to get hurt,”
I tried to reason.

He laughed, low and cruel. “You think this is about you?”

He turned to his partner.

“Light it.”

“No!” I shouted, but it was too late.

The man dropped the lighter.

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Fire exploded. The puddle ignited in a flash, and flames licked up the side of the bar.

The guy with the gun threw Britta to the floor and turned to run.

I lunged at him.

I tackled the bastard to the ground. We hit hard. His elbow to my jaw, and my shoulder to the floor. He grunted and twisted, but I managed to land a punch to his ribs.

I growled, wrapped an arm around his throat, but the bastard headbutted me. He rolled away and kicked me square in the gut.

I stumbled back.

He got to his feet.

“Wrong fucking move,” he spat.

Then he turned, raised the gun again, but this time he fired.

“NO!” Tempi screamed.

Britta let out a scream and crumpled to the floor with her hands clenched to her chest.

The two guys bolted for the door, and I couldn’t chase them. I couldn’t leave Tempi and Britta.

Tempi jumped from behind the bar before the fire got to her and ran to Britta on the floor.

“Fire extinguisher!” I shouted to Tempi.

“Behind the bar,” she said as she pressed her hand to the wound on Britta’s chest.

I jumped behind the bar and found the extinguisher. I pulled the pin and managed to get the fire out, but I knew there was going to be damage.

“She needs help,” Tempi called. “There’s so much blood!”

With the fire out, now I needed to get help for Britta.

I fumbled for my phone.

“911, now!” Tempi screamed.

“I got it, doll, I got it. Just keep applying pressure,” I ordered and ran over to them as I put my phone to my ear as the call connected.

As soon as I gave the dispatcher the address, I dropped the phone and grabbed a dish towel to pressing it to Britta’s chest, blood soaked through fast.

“Hold on, Britta. We’ve got you. Hold on,” I called.

Tempi was shaking beside me, and her hands were covered in blood.

“Baby, breathe. You’re okay. She’s gonna be okay. Help’s on the way.”

“Twister,” she choked out. “There was nothing I could do. I, I, I...” she stammered.

I gripped her face, made her look at me. “You did everything right. You hear me? None of this is your fault.”

She nodded as tears spilled down her cheeks.

Sirens wailed in the distance. I grabbed my phone again, this time calling the club.

“Badger’s Den. Now. Someone just shot Britta and lit the bar on fire. Now,” I barked into the phone.

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I ended the call before Swift said a word and looked down at Britta.

Her eyes fluttered open.

“You’re not dying, you stubborn bitch,” Tempi whispered.

Britta coughed, and a weak smile formed. “Well...damn. I was hoping for something a little more sympathetic. I’ve been shot.”

I let out a strangled laugh. “Stay with us.”

The flames were out now without catching anything else. But the stench of smoke clung to everything.

Within seconds, the sound of bikes roared outside.

The Saint’s Outlaws stormed in. Cord, Swift, Hodge, Wheels, Method, and more.

Tempi didn’t let go of Britta’s hand.

I didn’t let go of Tempi.

I knew this was just the beginning of the hell storm, but I knew two other things for certain.

Madison was my home now, and Tempi was mine forever.

No one was going to take them away from me.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Swift

I hated hospitals.

The fluorescent lights hummed above me, and the constant beep-beep-beep of the machine in Britta's room, which measured the distance between life and death, was faint through the door.

I stood outside her room with my arms crossed over my chest, and my cut hung heavy on my shoulders.

She was alive. That was all that mattered.

Barely.

I could still hear her weak pleas not to die as they loaded her into the ambulance.

That woman had grit under her nails and gasoline in her veins. I knew it the second I met her. Britta was loud. Sharp. Full of sass and bite. And now she was lying in a bed, pale as hell, with tubes in her arms and clinging to life.

She wasn't supposed to be in this.

None of them were.

We'd stirred up something dark in Madison. And now? Now it had fangs ready to kill us all.

I pulled the little folded note from my pocket that I had found on my motorcycle when I got the call from Twister.

Just two words.

You're next.

This was gonna be one hell of a ride.