



Venom's Sting (Savage Legion MC #9)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: One drone flight. One hunted beauty. One bikers heart on the line. When fate crashes into his lens, hell risk it all

My eye in the sky caught her runnin through the woods, hells hounds right at her heels. In that second, my world flipped. She vanished into the trees, then some lowlife shot down my drone before I could lock on his face. Now its personal. Im gonna find this dame and set things straight.

The plan? Crack the case, smoke out the bastard who's marked her. And the beauty? Shell play my Ol'lady while me and my brothers tear down the gates of hell to keep her safe.

What I didn't plan on? Fallin for Amy. Shes a delicate flower in my world of leather and steel. Our ways ain't pretty, but I'll be damned if evil wins on my watch.

Will Amy run when she sees what I'm capable of? Or will she look past the blood and bruises to the heart that beats only for her?

In this deadly game, can love survive?

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Venom

Today is starting out well. I'm in church, side-by-side with most of my club brothers. This is where I belong, I was always a bit of a loner when I was a kid, and I used to wonder what was wrong with me. But then I realized I just hadn't met my people. I grab a seat beside Rage, we both joined the Savage Legion MC around the same time and have become pretty good buddies. He's a medic and has this no-nonsense attitude and always says what's on his mind, which means I never have to wonder what he's thinking about.

He jerks his chin at me. "Mornin', brother. How's it hangin'?"

"Barely still attached." I respond wryly. "The wedding reception for Haze and his old lady was wild. That club girl who had a thing for him, hate-fucked all those feelings out on me before moving onto the prospects."

Rage glances towards the still-open door to the bar area. "Be careful of that one, Ven. Brittany's the type who can get a man's head all twisted around and fuck up his life before he even realizes what's happening to him."

"Yeah, noted, Grandpa."

"I'm being serious, Ven," he says in a stern tone.

"Sometimes you just gotta loosen up. But I'm hearing you loud and clear, brother—now that Haze's off the market, she's gonna be looking for her next victim. No matter how good the sex is, I ain't stepping into that honey trap."

“You don’t want her for an old lady. Trust me on this.”

Rage still doesn’t get it. I wave one hand through the air in a dismissive gesture. “You’re preachin’ to the choir, Rage. The last thing in the world I need is an old lady tellin’ me what to do.”

He finally gives me a genuine smile. “There are too many beautiful women hanging around this clubhouse who are eager to please to put all your chips on just the one.”

“Agreed. We’ve got our whole lives ahead of us. Plenty of time to play the field. No fucking brother should give up his freedom before he’s damn good and ready,” I say.

“Besides that, I doubt you’d find yourself an old lady who’d put up with your roommate and all the drone innards littering your suite. Unless she’s got a kink for scrapyards and serpentariums.”

Before I can answer, Siege drops the gavel and calls our club meeting to order.

“Quieten down and listen up. We’ve got a lot of ground to cover today. Let’s start with old business and then we’ll have reports from our club officers. First off Haze has something to say.”

Haze gets to his feet and looks around at everyone. I can’t help but smile at him because he’s a righteous brother who with our help, managed to save his old lady from desperate circumstances.

“I just wanna thank you all for the wedding gifts, you really shouldn’t have. Yeah Tank, I’m lookin’ at you bro. You really shouldn’t have,” he pauses and Tank, our VP, starts laughing. I’m guessing it must be an in-joke. Haze continues, “We’re gonna take a few days off to sail down to Santa Catalina Island—that’s in Anna’s father’s yacht, not in the fucking My Little Pony pool float, fuck you very much

Tank,” his speech is drowned out by the sound of me and my club brothers laughing at the mental image. “Anyway, we had a ton of food left over, so Anna and Trix are dropping by later this morning with the sides, and the prospects are setting up the grill now.”

A ripple of excitement moves through the room, because every brother loves a cookout.

Siege turns to Haze and says, “We were glad to be there for you and your old lady when things were bad. That’s what the brotherhood is all about.”

When Haze drops back down into his seat, Siege continues, “Next, Dutch has a few words to say about what we recovered at Rick’s hideout.”

Dutch stands up and glances down at his tablet as he gives the report. “It took a while to secure Mr. Tyler’s property. Turns out, as well as his assets, there was quite a stash of loot.”

Impressed murmurs run around the room as my club brothers whisper their approval. Most of our jobs involved helping out for the sake of doing the right thing, and therefore operated at a net negative. It was good to find that one finally paid off.

He continues, “The shipping container beside his cabin was sold for four grand, however, in the outbuilding we found a false floor hiding a safe. We recovered nearly a hundred grand and some gold bars.”

My mouth drops open. But before anyone can ask, Dutch explains. “We suspect he was a prolific hit man and what we recovered from his property was a small percentage of his overall wealth. We’re still debating whether or not to track down more information on this man or let sleeping dogs lie.”

Glancing at Siege he announces, “The total haul is around a quarter of a million dollars. We’ll take thirty percent off the top for the club coffers and the rest will be evenly distributed amongst all the brothers who participated in the raid.”

Reward follows risk. This is standard operating procedure for our club, so they aren’t gonna get any pushback from the brothers about how they handled dividing the money. I can’t remember the last time we ended up with a bonus from doing a job. Mostly, we all work individual jobs and pay our dues. I suppose outlaw clubs earned more through their club than working outside jobs, but that wasn’t the way with non one-percent clubs.

Dutch wraps it up by talking about the weapons we confiscated. “There were several trunks holding weapons and a couple full of ammo. We’re adding most of that to our armory. You never know when extra weapons will come in handy. The killer was a professional. That means the weapons were well maintained, wiped clean of fingerprints, and had the serial numbers filed off.”

There’s a cough from the back of the room, Dutch asks, “You got something to add Smoke?”

Our club attorney shakes his head, “Not really, just remember what happened the last time we got caught with illegal guns on our property, if it wasn’t for Serena’s quick thinking, Rigs might still be doing time.”

“Point taken, brother,” Dutch says. “Given the number of weapons, we’ll see if we can store them off-site.”

When he sits down, Siege stands again. “I feel a lot more confident about our ability to protect ourselves from anything the Grave Diggers MC throws our way with our coffers replenished and our armory filled to the brim. Now, for new business. Rider, come and talk to us about the suspicious activity your team has seen around our

area.”

Rider stands and turns to address the brotherhood. “As you know my team has been tasked with being on the lookout for any push into our territory by the Grave Diggers MC. Since they patched over the Hellfire Hounds, we’ve been concerned they might be using that as a backdoor into Las Salinas.”

Rigs speaks up, “Tell them the rest.”

Shooting Rigs a serious look, Rider launches into a short, but pointed explanation of a situation none of us were privy to, until just now. “Someone seems to be setting up shop in our territory. We’ve noted a number of out-of-state panel vans exiting off the interstate and moving through a sparsely populated area on the southside of the city, before going back to wherever they came from.”

Smoke rubs his chin thoughtfully before asking, “Do they leave right away or hang around for a few days?”

“There have been several times when we saw them leaving the area within an hour or two,” Rider replies.

“Sounds like some kind of smuggling operation,” Smoke responds. He’s saying what we’re all thinking.

“That was our thinking as well.” Siege motions to Zen, our IT guy. And within seconds our phones are all buzzing. “I just had Zen send you the exit number and the general area they’re circulating through.”

Rider looks around the room, “Here’s the thing I need you to remember. We can’t all swarm that area or begin randomly following every van with out-of-state license plates. We don’t want them to know we’re investigating the situation. If we spook

them, that'll cause them to become more secretive and go to ground."

Rigs adds pointedly, "The goal for our surveillance is to go unnoticed."

"Rigs is correct," Rider interjects decisively. "Moving forward we'll be handing out assignments. If you get one, your job is to show up at the specified time and report back on what you see. You are not to engage with any of the drivers, interrogate other people to find out what they know, or follow anyone unless we give the order. The club officers will be talking to the townsfolk on our own. If every brother does their part, we should be able to get to the bottom of this fairly quickly."

Dutch reminds everyone, "What we see as suspicious might be nothing more than some big corporation surveying land they just bought, maybe with an eye to building an oil refinery or something along those lines."

Rider cuts him off. "It doesn't matter what all these out of towners are doing in our area, we'll figure it out. We always do."

"I'll second that," Siege announces as he gets to his feet again. "Operational security is a serious concern. Modern technology is making it more difficult than ever to keep club business private, so no communicating outside of our encrypted app."

"Fucking technology," Rigs mutters.

"Much better when it was just pen and paper," Tank adds.

"Didn't you used to chisel messages into a rock, back when you were a boy?" Vapor says with a smirk.

"Fuck off," our VP glares at him. I know it's just good-natured banter, Tank and the twins are long-time work colleagues and constantly jerk each other around.

After the meeting is over, Rage and I go out back to the patio to grab some food. I've not shoveled more than a handful of bites into my mouth before my phone goes off. So does Rage's and by the pings on all sides, our other club brothers are getting their assignments too.

I pull out my phone and scan the message. "I'm headed out to exit 408. They want my drone in the sky. How about you?"

Rage frowns, "I'm headed to the other side of town. They want me to follow the river down through Brush Creek and report back anything I see out of the ordinary."

We quickly shove a few more bites into our mouths and wash it down with coffee before getting on our motorcycles. I check the storage compartment on my bike to make sure I have my mini drone. I can cover more ground, zoom in on objects, and capture images with this drone. I think my club brothers would approve because they have in the past.

I ride down the interstate on my Harley, intent upon doing exactly what my club brothers asked me to do. I can't think of any logical reason why there would be an influx of panel vans with various out-of-state license plates—other than for something nefarious. My club officers always have their ears to the ground as far as any developments in Las Salinas goes, so if it had been legitimate business I think they'd have gotten wind of it. Looking at the map Zen sent, they're exiting off into one of the more remote areas of our county. Our club officers are right to be concerned. It could be anything from stripping native burial sites for artifacts, to some kind of smuggling operation, or even some organized criminal elements dumping bodies in our area. To be quite honest, I'm as curious as I am worried.

I park up at a junction where two overpasses meet. There's a scenic viewing area that

allows me to stop without drawing the notice of people driving past. The exit is clearly visible below. I can see for miles in every direction over the treetops. but there are huge trees obscuring my view of the ground, especially the road leading from the exit to the wilderness. This is clearly the reason our club officers wanted me to bring a drone, it can track what my eyes can't.

I quickly pull out my favorite drone and get it in the sky. When it zooms out above the trees, the views are fantastic. Absolutely nothing beats the beauty of nature. This is definitely my happy place.

It takes me a minute to find the road again and I hover around for about thirty minutes before the first panel van exits off the interstate. I pull up high, so they don't catch sight of my drone and follow along with their journey. They turn onto a secondary road, but something catches my attention on the left.

I try to stay on course with the van but decide to sneak a quick look at what's going on. It could be another van or something important. I manipulate the controls, pulling the drone off my original target and fly it over a cornfield. At first, I think there's a large animal running at breakneck speed through the field because no human could move so fast through the dense foliage.

When I drop down a bit and zoom in, I realize it's a woman. She's not skipping through the cornfield like in a movie, all pretty and graceful. This woman is panicked and running for her life. Although I can't see her face. I do see her shoving her way forward as her black hair streams behind her.

A lump forms in my throat as I watch her terror-fueled sprint. At first, it's unclear whether she's desperate to get somewhere in a hurry, or to get away from someone or something that's chasing her.

I begin to search around, and it takes me only a couple of seconds to see she's being

pursued by two animals. Worry niggles in my gut that they are coyotes. When I zoom in, I discover they are dogs, large hounds by the looks of things. I can see them sniff around and stop as they try and catch her scent.

I quickly get the drone back to the woman and watch her claw her way up a sharp embankment to the highway. She runs out when a car stops, and she jumps into the passenger side. When they drive away, relief courses through my body and the tight knot in my chest finally loosens.

The hounds begin running up the embankment, sniffing and pawing at the edge of the road. Suddenly, they stop and race back the way they came. I follow them with my drone hoping to catch a glimpse of the asshole who lost control of his hunting dogs.

Eventually, the dogs run to an older man wearing hunting gear and an orange ballcap. He's carrying a rifle. I just want to beat his ass for the tragedy that almost took place because of his negligence. But then he takes out a piece of cloth and I watch him squat down and rub it forcefully in the face of each dog. They get riled up and start running towards the road again.

That's when I realize this isn't all just some kind of innocent mistake on his part. He was using the dogs to track the woman. She knew she was in serious danger and that her life depended upon giving those dogs the slip.

I wasn't about to let the old bastard get away with what he just did, so I bring my drone lower and closer to the man, hoping to capture an image of his face. Unfortunately, the sunlight glints off the side and he catches sight of my drone. Before I can focus in on his face, he raises his rifle and shoots my favorite drone right out of the sky. I don't know who this old man is but I'm already building a nice healthy dislike for him. There were no two ways about that.

I sigh and stare off in the direction of the road the van had disappeared down. Today

I'm zero for two. I didn't manage to track the van long enough to discover where it was going, nor did I capture an image of the old man's face. On the upside, at least the woman managed to get away.

I go back to my motorcycle and head to the clubhouse to pick up another drone. I've got a job to do and I'm not going to let the Legion down, not now, not ever.

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Amy

Earlier That Morning

I 've spent my entire life striving to be the opposite of my mom in almost every conceivable way. I'm outspoken, brash, and I don't let people push me around. If I want something, I set a goal for myself and I don't let anything pull me off task. I managed to pull us up out of the dirt and keep a roof over our heads, food on the table, and made sure she got her meds every month.

Unfortunately, my mother, Carol, came from an abusive background. Because of that, she learned to be quiet, do as she was told, and tends to make herself small to keep from drawing unwanted attention. I never knew exactly what had scared her so much, though it didn't take a genius to figure out it had something to do with my grandfather. He wasn't physically abusive, but her childhood veered between being neglected and being treated like an unpaid servant. She'd been estranged from her father for years, I used to see him occasionally when my step-grandmother was alive, though he'd never wanted much to do with me. But after she died a year and a half ago, the visits grew less frequent.

I tried to draw my mom out of her shell, but she was too scared to leave the house most days and terrified of talking to a therapist about what she'd been through. She thought hiding away was the best way to keep herself safe.

It didn't work. I know, because she wound up missing one day. She's been listed as a missing person for coming up on seven months. Las Salinas is a small rural town, and an easy ride to the West Coast. It's both heaven and hell, for me. I wanted to get out

of this town so badly and move to the city, but my mother flat out refused. So, I stayed because I couldn't bear to leave her all alone.

I believe she was abducted, because there's no way my mom would leave me, and she'd barely go to the grocery store by herself. I was working the day she went missing, I had a photography business, and I was happily taking baby portraits while something dreadful happened to my mom. The cops think she skipped town or that she met a man and ran away with him. Which is absolutely crazy, often a man just had to look at her and she'd shrink into herself in fear. I can tell they're just counting down the days until their chain of command lets them close down the active investigation. The thought of my mom's case being filed in the cabinet alongside dozens of other cold cases haunts me almost as much as the thought of her lifeless body being abandoned in the thousands of acres of barren wilderness out in the California desert.

Standing in my rented room, I read over the e-mail from the pharmacy. It's confirmation that her meds have been delivered as scheduled for the last seven months. Although it's a small-town pharmacy with a habit of doing things their own way, I finally managed to persuade the pharmacist to give me the information. My mom had a breakdown a few years ago and at the time I was given power of attorney for her medical care. That had never been withdrawn, and my Google searches for online free legal advice suggested that it might still be active.

The hand holding my cell phone drops to my side as I contemplate what this means. My mom has a complicated medical history. In addition to her mental health problems, she's an insulin-dependent diabetic with high blood pressure and has several other issues requiring maintenance meds. In other words, she literally cannot survive without medical support. Lifting the phone up again, I stare at the message. My lips press into a thin line as the reality of what I'm seeing sinks in. For the last seven months her meds have been going to my grandfather's farm, the one place on earth she never wanted to see again.

My grandfather, Rufus Grayson, is the kind of asshole no one wants for a relative. My mom's been no-contact with her father for years, and up until my mom went missing, I'd not spoken to him for almost eighteen months. Since she's been gone, I'd visited him a few times and called to see if he had any idea where she was, the old bastard just laughed in my face. For a father, he didn't seem to have one ounce of compassion for his daughter, and I had wondered if something had gone wrong with his mind after my step-grandmother died. Once, the farm had been a home—a cold, unfeeling home with rules and regulations, but a home none-the-less—but now it was empty, save for a bitter old man and his four freakish farmhands. All this time, he claimed to know nothing about her whereabouts, and now I come to find out, her meds were being delivered to his place.

Well, fuck this! I'm getting to the bottom of this right damn now. Grabbing my cross-body bag, I sling it over my head. Adjusting it at my waist, I cram my phone into one of the front pockets. Furious, I stomp out to my old beat-up Chevy and fire up the engine.

As I drive out to the farm, all the times that my grandfather denied knowing where she was circle around in my head, and I decide I'm going to get the truth out of him if it's the last thing I do.

My mind rolls around that threat in my head to see if I have any hope of finding leverage to force his cooperation. Not surprisingly, I come up empty handed.

There will be no storming the place to look for her, because he has four rough farmhands who are all too eager to do his bidding, especially if it means putting their hands on a woman. I don't even know if the police would entertain the idea of raiding his place or if a judge would issue a search warrant based on my gut feeling that if her meds were redirected to his house then there must be a reason. My grandfather is

holding her there, or at least he knows where she's being held.

I pull up at his place when the sun is high in the midmorning sky. He walks towards me in the same camouflage pants, khaki green jacket, and orange ballcap he always wears. This time he has his rifle cradled in the crook of his arm. His two hyperactive hunting dogs are jumping around, probably hoping for treats. I wrinkle my nose as he gets close, he smells of body odor, tobacco, booze, and dogs. Out of that collection of scents, the smell of dog is the most preferable.

His gruff voice asks, "Did you come to stay or just to snoop. If it's the latter, you'd best leave, I'm done with you, Carol."

Carol? I'm momentarily puzzled as to why he's calling me by my mom's name. Not backing down to his not-so-subtle intimidation, I tell him, "I got confirmation from the pharmacy that my mom's meds were redirected here."

"And what of it?" The tone of his voice is slow and careful as if I've finally hit upon something that might implicate him in her disappearance.

"Why are her meds coming here?" I shoot back. "You insist she's not living here, right? You have to admit, that don't hardly make any sense." I was using one of his favorite turns of phrase, maybe to connect with him, and lure him into seeing me as his granddaughter instead of the enemy.

"What don't hardly make no sense, is for you to still be circling around my ranch after all these years, accusing me of doing things I didn't do."

Years? My step-grandmother died eighteen months ago, it wasn't long after that I stopped dropping by. I wonder for a moment if my grandfather is going a bit cuckoo, but then I stop feeling sorry for him. I'm here to find my mom. I decided to be sly, like he's always trying to be. "What if I called the police to do a wellness check on

the person you claim isn't here, would they find all those meds or are they gone? If the pharmacist says they were delivered and you can't produce them, either you sold them, or gave them to her."

He steps out to meet me, his expression inscrutable. "You tryin' to set me off today, youngin'? Y'aint spoken to your old Pa in years. Why come back now?"

"I'm just trying to find my mom." Taking a step closer, I gaze up into his cold eyes. "She's your daughter as well as my mother. I find it strange that you aren't moving heaven and earth trying to find her as well. One would almost think you're not worried because you know where she is."

His hand comes out hard and fast. I step back before he can grab me, and he only gets the tail end of my long scarf. I reach out to yank it out of his hand, but the old buzzard is stronger and snatches it from me, causing it to jerk from around my neck.

The minute he kneels down and lets his dogs sniff at it, I know I'm in deep shit. He's not gonna let me leave here today, just like he didn't let my mom leave seven months ago I suspect. Only, I've got to escape or there'll be no one left to look for her.

Whirling around, I make a run for my car.

"That's right girlie, run away, just like you did years ago." I can hear him laughing as I head towards the cornfields.

Then I hear the blood chilling howls as his dogs start baying. The bastard is gonna hunt me down like a deer. I run as fast as I can. Running for my life. The highway is just on the other side of the field. If only I can get that far, I can hitch a ride to town and alert the police to what just happened.

I'm athletic and flight of foot, so I eventually pull away from his sniffing hounds by

running through the narrow stream that runs through his land. I know it won't stop the dogs for long and they'll pick up my scent, but it will buy me some time.

I can hear the dogs howling as I run through those cornstalks for what seems like forever. Eventually, I scramble up the embankment and reach the edge of the highway, waving my hands frantically for a vehicle to stop.

By a stroke of luck, the first car I wave down is my old Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Buren. She comes to a skidding stop and her eyes widen when she sees me. "Amy Beth Grayson! What are you running from girl, the devil himself?"

I run around and get into her passenger seat. Giving her a nervous glance, I respond honestly, "Almost as bad. I was running from my grandfather's hunting dogs."

She makes a disgruntled sound and hits the gas. "Those creatures need to be put down. Did you know they bit my Jimmy Jay when he was deer hunting a couple of years back?"

"No, ma'am. I'm real sorry that happened to him though. I hope he wasn't too badly injured."

"Those mangy mutts travel in pairs. He ended up with sixteen stitches in his leg. It probably would have been worse if he hadn't fought them off with the butt of his rifle."

I'm honestly horrified to hear about her son. My heart is still racing, and I can hardly pay attention to all her complaints about the dogs, because I'm still coming to grips with the fact that my own grandfather tried to attack me just now. The situation sounds surreal, but my gut tells me that's what his intention was.

"Rufus thinks because he owns a big spread, he can do as he likes. I should have sued

the pants off him, but my husband said that would be asking for trouble.”

“Well, you’re not wrong about him being an island unto himself. He certainly deserved a lawsuit over all the pain and suffering your son endured.”

She gives me firm nod. “If I had it to do over again, I wouldn’t let my husband dissuade me from doing what was right.”

We keep trash talking my grandfather because we’re both rightly pissed with him. He’s a gigantic pain in the ass. My mind keeps going back to what he was saying about me, it’s like he thought I was my mom. But if he was holding her, why would he be saying that? Nothing makes sense. However, by the time she lets me out at the police station, I’m feeling more elated than scared, because now I have enough justification for them to get a search warrant for his house and property.

The minute I walk in, Sergeant Pike begins shaking his head. “I don’t know what you’re up to this morning, Amy Beth, but the answer is no.”

I take a deep calming breath and square my shoulders before saying, “All I want is for you to do your job. I found evidence that my grandfather might be involved in my mother’s disappearance.”

“Not that again. Look, Amy Beth, we investigated that and found no indication of foul play. Rufus might be an ornery old coot, but he’s an upstanding member of this community.”

My hand comes up and I put my palm out. “My mom’s case is still open, therefore it’s still your job to continue the investigation and I’m telling you, I’ve found proof that she’s at the farm.”

His voice becomes exasperated. “I’ve personally looked at this from every angle,

Amy Beth. There was no break in at your old place, no sign of a struggle inside, and that fifty bucks is still sittin' in her bank account."

I try shaming him because I'll do absolutely anything to get my mom back. "You used to be a good cop. You fought the good fight, and people could count on you to do the right thing. What the hell happened?"

His expression shuts down and he grits out, "I'm just as dedicated as I ever was, girl. I've just learned to prioritize the cases I have some hope of solving. We're understaffed and don't have the manpower to go gallivanting off every time you get a wild idea in your head that you think might be a clue."

Since nothing else is working, I lure him with a promise. "You should be eager to hear this new information. It might bust the case wide open."

His eyes light up for a second before his expression turns suspicious. "You better not be feeding me a line, Amy Beth."

I bring my hand up and use one finger to make an X on my chest. "Cross my heart, Sergeant Pike. I wouldn't joke about something like this."

He motions for me to sit down at his desk and pulls out a reporting form. Most of the other officers type it into their computers, but David Pike is not only old, he's old school.

He sighs, pen poised, "What do you have for me today, girl?"

I launch into the whole spiel about how the pharmacist just verified this morning that my mom's meds had been redirected to my grandfather's farm for the last seven months, and why would he do that unless she was there and needed those meds to stay alive.

I can tell I've captured his attention. That glassy, bored, dead-eyed look he normally gives me has been replaced with genuine interest.

"What medication is she on, exactly? One of his farmhands might have done that in order to sell the pills."

I reach into my purse and pull out a copy of her med list. It's the one we were given the last time she saw her doctor. "This is everything she's on. I don't know the costs of anything."

I wait while his eyes scan over the list. He drops it onto his desk. "She's not on any medication that would have street value. That makes your theory that she's at Grayson's place more likely, than fraud."

"That's what I thought. I went out this morning and confronted him."

"You shouldn't have done that, Amy Beth. You know your grandfather's a cantankerous old fool who is far too used to getting his own way. He's not been right since your grandma died."

"You ain't wrong about that, sir. When I told him I was going to report this new bit of information to the police, he set his hunting dogs on me."

Sergeant Pike went ramrod straight in his chair. "Those dogs of his are practically feral. I tried to get an order to have them put down a couple of years ago, but the judge wouldn't sign off on it."

"Do you think all this is enough to get a search warrant?"

He nods. "Yeah, but if what you're saying is the truth, time is of the essence. Rufus might move her since he knows we're coming."

My stomach twists in knots as I realize that he's right. I never should have gone out there myself. I might have messed up our only chance to get to her before he moves her.

Before I can apologize, he speaks up, "Instead of taking the time to get a search warrant, I'd be willing to go out on a limb and make a wellness check based on this information. A family member or concerned citizen has to request one though."

Hope blooms in my chest because this might be the day I finally find my mom. "Alright, I'm my mother's power of attorney and I want you to do a wellness check because I believe she's at my grandfather's house because that's where her meds were redirected to after she went missing."

The sergeant's hand comes out to rest on mine, and he gives it a little squeeze. "I know this thought has probably never entered your mind, but on the off-chance that we find her there and she doesn't want to leave, we can't make her."

I snatch my hand away and shake my head vehemently. "My mother never wanted to set foot back on that farm, she's been estranged from my grandfather for years. Trust me, we're not gonna find any happy ending at that farm today."

"No, we're not, because you aren't going back there. You've done your part by requesting the wellness check. Now let us do our part by going out there and checking up on your mother."

"I've got to get back there. Those vicious dogs of his kept me from getting to my car. I need to get it back because it's the only ride I've got."

He sighs, "I simply don't trust you not to turn the wellness check into a screaming match with your grandfather. I know you, Amy Beth."

I throw both hands up. “This time, I’ll get straight into my car and drive away.”

“Fine. But if you start any mess at all, I’m gonna give one of my men permission to tase you and throw your ass into the back of your own vehicle and drive you outta harm’s way. And I better not hear a peep out of you afterwards.”

I stick out my hand for him to shake. “I’ll take that deal.”

Sergeant Pike reaches out to shake my hand. “I wasn’t making a deal, so much as alerting you what is going to happen if you can’t keep control of your temper.”

“Roger that. I won’t cause any trouble whatsoever.”

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:38 am

Venom

It's been a month since we started our surveillance. We're still no closer to finding out what's going on, and I didn't find anything more about the mystery woman I saw. Since the morning I got distracted and let that van escape, out-of-state vans have become a rare occurrence and hardly ever use that exit. So it's with a heavy heart that I arrive at one of the local coffee shops to meet up with Rage.

Rage gestures to me from one of the back tables and lifts two coffees into the air. I walk straight back and slide into the seat across from him and take a sip of the warm brew he gives me.

"Damn, that's good bro," I tell him, genuinely pleased with his choice in coffee.

"I told the barista to add two shots of espresso."

"I can tell this is going to be my new favorite place," I tell him brightly.

Rage always knows when I'm faking it though. It's like this fucker is a mind reader.

"You wanna stop pretending everything is okay, and tell me what's bothering you?"

"I'm the one who fucked up the surveillance, if I hadn't taken my eye off the ball we might have gotten some more intel."

"What do you mean? We've all been working on that. How is it that you're blaming yourself?"

“Remember that first day when we got our assignments?”

“Yes,” he responds. “You were to go out to the exit they were all using at that time.”

“It was exit 408. I got there and was distracted by a woman—”

“Whoa! Dude, seriously it’s time you got yourself laid,” Rage interrupts.

I shake my head, “No, it wasn’t like that. I saw this woman running for her life, that’s what distracted me. Long story short, some old codger in hunting gear shot my drone out of the sky. By the time I went back and got another drone, it was too late. They must have seen the drone get shot down and changed up their pattern.”

“Fuck, Ven. I bet Siege was pissed.”

“Not really. He understood,” I say.

“So what about the woman?” he asks.

“She was being chased by his dogs. She barely made it to the interstate and jumped in a car with some woman and they sped away.”

“Oh fuck. That is seriously messed up. So what’s the story? You find anything out?”

I take another sip of my coffee, before answering, “No. I checked the local newspapers but there was nothing listed regarding crimes or attempted kidnappings. And no police reports made. We got Brent, who works at the local cop shop to see what he could find, there was a wellness check made to that address later on that day, but nothing untoward found. I’m guessing it just looked worse than it was.”

“I’m assuming he’s the one that shot your drone out of the sky, right?” Rage asks.

I nod, totally hating myself for getting distracted by a situation, “I got involved in something that wasn’t my concern, and inadvertently alerted them that they were being spied on.”

“I don’t know about anyone else but something like that would have been distracting to me as well. I would have chosen saving a woman’s life over tracking that van, if it came right down to it.”

“That was my train of thought at the time. I can’t imagine what was going on in that situation, but I’ve lain awake worrying about her more than once.”

“Yeah, I hope she’s okay too. It sucks that your favorite drone got destroyed. That was the one with the cool zoom lens, right?”

“Yeah, I spent months tinkering with that thing. It was the smoothest flying drone in my entire collection.”

“Well, if you built it once, you can build it again, maybe even better.”

“Working on it now, I wanna incorporate thermal imaging. When we rescued Haze’s old lady, I had to get Talon to scope the place out with his infrared goggles and send me the images. Hopefully if this baby works, then we got enhanced eyes in the sky.”

“Wish I had your brains when it comes to things like that. I can hardly get my computer and tablet to sync.”

Gleefully draining the last of my coffee from the cup, I tell him. “I wish I had your talent for saving people’s lives. You’re invaluable to the club, especially now Doc’s semi-retired.”

“At least the old coot still rides with us, they don’t make ‘em like that anymore. I’ve

got him to thank for introducing me to you guys. After leaving the military and taking a job in EMS I was still lost—at least my battlefield surgery skills aren't going to waste."

I shoot him a quick grin. "Bet you ended up with more than you bargained for there, didn't you, my friend?"

"You have no idea," he responds grimly, before glancing at his watch. "I need to get out of here. Got another assignment to ride down by the lake. I feel like I've been riding that same stretch of road for ages."

"It's only been a month," I remind him.

"Don't give a shit. It's boring as hell."

I watch him walk out and toy with the idea of getting another brew. When my eyes drift over to the bar, I almost fall out of my chair. Working behind the counter is the woman from the cornfield. I know it's her by the long, dark, almost hip length hair and the way she moves. She's the most beautiful woman I think I have ever seen, and for a moment I'm almost entranced.

Forcing myself to remain seated, I wonder how to approach her, she's been on my mind on and off—more curious about what happened to her, than anything else as I hadn't gotten a good look at her face. Back then I'd been too focused on trying to see if she got away. I can't very well walk up to her ask why she was running for her fucking life that day in the cornfield, as there were no reports filed at the cop shop, and she's looking bright and breezy it might have been nothing—plus telling her I was watching makes me sound like a creeper. I'm still gonna go chat her up though, I ain't letting a beauty like this slip through my fingers.

I run my fingers through my hair, then pick up my cup and head to the counter.

She sees me approaching from the back of the room. Before I can get to her, two large men come stalking through the front door. One jumps the counter and pushes her back. I put on a burst of speed because I think they're here to rob the place. By the time I get to the front I can see he's got his hand clamped around her upper arm and is whispering in her ear.

As I reach the counter, the second man tries to slam into me with his shoulder. Unfortunately for him, he's out of shape. I shove him back with one hand and send him sprawling on his ass. I lean over, grab the first guy by his shirt collar and haul him over the counter with one hand, slinging him down onto the floor with his buddy.

"Don't know what the fuck you two are up to, but it's not going to happen on my watch. If you know what's good for you, you'll get the fuck out, right goddamn now."

Before he can get turned around to look at me, the first guy asks, "Who the hell do you think you are?" Once he sees me, his face pales. "Sorry, we don't want any trouble from the Savage Legion."

"If you don't start trouble, there won't be any trouble. Right?"

He nods as he scrambles to his feet and shoves his friend towards the door. I turn to the woman behind the counter. "Assholes move comically fast when they're in danger of getting a beat down from an even bigger and meaner asshole."

Her eyes narrow as if she's trying to figure out if there's a hidden message in my words.

I quickly clarify, "I'm a bigger and meaner asshole to men who like to harass women, not to the women themselves."

She presses her lips together like she's trying to keep herself from laughing.

I scratch the back of my neck with one hand, embarrassed by my awkward presentation. "Sorry, that all sounded better in my head than it did coming out of my mouth."

"No, don't apologize. I get it. Believe it or not, I'm the queen of awkward remarks. Just between you and me, nothing ever sounds as good when we say it out loud, as it did floating around in our heads."

I set my cup down on the counter, wishing the floor would open up and swallow me whole. "Thanks for understanding. I was hoping for a refill for the road."

She snatches the cup up, tosses it in the trash and pulls out an extra-large cup. "Absolutely. It's on the house." As she moves around, making my coffee, she glances over her shoulder to give me a relieved smile, "I should be the one thanking you for moving those assholes along."

Leaning on the counter, I ask, "Do they come in here a lot?"

"No, this is only the third time I've seen them here. I guess, today they thought they saw an opportunity and took it."

There's a strange expression on her face and I feel like she's not telling me everything, but I let it go. Instead, I say, "Neither of them looks too bright. If they give you any problems again, you can always call me." I slide one of my cards across the counter for her to take at her leisure.

After handing me my coffee, she picks up the card. "You're a member of the Savage Legion MC. Is that an outlaw biker club?"

“No, ma’am. We’re just men who like to ride and enjoy the brotherhood a motorcycle club has to offer. We truly aren’t into anything illegal.”

She’s holding my card in one hand and flicks it with two fingers of her free hand and teases me, “You mean except for roughhousing the town idiots when they get out of control, right?”

I give her a lopsided smile, “Except that, ma’am. I guess I’ll see you around.”

“It’s strange, I grew up in southern Las Salinas and I’ve not seen you around these parts before.”

“I live on the other side of the tracks, northeastern Las Salinas. My club is up that way as well. I only started coming down this way for the scenery. It makes for a nice ride.”

“Oh yeah, it is beautiful down this way, especially the southern magnolia trees. They’re due to burst into bloom over the next few weeks.”

“Well, I’d be a fool to pass up a breathtaking display like that.”

She chuckles and gives me an amused look. “Then I guess I’ll be seeing a lot of you in the near future.”

I take a step back towards the door and lift my cup into the air. “Thanks for the java. Hope the assholes stay away.”

Jesus, I turn and bolt out the door before yet more stupidity falls from my lips. I have never in my life been tongue-tied around a woman. I mean never, until today. Dammit, she was flirting with me, and I didn’t shoot my fucking shot. There’s something about this woman that turns my world upside down. She’s beautiful to be

sure, with long black hair that flows down to her waist, pale blue eyes, and skin so snowy white that it makes me think of what Snow White would look like if she were a vampire.

I shake my head, hoping to shake some sense into myself. Thank God, none of my club brothers were there to witness that blundering mess. I get on my bike and get back to my assignment of putting more drones in the air to look for those vans. While it's been all quiet near exit 408, I still think they were using that exit for a reason, so I keep concentrating my efforts in that area.

As I ride along the highway, the pretty woman at the coffee shop is still taking up space in my head. But now that I know where to find her, the thoughts aren't nearly as intrusive. It's strange that the old man had his dogs chasing her down, and now there are assholes harassing her at her workplace. I can't help but wonder if the south is just asshole territory in general, or if this harassment is targeted at her for a particular reason?

Rolling that around in my head, I continue to search for vans with my drones. After a couple of hours, I'm lucky enough to catch sight of one, but it's traveling towards the onramp to the interstate from parts unknown. I capture the footage and send it to Zen, like our club officers have instructed.

After a few more hours, I pack up and head to the clubhouse. At least the day wasn't a total bust. As I pass by the coffee shop, I notice that it's heaving. The windows are huge, and I can see three other employees and at least forty people inside, all laughing and worlds happier than I feel.

I'm one of the few brothers who lives at the clubhouse full-time. I've actually snagged myself Rigs' old suite. Since he moved out, it had been used for guests, but

such prime clubhouse real estate was going to waste, and Siege finally said that as the most senior resident I could move in. I could probably get my own apartment now as my drone side-business is doing okay, but I like living here, onsite. I have a bedroom, a small living room, a kitchenette, and a bathroom. After stashing my drone, having a quick wash, and changing the dish of water in Guivre's tank—she's my ball python, she's currently shedding so has to have a humid environment—I meander out to the bar and start making drinks. Prospects have been assigned to run the bar now that Mel is more focused on her baby and her other business. Mel and Tracker bought the bar in town from our club and spend most of their time there. The problem is, the prospects can't seem to mix a good drink to save their fucking lives. I lend a hand whenever I feel like it, because my club brothers deserve a nice drink after a long hard day.

Also, since I can't pour drinks and fuck, the club girls aren't on my tail constantly if I'm behind the counter. Brittany tries her best, though.

She slinks over the bar in a low-cut belly shirt and pouts. "Do you have to tend bar again tonight?"

"I don't have to do anything I don't want to do, Brit. You should know that about me by now."

"Then why don't you come out and play?" Sticking her surgically-enhanced tits in my face, she purrs, "I'll make it worth your while."

"I guess your last turn on my cock must have been magical, because it's left you craving more. Am I right?"

Her expression turns cagy, and she glances back at Haze and Anna who are cuddling up at a table, chatting and drinking with Vapor and Trix. "You could say that. I wouldn't disagree."

“Look Brit, I’m not your emotional support animal, or part of the dog and pony show you trot out to make Haze jealous.”

She makes a disgruntled sound in the back of her throat. “It’s not like that. Why do you have to be so difficult?”

“I know you like to cozy up to one brother and that your goal is to end up in a property cut. There ain’t nothin’ wrong with having goals. I just need you to know that you’re barking up the wrong tree with me. I’m not looking to settle down and I don’t do relationships.”

She jumps to her feet and flings back indignantly, “There is nothing wrong with me.”

Staring her straight in the eye, I tell her, “I never said there was. You’re beautiful, smart, and know how to go after what you want. You’re gonna make some guy an outstanding old lady. That man just isn’t going to be me and might not end up being any man associated with this club. Just hang tough and your time will come.”

Her shoulders relax. “You’re real nice, Venom. I wish you and I had a spark.”

“Yeah, me too,” I fib. “I guess it’s not in cards for us to end up together.”

She leans over the bar and gives me a kiss on the cheek. “You’re good people, Ven.”

I glance around and realize no one is paying us any attention at all. I respond jokingly, “Don’t go spoiling my moody loner image. I worked hard for that shit.”

She pretends to lock her lips with one hand. “My lips are sealed. If anyone asks, you’re the biggest, meanest biker in this club.”

“Attagirl, Brit. Now go stalk your next crush like a big game hunter.”

She twirls around and off she goes. Rage slides onto a barstool out of nowhere. “Shit’s not funny, Ven. You just pumped that girl up to prey on one of our club brothers.”

I laugh out loud. “Have you forgotten where you’re at, my friend? Half the brothers come here desperate to be preyed on by one of the club girls.” I gesture around the room. “Notice how there are six or eight brothers for every woman? That’s a lot of fucking brothers going not getting sex every night.”

He shrugs, “Yeah, just because I think she’s a nuisance, doesn’t mean every man in this club does. Who knows, she might luck out and end up with one of the brothers?”

I slide him a whiskey sour across the bar, like all good bar tenders I know what all my club brothers drink. “All I know is the brothers are grown ass men. They’re capable of saying yay or nay to a club girl all on their own. They don’t need you issuing an early warning every time she approaches someone.”

He picks up his whiskey and downs it in one swallow. “You’ve clearly never dated the toxic bitches I have, and it shows.”

I laugh at his backhanded compliment and refill his glass. After the fourth drink he glances up at me. “You know, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you drink. Not even once.”

“Sure you have,” I fib. “I drink off and on all the time, just not when I’m tending bar.” Pointing off to one of the pool tables, I distract him, “It looks like two prospects are about to get in a fight over Brittany, your night off might end up being cancelled if you’ve got to patch up the fuckers.”

Luckily for all of us, Rigs is all over the situation, so we don’t have to go running over to break it up.

Rage slams his empty glass down on the bar and states loudly, “I told you she was fucking toxic, and you didn’t believe me. Now she’s turning brother against brother.”

I refill his glass, going easy on the whiskey. “Yeah, you really called that one, bro.”

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:38 am

Amy

The tall, handsome, ripped biker has been coming into the coffee shop nearly every morning, literally at the crack of dawn for the past few weeks. I've learned that his name is Venom, or Ven as he prefers, and in addition to being drop dead gorgeous, he's nice, polite, protective, and has a fantastic sense of humor. If he weren't a biker, I would think of him as relationship material. But since he is, I don't. Instead, we're developing a fast friendship.

Because I've spent my life worrying about my mother, most of my relationships have fallen by the wayside. That's why making a new friend is so important to me. I work my hours, look for my mom, and sleep. I thought I'd gotten close with finding my mom's medications had been sent to my grandfather's farm, but Sergeant Pike found nothing suspicious. If I hadn't been there with him, I'd have thought he was just saying that to get me off his back, but it was true. There was no sign of my mom, and the only people there were the farmhands.

My grandfather never apologized for setting his dogs on me, though looking back, maybe I just misread the situation. I'd been so jacked up with what I'd found that I went in like a wrecking ball. That's probably why he'd sent two of his asshole farmhands to tell me to back off. I didn't tell Ven I knew who those men were, because if he went after my grandfather then things might end up even worse.

Talking to Ven is the only thing I do that fills my cup, so I'm hesitant to give it up or let things turn romantic in case it spoils what we have.

Our shop opens at five in the morning and he's always outside waiting for me to

unlock the building. Today is no different. He's sitting there on his motorcycle, the light from the streetlamp brings out the reddish highlights in his long brown hair. The sun isn't cresting over the horizon just yet and all the stars are still visible in the sky. I've always found the dawn hours before the sun rises and the moon sets hauntingly beautiful. Sharing the moment with Ven every morning makes it all the more special.

I open the door and turn the closed sign over to open as we enter. Today, I've got the scrapbook I made with everything I could find about my mother's disappearance. I've finally saved up enough to hire a private investigator to help me find her, I'm going to meet with them after work. I drop the scrapbook onto the end of the bar, along with my purse and coat.

Ven always pulls up a stool to the counter and watches me open the shop. We talk as the first pot of coffee brews. I like having company while I open. I don't feel so alone and vulnerable.

I ask, "Did you sleep well last night?"

"Yeah, I did. I slept like a log because I tended bar at the Savage Legion's clubhouse until around one in the morning."

"Jesus, you only went to bed four hours ago! How are you even functional this morning?"

He snorts a laugh. "I'm never functional until I get at least two cups of coffee into me."

I pour him a cup of java and glance over my shoulder, "It's sounding like a two shots of espresso kind of day."

He nods, finally perking up. "Yeah, it would be three, but I don't want to end up

going into cardiac arrest.”

I add two shots and hand it over quick as a wink.

He takes a sip and sighs. I can tell by the expression on his face that he likes my brew. I’m happier than I should be about something so insignificant.

He points to my pile of personal stuff on the end of the counter. “I see you brought your photo album. I’d love to see pictures of you growing up.”

I hesitate to tell him that my mother is missing. Ven is the one normal friendship I have that’s not marred by the greatest tragedy of my life. He sees my hesitation and his expression blanks out.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.” Coming to his feet, he stammers, “I’m sorry if I read our situation wrong. I thought we were getting to be friends. Maybe I’m that asshole customer who intrudes without realizing it. I didn’t mean to make myself a nuisance.”

When he takes a step back, I tear up. “Please don’t go. You haven’t read anything wrong. I want to be your friend badly. In fact, you’re about the only true friend I have.”

He slowly moves back and drops down onto the stool again. “If you don’t want me to see your embarrassing kid pics, that’s okay. I understand.”

I walk over with shaking hands and pull the scrapbook out from under my jacket and thunk it down in front of him.

“It’s not a photo album or a scrapbook of childhood memorabilia. It’s the place I organize everything I can find about my mom’s disappearance.”

Ven is so startled he nearly tips his coffee cup over. He quickly grabs it and sets it aside. I open the book to the first page. It's a copy of the missing persons form I filled out the day she went missing with her name printed in bold letters, Carol Ann Grayson

"I'm so sorry, Amy. I didn't know your mother was an official missing person. Why didn't you tell me?"

I'm more uncomfortable than I've ever been in my entire life. I shrug, wringing my hands in the bottom of my apron. "I don't know. Probably because I didn't think you would care. Unfortunately, I've driven just about everybody in my life off by talking about it and I didn't want to lose the one normal relationship I had left."

"Well, that's absolute nonsense. As long as you're willing to be friends with me, I'm not going anywhere."

Tears begin to gather in my eyes, and I try to blink them away. "It's just that it's been eight months already. I've tried everything I can to find her, but so far, it's been hopeless. It's pretty clear that the police are just waiting for the one-year mark so they can close the active investigation. I'm starting to lose hope that I'm going to find her alive, and I feel so guilty for having those thoughts."

"You know, my club could really help you with this. We've found tons of missing kids and reunited them with their families. Two of my club brothers are married to social workers from Child Protective Services. Another one is married to a social worker from the local women's shelter."

I get excited. "Do you think she might have ended up at the women's shelter? I didn't even think to look there."

He thinks it over for a minute and shrugs. "Anything's possible. She might have had

some kind of head injury or amnesia, forgot who she was and ended up getting referred there when she was discharged from hospital, for lack of better options.”

I roll this around in my head while he begins flipping through the pages. Halfway through, he glances up at me. “This is a whole lot of detailed information. You did a good job of keeping a hold of all the details. If you trust me to take your book to my friend Rigs, I’ll bet he could really help us drill down on the details that matter.”

“I brought the book with me because I finally saved up enough money to hire a private investigator to do exactly that. Maybe I could hire your friend instead? That’s if he’s not too expensive,” I wait, barely able to breathe while he thinks it over.

“I can practically guarantee he’ll take your case, but with Rigs and his old lady, Mattie, it’s not about money, they do it for the satisfaction of reuniting families. Any costs incurred are covered by the Savage Legion.”

“If you and your club can help me in any way, I’d be forever in your debt.”

“I promise you that we won’t rest until she’s rescued, or we find out what happened to her,” he states solemnly.

I’m almost too choked up to reply, so I just nod.

He closes the book and looks at me with such empathy. “Tell me what the police had to say about this case.”

I swallow the lump in my throat and speak freely about my experiences with local law enforcement. “The police sergeant at our local police department is David Pike. He’s a good man, but he thinks my mom ran away. He didn’t think of checking local homeless and women’s shelters either. When you go through the rest of the scrapbook, you’ll see that I came up with ideas and clues along the way although he

became increasingly resistant to investigating each one. I think he's super tired of dealing with me."

Ven scowls, "Why would he be tired of dealing with the family of a missing person? That's a crucial part of his job description."

Quickly, I try to explain the whole situation before he starts to think that Sergeant Pike is a typical corrupt small-town officer. "I've been running him in circles. Every time I think there's a new lead, I cajole him into investigating it. Every single time he comes up empty handed. I guess it gets frustrating for him."

"Again, that is his job," Ven says gruffly. "He should be accustomed to running down leads that turn into dead ends, since investigations are conducted by the process of elimination."

I press on with my story, "A while back, I found out my mom's medications had been getting delivered to my grandfather's farm. They've been estranged since I was a child."

His frown gets deeper, and his lips press into a firm line before he speaks, "That's weird. I hope Pike got a search warrant and checked it out."

"Since her meds were going there, I asked him to do a wellness check on her."

"Let me guess, it turned out to be another dead end." His voice was about as aggravated as I felt at the time.

"Not only was it a dead end, but the whole situation blew up in our faces. My anger was off the chain when I first got the verification from the pharmacy that her meds were going to his place. I went out there on my own to confront him. I guess I pushed him too far because he sicced his dogs on me."

Venom opens his mouth, looking for all the world like he's about to tell me something important but he stops in his tracks, his mouth snapping closed.

“Needless to say, I had to leave my car behind. Since I can't get to work or any damn where else, I talked Sergeant Pike into letting me go with him to get the car. He was reluctant but I promised to keep my mouth closed, get in my car, and leave while they did the wellness check,” I say.

Venom gestures for me to continue.

“By the time Sergeant Pike and I made it back to the farm, my grandfather and all his farmhands were weaponed up and standing in front of the house. Something about seeing them all standing there blocking the entrance to the house made me think for sure she was being held in there. When they tried to turn Pike away, I went a bit mental on the lot of them.”

His eyes pop open and he asks, “What the hell did that look like?”

I sigh, feeling my face get red as memories of that morning rose in my mind. “I just lost it and went flying towards them like a hellcat, but it didn't do me any good as Sergeant Pike got me to sit in his car while he went inside. He found nothing there, no trace that my mom had ever been in the house.”

His expression turns to disbelief. “I can't believe that she wasn't there after all.”

“Yeah, me either. The worst part was that my grandfather used my behavior to get a restraining order against me. So, in the unlikely event that I go snooping around his place again and get caught, I'll wind up in jail.”

Ven's eyes narrow as the look on his face shifts to one of suspicion. “How fucking convenient was that? The old man couldn't have planned it better if he tried.”

My breath catches in my throat. It had never entered my mind that my grandfather might have set up the perfect trap to keep me away from his farm. “Shit, you might be right about that. I’ve been a gigantic pain in the ass, I’ve probably seen him more times in the last eight months than I have in the last eight years. But every lead brings me right back to his doorstep.”

His head snaps up to look at me. “That can’t be a coincidence.”

“I didn’t think so either, but I saw the video myself. Sergeant Pike looked everywhere, attic, basement, closets, bathroom showers and even under beds. I know that house like the back of my hand and she wasn’t there.”

“Don’t you have brothers or sisters to help you look?”

I shake my head, “No, there’s only ever been me and my mom.”

“Can’t you get the rest of your family on board, aunts, uncles, cousins?” He must see by the look on my face that I don’t have anyone to rely upon. “So, what you’re telling me is that you’ve got nobody, and you’ve been looking for her for coming up on eight months.”

I nod, fighting back the tears once again, aggravated with myself for always getting so emotional when it comes to finding my mother. “It’s been really hard but if I don’t find her, no one will.”

“And you’ve been fighting this all on a barista’s salary?”

“To be quite honest, I was once reasonably comfortable. I had a photography studio, a decent apartment, and earned a good income. My photography studio caught fire and burned down, and I haven’t been able to rebuild it because I’ve spent my entire savings and the insurance payout trying to find my mom. I’ve sold off everything I

own, including what photography equipment wasn't damaged by the fire. I work the early morning shift because most offices aren't open this early. It frees up the rest of my day to keep the search alive."

When I'm finished, he tells me, "I just want you to know that you are hands down the best daughter in the entire world. You've been going at this on your own for far too long. That stops now. From this moment on, you'll have the Savage Legion MC spearheading this search and rescue."

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:38 am

Venom

I zip the large book up in my leather jacket and hit the road after Amy agrees to come to the clubhouse when she gets off work at one o'clock this afternoon. Luckily, Rage is there so I grab a coffee, walk up to him, and join him at the bar.

“When did you turn into Ven Bob Square Chest?” He teases.

I frown at him because I'm not really in the mood for joking around right now. I unzip my vest and pull out the scrapbook. “Are you up for helping me solve a missing persons case?”

He jerks back and stares at me for a second. “Of fucking course I am. How old is the kid?”

I take a sip of my coffee before answering him. “No, dude. This isn't one of Rigs' missing kids cases.”

Glancing down at the scrapbook curiously, he asks, “Then who the hell is it?”

“Remember that woman I told you about who was being chased by dogs?”

“Shit! Is she missing?”

I open the book and point to the first page. “No, but her mom is.”

Glancing down at the picture of an older woman with light brown hair, he says, “I

don't understand, did this have something to do with the day you saw her?"

"No. Yes... It's complicated," I say.

"How's about you start at the beginning and tell me everything?" When he's not bitching about stuff, Rage is so calm it makes me feel hot-headed by comparison.

I rake my hand through my hair and tell him, "I have a better idea. I was going to get Rigs to help us out on this one. Maybe we could find him, and I'll tell it all in one go?"

Rage gets to his feet, nodding. "Yeah, that sounds like a plan, because getting information out of you is like pulling fucking teeth."

I love Rage like a brother, but he can get my hackles up faster than anyone else in this club. Ignoring his angry muttering I head towards the offices at the back.

We find Rigs in the office he shares with his old lady. Mattie's at work, and he seems to be working on a schedule for the prospects. He has an open-door policy and the older brother glances up briefly as we walk in.

Rigs was a chaplain in the Marines when he was young. Even today he wears black dress pants and a matching button up shirt underneath his cut, with a hefty cross hanging around his neck. He's the spiritual advisor and the one who keeps us all on the straight and narrow. I've always liked and respected Rigs, though I know he's not someone you'd want to get on the wrong side of. I've heard Tank talk about how Rigs was the very first man patched into the club by our founder, Claw.

He stands up as we enter. I watch his eagle eye rove over us and zero in on the scrapbook under my arm.

“Good morning,” he says good-naturedly. “Did you bring memories to share with me today?”

“I’m afraid not, sir. I’ve brought more problems.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, why can’t you ever just speak directly?” Rage, grumbles.

“You shouldn’t take the Lord’s name in vain, brother.” Rigs’ rebuke is quiet and offhand like he doesn’t really expect us to obey but feels like he should mention it anyway. Gesturing towards the long table at the back of his office, he suggests, “Why don’t the two of you have a seat. We can take our time and talk this out.”

No sooner does my ass hit the seat than Rage starts telling Rigs all about how the lady from the cornfield’s mother is missing and we need to find her. Rigs knows all about the woman my best friend is referring to because I fessed up to the club officers about how I got distracted with her being in danger and lost sight of the van I was supposed to be tracking. And since her grandfather shot down my drone it alerted the drivers of those vans that there were eyes in the sky. The whole debacle is embarrassing.

Rigs rubs his chin for a second before asking, “Is all that true?”

“Yeah, her name is Amy Grayson, and I found her working at a coffee shop near the location I was staking out at the time. We got to talking and she eventually told me about how she’s sold all her personal possessions to keep the search going for the last eight months.”

Rigs and Rage are all ears as I tell them all the details Amy told me earlier this morning. When I’m finished, I shove the scrapbook towards him. “She brought this to work with her because she’s saved up enough to hire a private investigator. I told her that I would look into it myself and our club would probably help out as well. I know

she's in a bad way financially, so she can't really afford to waste money on a PI."

By this point both Rigs and Rage are carefully scrutinizing each and every page. The last page has a small flash drive taped to the paper with a notation that it's a copy of the footage from the officer's cell phone when they performed the wellness check.

Rigs detaches it and pulls his laptop over to have a look at it. "Whoever took this is dedicated to solving the case. He didn't miss anything. It's interesting that they didn't find any trace of the meds that were supposedly being delivered there. What did the grandfather say about that?"

"Her grandfather is shift as fuck. Just claimed he never received them, and the pharmacy is in error. The stupid fucker used her desperation to get inside the house and look for her mother against her to obtain a restraining order. She's not allowed within five hundred feet of the property or fifty feet of the old man."

Rigs' head lifts to look at me. "That's pretty extreme. Do you think the grandfather fears for his safety around her?"

I snort a laugh. "Not fucking likely. He seems to be toting around his rifle with him most of the time and has a bunch of farmhands who like to roughhouse women. She's barely a hundred and twenty pounds soaking wet."

Rigs responds thoughtfully, "You know what that means, right?"

"That he's a grumpy old man who doesn't want to deal with her ass anymore," I respond.

"No, getting a restraining order he means he doesn't want her to be eyes on with whatever's happening at his place."

“Well she has gone to the police a bunch of times. She also told me that when she came along for the wellness check she kind of lost it with her grandfather, so that might have had something to do with it too. Amy told me that every clue seemed to lead back to her grandfather but now she’s too scared to keep going out there because if she gets arrested, there’ll be no one looking for her mother. Plus if her mother isn’t at his place, there’s no real point to risking her freedom to keep snooping around his farm.”

“Your new friend has done a good job of gathering information and organizing it in a way that makes it easy to understand what she’s done so far, but we need to branch out. I’ll call Zen and ask him to do a thorough online search for anything your friend might have missed. I’ll also ask him to ferret out all the information he can about that grandfather, Rufus Grayson, and his farmhands. That should give us a feel for how much of a danger he poses.”

“That’s a good idea. “I’m worried about her mother because she has a bunch of serious medical conditions and she’s been missing for coming up on eight months.”

“Statistically speaking, the longer a person is missing, the less chance there is of finding them alive. Is your friend aware that instead of this being a rescue mission, it might turn out to be a recovery mission.”

“I told her exactly that, but she’s convinced her mom’s alive, and the grandfather knows where his daughter is.”

“Is there any chance Amy’s mother is avoiding her and taking shelter at her father’s farmhouse?”

“I don’t think so. Amy reported that her mother had nothing to do with her grandfather for years, and after her step-grandmother died almost two years ago, Amy had little contact. I didn’t want to pry, but I’m suspecting abuse of some kind.”

Rage speaks up, “I need the most current list of the mother’s medical issues and prescribed medications so I can have the proper treatment and meds on hand when she’s rescued.”

“Amy has agreed to come to the clubhouse when she gets off work today. I’m sure if that information isn’t in the scrapbook, she can give it to you, then.”

“If she’s in bad shape, we might have to chopper her out to one of the big medical centers. I’ve got a contact with Air Life Line. I’ll call and give him a heads up that he might be needed,” Rage says.

“I’m sure Amy would be thrilled to hear you’ll be managing the medical details.”

“I just hope that wherever her mother is, those missing meds are getting to her,” Rage says, looking concerned.

“Yeah, me too,” I tell him grimly.

Rigs calls in the other club officers, as well as Zen and Smoke. We devour the information in the scrapbook and begin brainstorming possible scenarios.

We’ve got some ideas about what might have happened, I’ve been waiting outside the clubhouse since one for Amy, and finally at just after half past one, the prospects wave her through the front gate. She parks in front of the clubhouse, and I catch her eyeing the place pretty hard when she gets out of her beat-up chevy. To be honest, her car looks more like a death trap than reliable transportation. I’m thinking about having our garage give it a once over, when suddenly I notice her cheek is bright red and she has a small cut on her lip.

I rush out to meet her in the parking lot. “Are you okay? What happened to your face?”

“The assholes you threw out a few weeks ago, came back about thirty minutes after you left.”

My anger rises hard and fast as I tilt her head back to get a look at the damage. “Fucking hell, sweetheart. They really did a number on your face. It looks like your right temple is bruising up, in addition to your cheek and lower lip.”

She glances away, clearly embarrassed. “I’ll be okay. It’s not the first time they’ve slapped me around and it probably won’t be the last.”

“Trust me it’s going to be the last time because I’m going to put them both in the fucking hospital.”

She frowns up at me and shakes my hand off her chin. “No, you’re not. We don’t have time for distractions. The only thing that matters is finding my mom. You promised me that you’d help me do that. Remember?”

I give her a single, grudging nod. “Yeah, I remember. We’re on it and we already have several ideas to explore with you.”

Her face lights us with a brilliant smile before she shuts it down, cupping her lip with her hand. I can see the cut has opened back up. I wrap one arm around her and guide her into the clubhouse. The second we step into the Rigs’ office, Rage jumps to his feet and begins acting like it’s an emergency. He sits her down and sends Rigs to get his medical kit from the armory.

Amy does not appreciate the fuss we’re making over her injuries. Her eyes keep cutting to Siege and the other brothers we’ve assembled to help us find her mom.

They don't bat an eye because taking care of her injuries comes first.

Rage shines a light in her eyes and begins asking her questions. "How long ago did this happen? Did you lose consciousness? Is your vision blurry? Have you felt lightheaded during the day? Did they inflict any other injuries?"

"No, to all of that. Honestly, they just shoved me a bit. I caught myself on the edge of the counter," she lifts up the side of her shirt to reveal a large bruise that takes up most of the right side of her ribcage.

I curse under my breath, but it's Rigs who asks the question that I've overlooked. "Why? Why do they keep attacking you? There has to be a reason."

She sighs, "They work for my grandfather on his farm, I don't know why they feel the need to keep on antagonizing me. Today they came to deliver a message. My grandfather wants me to call him, I told them to go to hell. That's when the assholes got handsy."

Rigs shoots a warning look to Siege who speaks for the first time. "You know that you can't go back to work, right?"

Amy's head whips around to look at our club president. "What? That's crazy talk. I've got to earn a living if I want to keep a roof over my head, food in my belly, and to continue searching for my mother. God, I can't just quit my job."

I squat down to look her in the eyes. I'm wondering why it's only just now I'm learning that she knows who these fuckers are, and that they aren't just some local idiots. Before I can speak, Rage tells her, "Do you know what would have happened if they broke your rib and it punctured an internal organ? You might have bled out internally without even realizing how serious the injury was. You can't keep risking yourself like this."

She starts getting emotional, so I take her hands in mine and break it all down for her. “You already said if anything happens to you, there’ll be no one to keep the search for your mother alive. You can’t afford to let those assholes take you out of action.”

Her voice is pleading when she speaks, “I need to work. I can’t live on air, and my gas tank has to have gas, especially if I can’t afford my room rental moving forward.”

Shooting Siege a quick glance, I turn back to her. “We have an opening for a bartender here at the clubhouse.”

Her eyes open wide, “I don’t know anything about mixing drinks.”

“Trust me, it’s not rocket science. I’ll be right by your side, teaching you everything I know. You learned to be a barista, right?”

She nods, still looking shocked at this latest development.

“If you can learn to be a barista, you can learn to mix drinks. It’s really not that hard. Most of the brothers drink beer anyway.”

“But I can’t really stay here, can I?”

“I have a small suite, it’s nice and big enough for two. You can take the bedroom, and I’ll have the sofa. The clubhouse is private property and guarded day and night. You’ll be safe because those assholes can’t get to you here.”

Rigs speaks up, pointing out what the rest of us are missing once again. “She’s still going to be out in the community, tracking down leads on her mother’s whereabouts. That means she’ll still going to be in danger.”

Siege says what I’m already thinking. “She needs a protector.”

“She’s mine to protect,” I announce without asking her how she feels about it.

“Put her in a property cut. She’ll be safer that way,” Siege says quietly.

“What’s a property cut? I don’t know if I like the sound of that,” Amy says, her eyes wide with confusion.

Siege pecks out a text on his phone before explaining. “The Savage Legion MC has worked hard to communicate to everyone in Salinas County that we have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to anyone messing with our old ladies or kids. Our old ladies wear black leather vests that say ‘Property Of’ whoever their old man is. Someone would have to be a complete idiot to harass any woman who has the club’s protection because every brother in our club would drop down on them in a heartbeat.”

I see Amy looking nervous and I quickly add, “It’s more like a protection thing. It doesn’t mean that the women literally are the property of the club.”

Siege follows up with, “Although I’m sure you don’t yet understand it, property cuts are very much coveted by the women associated with our club, but brothers only give them to a woman when he’s dedicating himself to her exclusively.” As if catching his mistake, he quickly adds, “Or in your case it’s being offered because you desperately need the protection. If those men that have been beating on you see you with Ven, wearing a Savage Legion MC property cut, I guarantee they’ll steer clear of you because if they don’t, our club will rain hellfire down on them.”

Amy perks up a little, “I think you’re right about that. When Ven got on them for messing me the first day we met, they seemed really worried about triggering a response from your club. I would even go so far as to say they were scared.”

Siege grins. “They should fear us because we won’t be playing around if they

disrespect our club or mess with our old ladies.”

She starts to nod, as understanding sets in. “Alright, I’ll stay here, work at your bar, and wear the property cut for as long we continue looking for my mother.”

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Amy

V en sits close to me as we begin to go over the information from my mom's case. They must have really been studying the material I collected, because they were familiar with all the details and were even putting forth a theory about what might have happened to her.

Rigs talks about his theory first. "I believe that her meds were redirected to the farm before she was abducted. You said that she's been estranged from her father for many years. I'm thinking that grabbing her off the streets or dragging her kicking and screaming out of her apartment would have been risky."

"That's true," I tell him. "My old apartment was right in the center of town and my mom almost never left it."

Rigs flicks through her notes and looks at me, "Is she agoraphobic?"

I shake my head, "No, she just didn't like leaving her home. I think she saw it as her sanctuary, but she could go out if she needed to, for medical appointments or the rare few times I could coax her out."

Rigs responds, "I think the perfect way to lure her out was to redirect her meds, act like it was an accident and tell her that she has to come and get them personally."

My heart jumps into my throat because I feel this gruff biker preacher is onto something.

“I could see that happening, she might not want anything to do with her father, but getting her meds is possibly the one and only reason she might be persuaded to go to his house.”

Ven pulls a chair over and sits beside me. “You said she was estranged from her father. Can you think of any reason he would want her to stay at his house?”

“He used to slave her out,” I respond bitterly. “Her mother died during childbirth. I think he resented her, she had an awful childhood, no physical abuse. More that he ignored her, that is until she got older and more useful. He used her to cook, clean, do laundry for him and all his farmhands. That went on until she was sixteen, around that time he met my step-grandmother. Elsie, my step-grandmother put a stop to it, she was a nice woman, but by then the damage had been done. My mom left the day after the wedding and barely spoke to him again.”

“Did you have contact with him?” Rigs asks.

“Yeah, even though she hated him, she didn’t want to keep me from him. But it wasn’t like happy families or anything, usually if I visited it would just be me and my step-grandmother and I’d help her with the chores. It’s clear that’s all he thought women were good for,” I pause, as another memory flashes through my mind. “My earliest memory of my mom was watching her ironing a mountain of clothing several times a week. Because she had no schooling, she had to take whatever work was available. My father hadn’t stuck around so it was always just me and my mom. She was always so sick, but she worked all the hours God gave to keep a roof over our heads.”

“Fucking hell,” Ven asks. “How did you get out of that situation?”

“She literally worked until she dropped. It happened while I was in school. She was taken to the hospital. I was around nine or ten at the time. A social worker came into

the room and my mom didn't want to talk to her because she was scared they might take me away from her."

"My Cleo says that's common. A lot of people get the wrong ideas about social workers. Did this one help?" Siege asks.

"Yes, she told my mom what was available in terms of claiming disability benefits, low-income housing, that kind of stuff. She even helped my mom sign up for adult education lessons, that was the one thing my mom had been most ashamed about—she'd never learned to read."

"Your mom sounds like a survivor," Ven says with admiration in his voice.

I smile, "She doesn't think so, but in the years that followed, she got her GED. She was still too sick to work regularly, but we managed. She scrimped and saved and bought me my first camera. After I graduated from high school, I got lucky and found myself a job at a photography studio helping out. I couldn't afford college, but I learned on the job. Eventually, I started my own small business and made enough money to afford a nice apartment in a secured building."

"You sound like you take after your mom," Ven says and gives my hand a squeeze. My heart races at the unexpected contact. He's not wrong, people look at women like my mom and think of them as weak, but what they don't see is the sheer determination they need to fight the system and the years of conditioning.

"I guess it rubs off," I smile, but feel myself getting teary-eyed. I wish I knew what had happened to her, she has to be alive. I'm sure if she wasn't then I'd feel it.

"And she disappeared while the two of you were living there, right?"

I nod, unsure how all this information is going to help them find my mother. Most of

this was ancient history after all, “I was at work, and when I got back, she was gone. No note, no explanation, no clothing missing, nothing. It’s just like she vanished into thin air.”

Rigs flicks through the information again, I’m not sure he’s reading it, it’s more like he’s gathering his thoughts. He places the scrapbook on the table and fixes me with his serious, dark eyes, “Since the police checked out the train and bus stations and your mom doesn’t drive, the most logical explanation is either that someone drove her away, or she’s still here in Las Salinas. Your theory that your grandfather took her is the most likely scenario.”

Ven runs his hand through his hair. “So what did he do with her between the time his hunting dogs ran you off, and when the police arrived at his farm to perform the wellness check?”

Any hope I had falls flat in my chest. “That’s the bit I don’t understand. Sergeant Pike searched the entire property, even the living quarters above the barn where the farmhands stay.”

Ven wraps his arm around me, probably because my voice is trembling. I’m just so upset about not finding any evidence she was ever there.

He states confidently, “Then they moved her. That’s the only explanation I can think of—”

“Moved her, or did something else,” Rigs says darkly. I don’t want to think about that option, I can’t think about that option.

Glancing at one of his club brothers, Ven asks, “How much land is included in that farm of his?”

I almost choke when the man with the laptop responds, “A little over seven thousand acres.”

“Seven thousand acres? how is that even possible?”

He looks at his laptop, running his finger down the screen he explains, “It looks like he inherited two thousand acres and spent his entire life buying up more. He’s currently got two gas wells he’s leased to Las Salinas Oil and Gas. He harvests hardwood selectively every ten years and has several other business endeavors. The names are obscure, so I have no idea what they deal in. I’m assuming he’s leasing a lot of the property out, because his bank deposits have gone through the roof the last couple of years. Looks like he’s worth almost two million dollars at this point.”

I just sit there stunned, trying to reconcile this with what I know about my grandfather. He’s always been stingy, miserly, and mean as a rattlesnake. I can’t even imagine him as a millionaire. It literally doesn’t compute in my head. And this in the last couple of years? Then I have a thought, all this started around the time my step-grandmother died. Perhaps she was wealthy in her own right?

But however he came into the money, it’s all so odd. Elsie’s funeral was probably the last time I visited the farm before my mom went missing. After that there was no reason for me to see my grandfather, there was no love lost between us, and honestly, I just got a bad feeling being around his thuggish farmhands who turned up around the same time.

Ven can see how overwhelmed I am and hugs me tighter. I sink into him, feeling a little lost.

Siege fixes me a look, “With all that money, he can surely afford to hire a battalion of housekeepers. It makes no sense that he would be holding her at his house to cook and clean for him.”

“Then I’m at a total loss as to what’s happened to her,” I tell him, my voice cracking with emotion.

Ven states quietly, “I think we need to take a break. Amy’s been through a lot today. She needs to get some rest.”

I don’t even object because he’s right. I do need to get out of this room and take some time to decompress.

Ven’s suite is cool and clean, I don’t know what I was expecting rooms at an MC clubhouse to be like, but it’s really nice. He leads me to the sofa, and when I sink into it, I realize just how bone tired I am. Everything is hurting and my cut lip is burning, after talking with the guys and telling them about my mom, it’s like I’ve used up my entire day’s storage of energy. The next moment he’s handing me a glass of soda, which reminds me that I should be working instead of relaxing.

I take a sip, it’s deliciously cool and I ask, “So when does my shift start at the bar?”

“Don’t worry about that, there’s no rush. We have prospects tending the bar, if anything, suggesting you help out was more to make you feel better about accepting our help.” He leans over and moves a strand of hair out my face, his expression looks tender and caring.

“Thank you and your club for taking me in and for offering your help in finding my mother. You’ll tell them for me, won’t you.”

“Of course. Don’t worry, everything is in motion. We have thirty-two fully patched brothers in this club, and we’re all going to be working on locating your mom. All you need to worry about is resting up.”

“I just want to earn my keep around here. It’s just that I feel like a windup toy that ran out of energy all the sudden.”

“That’ll be the adrenaline wearing off. Rage gave you something for the pain, you still okay or do you need another dose?”

“I’m a bit sore, but I think the main thing I need right now is rest.”

“You sleep for a while. I’m going to make some food for us.”

I finish my drink and snuggle down under the blanket. All the information we just talked about is swirling around in my brain, confusing and hypnotizing me into a trance-like state where my eyes are getting more tired by the second. I don’t know when they drift shut but the dreams that come are more like nightmares.

I jolt awake with a start and smell the scent of lemon chicken. It smells so good that my stomach is growling. Lying back on the sofa, I try to remember the last time I ate. I think it was lunch yesterday. I drink coffee like it’s going out of style and try to get down a couple of bottles of water each day, but food is that thing I always mean to get around to, but often fall short. My eyes take in his room, there’s a large glass case taking up a heap of wall space, I’m about to ask what it is when I see it and let out a scream.

Ven rushes over, “What’s happened?”

“S- snake,” I stutter, pointing to the five-foot-long python that’s, for want of a better word, snuggling on the rug in front of the TV.

“Oh, that’s Guivre,” he says, bending down and picking up the creature lovingly. Seeing my face, he adds, “Shit. Maybe I should have warned you, you’re not scared of snakes, are you?”

“No,” I say, my voice sounding much calmer. “I just got a shock. What’s wrong with it?” I’m no snake expert, but it looks like there’s something wrong with its skin.

“She’s shedding, I let her out of the vivarium when I’m home. They like things to rub against, and the rug is perfect. I’ll put her back in, if you want?”

I shake my head, “I’m the house guest here, let your roommate chillax by the TV,” I start to laugh at the mental image of a snake watching a movie, then I wince. I touch the side of my face where Big Joe slapped me.

Ven places the snake back on the rug and comes over, “How’s the cheek?”

“It’s more like a dull throbbing pain now.”

“I hate that those assholes keep putting their hands on you. Care to tell me more about our enemy?”

I give him a tired half-smile because I’ve never thought of them as enemies necessarily. Just gigantic pains in the butt. For all intents and purposes, I guess they are my enemy though.

“My grandfather has four full-time farmhands and a bunch of part-timers that I don’t know very well. They came along one by one when my step-grandmother got sick. I never liked them, and when she died, I had no more reasons to visit the farm. Big Joe is the one in charge. And the one that does my grandfather’s dirty work.”

“Is he the one who beat you up today?” Ven asks gently.

I nod. “Yeah, he slapped me across the face, I don’t think he meant for me to hurt my ribs, but he doesn’t know his own strength and I went flying into the edge of the counter.”

“Tell me about the other three,” he coaxes me.

“Hal is the next biggest. Their pecking order seems to go by size. He’s a little younger and has red hair and freckles. He doesn’t seem to enjoy hurting other people as much as Big Joe.”

“That’s two down, two to go,” he saying lightheartedly. I can tell he’s making a mental note of everything I say, so I just get on with it. “The third musketeer is Dan. He’s laid-back, easygoing, and I can tell the violence bothers him. He’s always telling them to dial it down a notch and not take things too far. I used to get on okay with him when I visited the farm.”

Stopping to take a breath I finish up with, “And then there’s Edmund. He doesn’t really interact with anyone other than my grandfather. I’ve never known him to actually leave the farm. I don’t know why, he’s an odd one.”

“Well, I’m eventually going to run into them one day and they’re going to regret putting their hands on you,” he says with an element of dark promise in his tone. “The bit I don’t understand is why they have to knock you around just to deliver a message?”

“They want to be respected by my grandfather so much that they’ll do anything to curry favor with him. They know my grandfather doesn’t care about me, and they won’t get in trouble for knocking me around. To be honest, since my step-grandmother’s funeral I barely saw them. Sometimes I’d see Dan around town, but it’s only over the last month they’ve started visiting the coffee shop on the regular.”

“So around the time you went to the farm and got the local police to do a wellness check?” Ven says.

I nod.

“Sounds to me like they might be tryin’ to scare you off. Don’t worry, I’ll beat that out of them as well.”

Looking at his totally blank expression, I have to assume he’s just joking around, so I respond in kind. “Well, if the wind blew just right and you showed up, Dan would probably tell you everything he knows.”

“One way or another, I’m going to get to the bottom of this.”

Wanting to change the subject, I turn back to his pet, “What did you say her name was?”

“Guivre,” he says with a smile.

I’ve never heard of that name before, so I ask, “Where’s the name from?”

“It’s French, Guivres are mythical creatures from the Medieval French legends. They have a snake’s body, a dragon’s head, and venomous breath. Seemed a good name for her, though obviously she’s not venomous.”

“Nice to meet you, Guivre,” I say. Hopefully, she’s not the jealous kind and doesn’t mind sharing her home with another woman.

Glancing over his shoulder towards the kitchen, Ven asks, “Are you about ready to eat?”

He helps me off the sofa, I keep my hand over my side because it does still hurt. I gingerly sit down at his tiny kitchen table for two and watch while he plates food for me.”

“Everything looks and smells delicious,” I tell him, genuinely surprised that he can

pull something homemade together on the fly this way. The first mouthful is pure heaven. His chicken is tender, seasoned perfectly, and melts in my mouth. “This is the best food I’ve tasted since my mother went missing.”

“Let me guess, you were too busy snapping pictures to learn about cooking?”

I nod, not even trying to deny it. “Although I have zero interest in cooking, I’m a passable baker. My mom even taught me to make fresh bread.”

“You realize what that means, don’t you?” he responds after he swallows his mouthful of chicken.

I take a shot in the dark and reply, “That between the two of us, we can make a delicious meal?”

He’s suddenly all smiles. Pointing his fork straight at me he answers, “Damn straight. That’s exactly what it means.”

“Good thing, I’m your old lady then. We’ll be the envy of all your friends when we invite them for dinner.” I wasn’t sure who knew that we weren’t a real couple, I know his club officers did, but I wasn’t sure about the rest of the club.

His expression lights up at the mention of us acting like a real couple. “They’re all going to be disappointed to find that we’re not a couple after all this is over.” Taking a minute to gaze at me, he shakes his head and does a course correction. “Scratch that. All my single club brothers are going to be thrilled to find out you really aren’t my old lady. They’re always on the lookout for a beautiful woman to try it on with.”

“I thought your club had club girls for that,” I tell him.

A rueful smile settles onto his face. “Many of my club brothers are eager to find

someone to settle down with. Most club girls are into variety and the few that are persistently looking to settle down are a little on the dysfunctional side.”

“That’s not a nice thing to say,” I protest, thinking the women who come here to spend time with the brothers don’t deserve to be left out of consideration as potential mates.

One side of his mouth quirks up. “Wait until you’ve met a few of them and you’ll end up agreeing with me.”

We spend lunch in casual conversation and just as we’re finishing up, Rage shows up, insisting upon taking me for my x-ray. He tosses something to Ven before checking out my face again.

“Do I really need to go to the hospital?” I protest. “I feel fine. Really, I do.”

He frowns down at me, his face filled with concern “Yeah, you need an x-ray. Ribs usually heal without any intervention, but we need to know what we’re working with.”

It seems like a lot of fuss to me, but I agree to go with him. I don’t think I have much choice in the matter, given the determined look on his face. If I didn’t agree I’d probably be dragged there screaming and kicking.

Before we leave, Ven holds up the thing Rage brought with him. It’s a black leather vest that says ‘Property of the Savage Legion MC’ on the back. He helps me slide it on and zips up the front. I move around a bit, trying to see how my new armor fits. It’s relatively comfortable and it doesn’t take me long to forget I’m even wearing it.

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Venom

Rage and I take Amy to the local clinic, Rage knows everyone there, so she's seen super quick, and the doctor orders several x-rays of her ribs. Come to find out, she doesn't have a fractured rib, thank God. She's just bruised a bit and is probably gonna be sore for a week or two. The doctor gives her the once over before cutting her loose.

We hurry back to the clubhouse and brainstorm some more about her mom's case. Before we can get turned around, it's evening and Amy is wilting like a spring flower. Rage and I exchange knowing looks as we tuck her into bed.

I tell her, "Get some rest and call me if you need anything."

She's already falling asleep before we leave.

The moment we step out of my suite, Rage asks, "Are we kicking ass tonight? Because I need to blow off some steam."

"You know we are, brother. I can't wait to get my hands on those dimwits, especially the one she called Big Joe. He's the one I pulled off her that time in the coffee shop. I warned him to stay away and now he's going to pay the price for not listening."

"What kind of man beats on a woman? These guys are absolute garbage," he responds hotly.

My best friend is not wrong about that. We jump on our bikes and head for the

southern part of Las Salinas. It's after work hours, so I suspect they will be at one of the local bars or eateries. Even if we find all four of them together, I have no worries about our ability to kick their asses.

It takes a good two hours to track them down. After walking in and out of every restaurant, bar, and strip club in Las Salinas, we find them hanging out at a burger joint with a play park. They had huge piles of fucking tiny sliders on their trays like they were five or something. They had at least twenty each and were laughing it up like fucking kids.

I start walking towards their table, but Rage's hand lands on my shoulder. "Not here, brother. There are kids near."

"Fuck, you're right." Reluctantly I back off and we head outside to see if we can figure out which vehicle looks like it belongs to these assholes. It's an easy pick really, because there's only one pick-up truck that looks like it belongs on a farm. It has hay in the back and a hand-written license plate in the window with their number and the words, 'missing tag' written across the top.

Rage pulls open his pocketknife and drives it into the back tires. So much for their getaway vehicle. The last fucking thing we needed was them running us down on our motorcycles with their trashed out pick-up truck. Fifty of their trucks wouldn't equal the value of my Harley, so we were taking no chances today.

We wait around for them to come out. Half an hour later, they come out with gigantic milkshakes in their hands, just chatting away like they don't have a care in the fucking world.

We wait until they're right beside their vehicle and then I pounce on the larger one, Big Joe. Rage jumps on Hal, the next biggest. These two were the fuckers I'd seen at the coffee shop that first time. I gotta say these men are not fat, they are thick-necked,

robust, and stout as bulls. The third one just stands around, looking agitated and keeps telling us to cut it out before someone calls the cops. Amy had said there was a fourth, but I'm guessing he doesn't get out much.

I'm having way too much fun beating the everlovin' shit out of Big Joe. After giving his face a knuckle makeover, I begin punching him full force in the ribs. I can hear some crunching going on, maybe he didn't break Amy's ribs, but this fucker's gonna regret beating on a woman.

That's when Rage's voice drifts from the side, and he sounds pissed, "Aren't you finished with your guy yet? Stop fucking dancing with him and cold-cock the fucker."

I glance over and see that Hal is lying on the ground, a crumpled, bloody mess. The other man has backed off and is just watching. Big Joe is not looking so good. In fact, he glares at me as he spits blood out onto the ground.

"This is about fucking Amy, isn't it?" As if the ignorant fool had to ask.

"You know that it is. I told you she was mine and warned you not to mess with her again. I remember you saying you didn't want any trouble with the Savage Legion and now, here we are."

"Fuck, I didn't hurt her. I just gave her a slap."

The third man calls from the sidelines, "Big Joe doesn't know his own strength. It's not his fault."

I glance at Rage. "Can you shut that fucker up."

He turns to jog over to the timid, mouthy one, but Big Joe stops us. "Leave Dan alone

and tag team me. I'm all warmed up. I can take you both now."

"What's that, Joe? You in the mood to be a hero tonight?" I sneer at him.

He cracks his knuckles. "Nope, just dying for a good work out."

Rage is on him inside of three seconds and we take turns whaling on him until he's on the ground and not moving, then we turn to Dan. He's not exactly trembling but he's certainly anxiety ridden.

I point a finger right at him and articulate my words clearly. "I want you and your stupid ass friends to stay away from my old lady."

"What? Are you married or something?" Dan stammers.

I can't figure out if this one is dumb, or just plain innocent. I spell it out for him, "It means, married or not, she's my woman. What's the deal with these assholes?" I say gesturing to the two on the ground.

He glances at Big Joe and Hal, "My brothers aren't as bad as they seem."

"What do you mean, brothers? Are the three of you blood brothers? You look like a fucking variety pack."

He nods. "We're half-brothers, same father, but different mothers. We don't have the Grayson name, but Rufus is our father."

"Fuck me! You mean to tell me that you're beating up on your fucking niece?" I exclaim. Amy said nothing about that, I wonder if she actually knows they're her relatives.

“It’s not like that,” Dan tries to explain.

“What is it like then? Because to me I just see a bunch of fucking degenerates terrorizing a poor woman.”

He lets out a sigh, “You don’t understand, we gotta keep on the old bastard’s good side.”

“You can tell your fucking brothers that if they touch my woman again, I’m gonna geld them. You’re a farmer. You know what that means, right?”

He goes pale.

“So we’re on the same page. As for your bastard of a father, I haven’t decided what he’s gonna get if he doesn’t back the fuck away from Amy. Got it?”

He nods.

“So you wanna tell me what that was all about this morning?”

His lips press together as though he wants to say something but dares not. He glances away. “They were only supposed to deliver a message.”

“About that, why does the old man want to talk to Amy?”

He shrugs and digs the tip of his shoe into the dirt, making a long line. “I dunno. They don’t tell me nothin’.”

I take a step closer and look him over. “I’m beginning to think that maybe you know a hell of a lot more than you’re telling us, Dan.”

His eyes lift to mine and there's an expression playing about his face that I don't recognize. Whatever that expression is, it tells me I'm right. "Where the fuck is Amy's mother? Have you seen Carol at the farm?"

He shakes his head, looking all kinds of shifty. "They don't really let me in the house. I know that cop had a thorough look around and didn't find anything inside or around the property."

"I know that numbskull. Don't insult my intelligence. I know you fuckers probably moved her sometime between Amy leaving and the cops showing up."

"If they did, I didn't see it," he insists a little too innocently. Something about this man is triggering my Spidey senses really badly. I give it to him straight, "Let me make something abundantly clear, Amy is now mine. If any of you so much as look in her direction, I'll drop you so fast you won't know what hit you. And we're gonna find her mother. If one single hair on her head has been damaged, the three of you won't live to see the light of day."

He looks surprised. "You don't have to worry about that. Nobody's going to hurt her."

I take another step closer to him, tilting my head sideways as I try to get a handle on this guy. "If you don't know where she is she is, how can you know she's safe?"

"She's a sweet, older woman. Who in their right mind would want to hurt her?"

"Amy's as nice as the day is long and your asshole brother almost broke her ribs. That sweet, older woman is your fucking half-sister, or haven't you figured out the family relationship dynamics yet?"

He glances at his brothers, they're both coming round now, but they'll have one hell

of a headache. “I guess I never thought of it. I don’t really think of these two as my brothers as we never grew up together, it was only when they—” he stops suddenly.

“Cat got your tongue?” I ask.

He shakes his head, “No, just thinking about family stuff. It’s so fucking messed up. Okay, I understand.”

“Remember to tell your brothers what I said about Amy and her mom—and, just for the record, I don’t believe a word you said about her not being on the farm.”

“You already told them, but I’ll mention it to them again. Fair warning, they don’t ever listen to me. The two of them still think I’m a fucking kid.”

I laugh. “That sounds like a personal problem. You’re the youngest, right?”

Rage asks in a bored voice, “Are we about done here?”

I jerk my chin at him. “Yeah, I’m fucking finished for now.”

We get on our bikes, and I see Dan tending to his brothers as we pull out of the parking lot. I hope this was enough to get them to lay off Amy, but something niggling in the back of my mind tells me it’s not. As I ride back, I go over what Dan said—or rather didn’t say. Amy’s mom has to be at the farm, I don’t know what the old man is doing with her but it’s the only thing that makes sense.

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Amy

I wake up the next morning feeling refreshed and raring to go. Well, refreshed, at least—I'm still a bit sore. I was asleep when Venom came back last night, he left me a sweet note this morning, promising that he'll catch up with me later and that he didn't want to wake me. I get dressed and go downstairs looking for food. Ven's note says he's going to pick up some groceries, but in the meantime, I can help myself in the communal kitchen. I get the prospect behind the bar to pour me an orange juice, then I sit down at one of the tables and type out a message to my employer. I had the weekend off anyway, but I let him know that my injuries were more substantial than I thought and I need to take a leave of absence for a week or so. I know Venom didn't want me going back to the coffee shop and said I could work at the clubhouse bar to keep safe, but I'm not convinced that's necessary. Asking for some personal days will give me a chance to think it all over. I sip my juice as I wait for a reply.

While I wait, I unzip the property cut as it feels a little tight across my bruised rib cage. Nothing's broken so it should heal up quickly, I swallow a couple of pain pills and wait for them to kick in.

Someone walks towards me, and I hear her sneer, "We all saw your property cut. There's no need to preen."

I turn around to see a blonde. She's wearing tight, shiny, pleather booty shorts, and a t-shirt that shows off her midriff. All the club girls dress so outlandishly here, like they're going out night clubbing, rather than it being nine in the morning on a Saturday.

I can't help asking, "Are you always like this or only before you've had your caffeine fix?"

One of the prospects speaks up. "Good morning, Brittany. Didn't you just come off a ban for talking shit to one of the old ladies?"

"My business isn't your business, prospect," she hisses at him.

"Unless you're looking to get reported, slow your roll and have a seat." When she eases down onto one of the bar stools, he asks, "What ya drinking this morning?"

"A gin and coke."

"One coke coming right up because you know we don't start serving alcohol until eleven and I'm not old enough to pour drinks."

Brittany grumbles, "Damn, you're getting to be a smartass. When you finally get patched in, I'm not sleeping with you."

"Of course not. You'd have to be picked by me and that's never going to happen in a million years."

"What the hell is your problem, Evan? What have I ever done to you for you to be on my case constantly?"

"You're arrogant enough to shit talk the old ladies that I'm tasked with looking out for when their men are out on a job. I'd have to be pretty ignorant not to speak up."

She leans over and flashes the younger man a sexy smile, "Don't be that way, Evan. You know I've always liked you."

He snorts a laugh, “Don’t even try to play me, Brittany. My old man would literally throw us both out if I hooked up with you.”

Her saccharine voice turns cold in an instant. “You are going to die a virgin, Evan. And it’s going to be because your daddy’s a preacher man.”

He just laughs at her belittling words. “You know I already have a girlfriend. I bring her around sometimes.”

“Yeah, she’s a cute little thing.” Brittany leans on the bar and sips her coke. “The two of you look good together. Don’t go complaining to your dad about me. The last thing in the world I need is Rigs on my ass, or worse that mother of yours.”

He stops dead in his tracks, throws the towel he’s wiping the counter with down, and glares at her.

This beautiful club girl immediately began backtracking, “I didn’t mean anything by that. We both know your mom has balls of solid brass. She’s tiny but mighty, if you know what I mean. I respect her and your dad for finding all those missing kids.”

Evan frowns at her, “I know. I was one of those kids, remember?”

Another female voice speaks from behind us. “Britt, you should just stop while you’re ahead. Why do you even open your mouth before you’ve had a good strong dose of caffeine is beyond my ability to reason.”

Brittany spins around in her chair and gushes, “Stephanie. I didn’t see you, come join us.” Then she stammers, “How long have you been standing there? How much did you hear?”

“Enough to know you’re going the right way for a perma-ban if you keep it up.” She

smirks playfully at Brittany and sits on the other side of me. Without her even asking, Evan slides a nice cold cranberry juice over to her with a straw.

The woman turns and holds out her hand. “My name is Stephanie and I’m one of the club girls, like Brittany. I heard you snagged the last good brother.”

Brittany snorts a laugh. But it’s Evan who gestures to himself with one hand. “I’m standing right here. I’m good too.”

Stephanie just grins at him. “Maybe in five years’ time, kiddo. Anyway, you’re technically still a prospect and not a brother. Don’t worry, your time will come and when it does, you’ll be the best brother in the club.”

Evan picks the towel up off the bar and grins at her. “Tell more about how amazing I am.”

Stephanie shakes her head. “You’re not even eighteen and you already have girlfriend to stroke your ego. You don’t need me. And Brittany is right. The two of you look like you were made for each other.”

Evan’s face lights up like Christmas morning. That’s about the time Ven walks through the front door. He’s looking all kinds of handsome in his cut and faded jeans.

Ven makes a beeline for us and jerks his chin at Evan. “The club girls chatting you up, Evan? You know not to believe a damn thing they say. They’ll flatter the pants right off you if you’re not careful.

Brittany smirks. “You should know. We’ve flattered your pants off hundreds of times.”

I freeze in place as the implications of her words settle in. These two beautiful

women have had sex with my new protector hundreds of times, if what they're saying is true. Although I know that I'm his fake old lady and wearing his cut simply for the safety it affords me, something about him just randomly fucking club girls that love to point out that they've been with him in front of his supposed old lady, rubs me the wrong way.

Ven just shakes his head. "MCs having club girls is one of the oldest biker traditions. Fucking club girls is always secondary to the brotherhood and every damn thing else about MC life. The two of you would do good to remember that."

The girls just shoot him a disgruntled look and say nothing. They're disrespecting me and the prospect behind the bar. He's disrespecting them. Is this what MC life is all about? Someone constantly disrespecting whoever is lower in the pecking order. I glance away from the whole sordid situation and gaze out the window. I was in such a good mood when I woke up this morning, but now I feel like someone's burst my bubble.

I have to remind myself that I'm just here for the protection their club offered, and help in finding my mom, nothing more. I'm seeing Ven in a new light and can't decide if he's really like this, or just playing the part he's expected to play as fully patched member of the Savage Legion MC.

He holds out his hand to me. "Come with me, sweetheart. We need to talk about your mom. We'll talk over breakfast."

I hesitate for a brief moment before putting my hand in his and allowing him to walk out the door with me. I'm not sure what I expect, but he leads me over to his Harley. It's a big, beautiful bike with lots of chrome that reflects the sunlight.

He hands me a spare helmet and helps me strap it on before straddling the motorbike and patting the seat behind him. I notice that he didn't ask if I was okay riding on his

bike.

That's when it hits me like a ton of bricks. I'm supposed to be his old lady. I'm even wearing his property cut. It's expected that I ride on the back of his bike. I push aside any misgivings and awkwardly climb on and slide my hands around his waist.

Once I'm sat there with my breasts pressed against his back, I hate how right and wonderful it feels being close to him like this. Truth be told, I'm excited to be on the back of his bike, the one parked outside my coffee shops every morning for all those weeks. I used to drive to work hoping he'd be waiting there for me, and he never once disappointed me.

He glances over his shoulder, and we make eye contact. His gaze is steady and strong. "You ready to ride?"

Oh, this is him asking, maybe a little late but not after the fact. A slight smile tugs at the corners of my mouth. "Yeah, I'm as ready as I'll ever be, hot stuff." I've got to try out terms of endearment to make our fake relationship seem more believable.

His gaze turns warm for a second before he straps his helmet on and starts the engine. He revs the bike, and it vibrates so hard I can feel it in my bones.

When my hands tighten around his waist, Ven laughs and takes off, slowly at first and then picking up speed as we pull onto the interstate. Suddenly, all my angst about the club girls and how cold he was to them drifts away. It's not my job to judge him after all. That would be considered looking a gift horse in the mouth.

I hug Ven tighter because he's the only person in this whole town who took an interest in me, and the moment he found out my mom was missing, he jumped into action to help me find her. I don't know if that means he's just a good man by nature, or if he's interested in me. Whatever his reason, it doesn't matter. There is nothing I

won't do to bring my mom home safely.

I feel a warmth in my gut at the thought that maybe he is interested in me. In the weeks I've known him, I've developed quite a crush on this big, sexy biker.

Though, the thought of jumping his bones seems inappropriate because all my time and energy should be spent looking for my mother, not on thinking about steamy sex with potentially unavailable guys. But when I hold him tighter, feeling his muscles ripple when he moves slightly to maneuver the motorcycle, it's hard not to think about how his muscled body would look on top of me. It's been ages since I've been with a man. Most of my life for the past few years has been taken up trying to get my photography studio off the ground and taking care of my mom. The thought of being with Ven flips all the right switches for me. This big biker with a heart of gold is handsome, ripped, and is obsessed with protecting me.

If he showed any hints of wanting to be with me, I wouldn't turn him away. Feeling his warm body against me as I hold on tight, my imagination runs wild with what it would be like to see him naked, touch him and wrap my hand around his thick cock.

I find myself squeezing my legs around his hips without meaning to. He clearly takes this to mean I'm scared. He slows down slightly and brings one hand back to rest momentarily on my thigh. My heart beats faster as I realize he intends this to be a soothing gesture to help me calm down. It's one of the sweetest things anyone's ever done for me and makes me like him even more.

I try and keep my mind away from thinking dirty thoughts about this hot biker, because while the idea of sex with Ven is a powerfully alluring fantasy, in reality he probably won't ask, because he's a decent man doing a good deed, I tell myself.

He takes me for a ride down the coast to a small, secluded restaurant. He pulls up and I jump off the bike and remove my helmet to get a view of the place. The sign above the door says, ‘The Serpent’s Den’ and there’s an image of a snake entwined around a long-stemmed rose making up the letter ‘T’. I’m not sure what to make of it, there’s window boxes overflowing with flowers, and considering the gray stone building is nestled amongst a lush landscape of winding paths, overhanging trees, and flowering bushes, it looks like something out of a fairytale. I shade my eyes from the morning sun to get a better look at the details.

“This place is absolutely gorgeous,” I gush, wishing I still had my trusty old camera.

Ven flashes me a pleased grin, grabs my hand and leads me into the restaurant. We pass a huge sandy-colored dog sleeping peacefully on a rug on the front porch. Inside it’s all red and white checkered tablecloths and beautiful vintage wall art. I don’t know what to make of the name of the restaurant or the eclectic theme. There’s something very European about it or like it’s from days gone by.

Ven doesn’t wait for someone to seat us. Instead, he boldly walks right past the sign that says closed and pulls out a chair at a corner table with a view of the meandering rose bushes out the window. I was about to ask him if we shouldn’t wait to be seated, but suddenly, we hear a loud voice saying, “I tell zis already. I want a seeley mattrees delivered, tout de suite .” Her French accent is so thick I can only make out half of what she’s saying.

There’s a brief pause as she walks into the room and begins fussing over a flower arrangement. The next minute she starts yelling again. “Non, that ees not what I say. You non lissen. I need a seeley mattrees, you know, for zee sleep.” About that time she catches sight of Ven, and her expression changes to relief.

She rushes over to him and hands him her cell phone, speaking in rapid-fire French, “Parle leur pour moi, mon petit Serp .”

He grabs the phone and states lightly, “Yeah, I’ll talk to them for you.”

Ven verifies who he’s talking to and then he tells them, “She obviously wants a Sealy mattress. Yeah. Make it queen-size.” He pauses again before saying, “No delivery. I’m with the Savage Legion MC. I’ll send a couple of our prospects to pick it up. They’ll put it on our club credit card.”

The moment he ends the call, she grabs his head and joyfully kisses him on both cheeks, before enveloping him in her arms. At first, I don’t know what to make of the whole situation. The woman is clearly a little older than Ven, not by much though. She’s got long, light brown hair and is wearing a beautiful floral sundress.

When I’m fairly certain she’s cutting off his airway, he pulls back and looks up at her. “That’s enough hugging for one day, Maman.”

My flash of jealousy evaporates, and I can’t help but smile that he’s using the French word for mom. But then I do a double take, seeing them side-by-side I can see a slight resemblance, this woman is his actual mother. She’s so small and delicate compared to Ven. He’s easily three times her size and I can’t reconcile the fact that this endearingly sweet French woman gave birth to a big strapping biker like Ven.

Then everything starts clicking into place. Ven is short for Venom, and there’s the snake on the restaurant sign. I wonder if the family has a thing about serpents, there has got to be a story there. I don’t ask though. I wait for him to introduce us.

His mother is all dotting smiles and petting his hair. “You came to see your mother today, mon petit Serp ?”

“I came to get fed and I brought a friend.” Glancing at me, he says, “This my mom, Melusine.” Gesturing to me he tells his mother, “Maman, this is Amy.”

She glances at me, and her mouth falls open. “You have taken a lady friend and not told me?”

“No, Maman. She’s not my girlfriend. I’m just protecting her while we try to find her mother. We think she’s been abducted.”

The woman jerks to attention, as a multitude of expressions move across her face in rapid succession. Then she’s fawning on me too. “Oh, you poor girl. Was it them who hurt you? Your poor face looks like it hurts.”

“I’m fine, Melusine. My top priority is to find my mom,” I tell her.

“Don’t you worry. My boy will find your mother. Trust me on this,” she pats me on the shoulder and gives me a kindly smile, “And call me, Meli, everyone else does.”

She shouts at someone to bring food and drops down into the chair between us. The table is round, so Ven and I are sitting across from one another, and she’s on the outside, leaving the free chair behind the table. Ven’s mother is something else. She flips open a large white napkin and spreads it across her lap. Before I can get my head around what’s going on, a younger woman comes running out with a tray of croissants, fruit, and coffee.

I wonder for a moment if we’re eating the breakfast his mother had made for herself. The restaurant isn’t open after all. Or maybe this is what they were preparing for brunch?

Ven’s asks, “Did Barley chew up your mattress again?”

Meli gives him a slight nod as she makes her coffee. I follow suit, putting milk and sugar into mine, I notice the milk is warm and wonder if this is a French thing. His mother gestures to the carafe. “It is good, strong coffee, just like you love.”

When he starts pouring coffee into his cup, his mother uses little silver tongs to place a croissant on our plates and gives us each a small dish of fresh fruit. When it's all done, she says, "Now, tell me everything. I do so love a mystery."

Ven seems uncomfortable, like he's about to tell her my life's greatest trauma is not a mystery for her to logic her way through. But there's something about the tone of her voice, a hardness that's totally out of character with the rest of her personality. It alerts me that she means business, so I jump right in and give her the short version of the story, even how Ven had to save me from getting roughed up by the farmhands.

The more I tell her, the angrier she gets. I can tell she's fuming because she stops eating and drinking her coffee.

Ven finally jumps into the conversation. "I tracked down those farmhands last night."

"Please tell me you didn't kill them," I say before I think.

Both Ven and Meli turn to look at me with the same odd expression on their faces. Ven snorts a laugh. "No, but I wanted to in the worst fucking way. Rage and I gave them a little taste of what they've been dishing out and warned them that if I had to pay them another visit it would be castration time."

Ven's mother tosses him a disapproving look. "You wouldn't!"

Ven raises his eyebrow, "I hope that scared them straight, because the thought of handing their junk makes me want to puke my spleen up."

His mother looks at him over the rim of her cup and makes a tutting sound, before taking a sip of her coffee and murmurs, "No puking of spleens. There are much better ways to solve such problems. Permanent ways, like we have resorted to in the past." I notice that her French accent diminishes a bit when she's calm. It's interesting how

that works.

Just when my curiosity is on the upswing, he taps his lips for her to shut up talking about his personal business. Damn, so many secrets. I'm dying to uncover them all, but right now the priority is on finding my mom.

We'd not had much of a chance to talk since he returned, and I was curious what he had found out, "So, they didn't say if my mom was at the farm or if my grandfather had moved her?"

"Not a word. I had a little talk with the youngest of the brothers and he claims they don't tell him anything."

"What brothers?" I ask.

Ven explains, "Remember how you told me that your grandfather has four farmhands that run together? The youngest one, Dan, admitted to me that they're half-brothers. He said they're all your grandfather's but have different mothers. It's the reason they don't look a lot alike."

"What? They're my uncles?"

Ven nods.

I digest that little nugget of information. "I never knew he had any other children. I know he remarried, but he and my step-grandmother didn't have kids. I hope he didn't cheat on her. The first I saw of the farmhands was when she got sick, and they showed up. I figured as he was looking after her, he needed more hands to work the land."

"What do you know about the fourth one, Edmund? He wasn't with the three amigos

last night,” Ven asks.

I speak up, “I only met him a handful of times when I was visiting my step-grandmother. There was something I didn’t like about him, he sticks to my grandfather like glue. He was always whispering some kind of toxic shit in his ear. I can tell because my grandfather gets meaner after talking to him about pretty much anything.”

Meli adds, “This Edmund is the sly one. Follow him, mon chéri . He’ll lead you to the answers you seek.”

Ven runs one hand through his hair. “I think you might be right about that, Maman. Until another clue turns up, keeping eyes on Edmund and that farm is our only real option.”

“I can help,” I chime in, because nothing and nobody is going to keep me from searching for my mom.

Ven’s expression shuts down almost immediately, “I don’t want you near them.”

His mother’s voice drops to not quite a whisper. “You know better than most, that women are clever, resourceful beings that you dare not leave behind during times of trouble. If she cannot protect herself, you teach her. If she wants to help, let her.”

He swallows thickly, nodding to his mother. “Yes, Maman.”

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:38 am

Ven

Rage, Amy, and I are set up on a ridgeline a few miles from her grandfather's farm. I've got three drones in the air and I'm teaching Amy how to use hers. She's a fast learner and catches on almost immediately. I'm keeping my mom's advice about letting Amy help in the forefront of my mind. But whereas my mom likes to get into the thick of the action, I don't want Amy to have to deal with those assholes anytime soon, so this way she can help, but at a safe distance.

I reach over and pull up the lever that controls the altitude. "Keep it high in the air until you see movement on the ground. You don't want it to get tangled in trees or powerlines."

She playfully smacks my hand away. "Don't worry. I've got this. It's just like playing video games."

I gasp at that comparison, but Rage just laughs. "She ain't wrong about that, brother."

I give Rage an irritated glance before responding, "My mom sent you fresh croissants. I was going to give them to you, but I might leave them in the storage compartment on my bike."

Rage calls his drone back and sets the controller down beside it. "Give me your keys or I'm breaking into that storage compartment, now."

I smother back a smile and toss him my keys.

He immediately asks, “Did your beautiful maman ask about me?”

I reach out to snatch the keys back from him, but he dodges away, laughing. I know the fucker is only teasing but he still gets under my skin. “I hope you choke on them,” I mumble under my breath.

“Don’t be like that, Serp. You know Rage is only joking around with you.”

My head snaps up because she used my mom’s nickname. “No one but my mom calls me that.”

She shoots me a mischievous grin. “Your mom and me. I’m your old lady, remember?”

I kind of like her calling me Serp. It feels right. “That’s fine, but just when it’s you and me. Not in front of anyone else, especially Rage. He’s way too far up in my fucking business anyway.”

“What’s with the snake theme in your family?”

“Maybe it started with her name, the Melusine of French folklore was half woman half snake, she always loved serpents, especially her petit Serp,” Rage says with a mouthful of croissant.

“Like you know anything about my maman,” I throw back.

My friend shoots me a smile, “Well, Siege, Rigs, and I stopped by there for lunch one day on the way back from a biker rally. Your mother was real nice to us, so if I’m passing, I always drop by to say bonjour to Meli.”

“You fucker. Stay away from my mom,” I mutter.

“Calm the fuck down, you degenerate fuck. I’m not after your mom. If anything, I wish she were my mom, since I never had one.”

I instantly regret my words, even though I was only joking, all the brothers love my mom, “Sorry man, I never knew you didn’t have a mother, that sucks. I hope she didn’t break out the photo albums.”

Rage’s face lights up. “Yeah, Meli has them on her phone. She showed us pictures of your worm farm from when you were five, your little boy pajamas with cute little worms all over them and even that bad ass boa constrictor you had when you were in high school. She told us all about how your worm obsession bloomed into a full-blown obsession with snakes as a teen. She said when you were a tween you got all embarrassed about your real name, and that’s when she started calling you Serp.” My friend pauses, and I wait for it. “Serge,” he says with a grin.

“There’s nothing wrong with the name, Serge,” I protest. Now I’m an adult I don’t mind it so much, but when I was a kid, I’d get teased all the time and wished I’d had a normal name like Kyle or Brandon. I say, “She named me after her favorite singer, Serge Gainsbourg.”

“Never heard of him,” Rage mutters as he takes another mouthful of his croissant.

“That’s ‘cause you only listen to that country shit,” I bite back.

“Stop deflecting, bro. I’m sure Amy wants to know all about your childhood,” Rage says as he gives me a wicked grin. Bastard.

I turn away from him, feeling some kind of way about my mother sharing all that with my club brothers. Though, at the end of the day, she’s just a proud mom so I can’t really blame her for wanting to share my childhood photos with my friends. Besides, Rage probably egged her on. He can be quite a prick when wants to be.

A short silence spins out between the three of us. Amy is the first one to speak. “That’s a really sweet story, adorable in fact. I was obsessed with being a safari guide when I was little. My mom put huge tropical stickers on my walls so I could pretend to be exploring the jungle. I had it in my mind that I could ride lions, panthers, and giraffes like people did camels and elephants.” I glance over at her to see she’s shaking her head. “It took me years to understand I couldn’t ride every wild creature in the jungle. I remember crying about it.”

Rage just stood there staring at us. Finally, he sighs. “You two had the best moms in the fucking world and probably don’t even realize it. My mom ran off with her drug dealer the day after she pushed me out. I spent my entire childhood fucked in the head about that. It made me a very angry person.”

Amy wrinkles her face in an expression of confusion. “You absolutely didn’t deserve that, Rage. Some women are garbage. Just make sure you pick a better woman than your father did.”

Rage just shrugs because he’s too emotional to speak.

“Since my mom likes you so much, I’ll share her with you,” I say with a grin.

“You what?” Rage looks confused.

“You know, like a surrogate brother.”

His eyes light up. “Are you serious?”

I grin at my club brother, “Yeah, she’s always trying to mother every damn guy she runs into. Why not you? We’re club brothers, so why not real brothers?”

“I know you’re joking, but that sounds great.”

His voice was so hopeful, I didn't want to do anything to blow it for him, so I just said, "No joke, bro. But you gotta stop calling her beautiful and shit. It creeps me out."

Suddenly, like a record scratch, Amy clears her throat. "You two are something else."

I throw open both hands, careful to keep a hold of my controller. "What?"

She gestures at us. "So, the two of you are just going to decide between yourself to split your mother's attention right down the middle and assume she'll be fine with getting a bonus son."

Rage's expression closes down, and he balls the remaining bit of croissant into his fist. "It was just an idea," he mumbles in a faint whisper.

"My maman always wanted a houseful of kids, but it didn't work out. Trust me, she'll probably be flattered."

Rage speaks up again, "And she might get bonus grandkids one day. A good mom can never have enough love from the kids in their life."

Again, the hopeful tone of his voice really gets to me. So, this time, I decide to do something about it. I call my drone back, which we've been doing every thirty minutes or so to take a break.

Pulling out my hunting knife, I motion for Rage to come closer. I make a shallow cut along my palm, barely drawing blood and jerk my chin to him. "Blood brothers, your turn." He pauses for a moment, and I add, "You've seen my medical notes, you know I ain't got nothing contagious."

We've all seen movies where people took a blood brother oath, so Rage knows

exactly what I'm offering him. His eyes are glistening when they lift from my bloody palm to look into my eyes. He pulls out his pocketknife and makes a similar shallow cut. We press our palms together and I say, "From this point forward, you're my blood brother. Everything I have is half yours for the asking. I'll spill blood to protect you and yours, always have your back, be the first to speak at your wedding and make sure you get a proper funeral when your time comes."

Rage hoarsely repeats the oath and when we pull our palms apart, we are true blood brothers. Suddenly, Rage is calmer. "I don't know whether you know this or not, but you're the only family I have in this world."

Fucking hell, I didn't know all his family has passed or run off on him. I feel like a shitty friend for not realizing. I give him a nice hard thump on the shoulder. "Well, just so you know, no take backs. My mom has dinner every Sunday night and you're invited."

An uncertain smile pulls at the corners of Rage's mouth. "Do you think your mom is going to accept me that easily?"

I shrug, feeling certain she will jump at the chance. "She always wanted to give me a brother. When I joined the Savage Legion, I told her that I had over thirty brothers. She said it wasn't the same. I think she wanted me to have someone like you, someone who always had my back and such."

"I hope that turns out to be true, I really like you and your mom."

I wipe my palm on my jeans and scoop up my controller while I'm down there. "You're family."

Rage tosses the wad of croissant into his mouth and picks up his controller as well. "Well, let's find these fuckers. Then we can get a coffee."

I glance over at Amy to find that she's sniffing. I rush over to her. "What's up, sweetheart?" I don't see anything wrong, but sometimes you can't tell by looking.

She steps out and wraps her arms around me. Okay, she's hugging me. That's cool and all but the part I don't is why. If I knew that, I would be able to get more hugs later. I wrap my arms around her and hold her tight. "Whatever happened, we can fix it," I tell her.

She shakes her head. "It's just that the two of you are just such good human beings. The way you stepped up for each other was really beautiful. I never thought guys had such deep and profound feelings."

Suddenly, Rage was standing right beside us. "Of course we fucking do. Men have deep feelings. We just don't cry and shit like that every damn time we get emotional."

I whisper, "Too much. Back off, brother."

"Oh, sorry about that," he whispers back. "I'll give the two of you some space, I'm gonna park up around the other side of the farm and get eyes on the woods."

I can feel Amy trembling in my arms. At first, I think it's from still being emotional. When she pushes her face back from my chest, I realize she's laughing. "You two are just too perfect. Whatever woman ends up with you is going so damn lucky."

Something about the tone of her voice rings true. No one has ever said anything like that to me before. And standing there, staring down into her eyes, I want that woman to be her so much it hurts. I don't say that because I don't want to scare her off or make her think I'm trying to get possessive. Unfortunately, I am getting possessive of her.

I hear Rage's motorcycle engine fire to life and then the sound gets further away as I stand there looking down at Amy's smiling face, her eyes are still glistening with emotion. Tucking my controller under one arm, I cup her lovely chin in my hands.

"Sorry if all the mushy stuff got to you."

"Do you really think your mom is going to be okay with getting a surrogate son out of the blue?"

I smile at her. "Yeah, she'll love it. I've seen how she is with Rage whenever we've dropped by the restaurant."

"I'm glad about that." She hesitates for a few seconds before asking, "So, what got you so interested in snakes?"

Pleased that this woman is so curious about me and my life, I half-jokingly suggest, "How about we trade kisses for secrets."

Before we can even talk about it, she jumps onto her tiptoes and pulls me down for a kiss, and then another and then another. I'm taken aback as I didn't expect her to do it—don't get me wrong, her kisses are amazing, better even than I thought they would be and it's something that I have been thinking about quite a lot since she came into my life. But something is tugging at the back of my mind. I'm lost in the kisses until it occurs to me that she's paying in advance. I pull back, astounded that she lured me into disclosing my secrets so easily.

No wait, it was in fact my idea. She's just using my own ideas against me. My maman is right, women are resourceful.

I press my forehead against hers for a brief second before pulling all the way back. "We should probably keep monitoring your grandfather's farm. You can ask your

questions while we work. How does that sound?”

Her pretty face lights up and I don't think I have ever seen a more beautiful sight.

We sit on the edge of the ridgeline with our feet hanging over and activate our drones again.

“Your drone looks different from mine. Does it do anything special?”

I nod and tell her all about it, probably in more detail than necessary. “Yes, this is my newest drone, I lost my best one a while back. I switched out the motor for a more powerful one, so it doesn't get blown around by the wind and it can accelerate and decelerate faster. It has a maximum flight distance of twenty miles, that means we can sit here, and the drone can fly way out of Las Salinas.”

“Wow!” she says, her voice full of admiration.

“Yeah, it's a pretty cool feature. I've got one that can fly for sixty miles, but for today's surveillance we don't need that. This drone has an infrared feature to pick up heat signatures.”

“How do you manage to do things like that? Did you study mechanical engineering or something like that?”

“No, I've always liked tinkering with mechanical things. I might have been a fully-fledged worm and snake enthusiast as a kid, but I also liked to take things apart and put them back together again. My mother used to buy me old clocks, radios, and small appliances to tinker with, by taking them apart I could figure out how they worked.”

“I wish more than anything that we could pick up my mom's heat signature,” she

replies wistfully.

I explain the hard truth of our situation to her. “We have a better chance of picking up heat signatures at night. When it’s cooler, there’s more contrast between a human body and their surroundings. What I can’t do with the equipment I have is distinguish between men and woman.”

“That means if we pick up a heat signature somewhere suspicious, we’d have to go investigate in person, right?”

“Absolutely, fucking not. It means that me and my club brothers would go and investigate it. I won’t risk you turning up missing like your mother, or worse. Leave the daring rescues up to the men with fighting experience,” I say grudgingly.

“Okay, big guy. Don’t get bent out of shape. I’m not wild about being shot at anyway. Your mom suggested you teach me self-defense. Will that eventually be on your radar? If you’re not going to teach me, you have to be the one to tell her, ‘cause I’m not lying to your mom. She’s too nice.”

“We’re definitely doing to work on self-defense. Until I’m convinced you have some hope of protecting yourself, I’ll stay right by your side. If I have to go on a mission, you’ll need to stay at the clubhouse where the prospects can protect you.”

“Yeah, that all works for me,” she tells me. I’m not sure I believe her because her tone is light and dismissive.

She follows up with, “So can I ask my first question?”

I decide to try to outsmart her. “Well, we both gave each other kisses, so maybe we could take turns answering questions to each other. It would be a great way to get to know each other better.”

Her eyes narrow on me but when I don't respond she sighs. "Sure. Why not?"

Gleeful that I get to ask questions too, I quickly say, "Since this was your brilliant idea, you can ask the first question."

She asks without hesitation, "Why worms? Of all the things that could have caught your notice at an early age, why worms?"

I hesitate to tell her the truth, so I go with a sanitized version of the truth. "I was in an accident once and they had to put me in an MRI machine. I was scared, but my mom told me to pretend I was a worm, and it was my special wormhole and that nothing could hurt me while I was safe inside it. It worked, and after that I started to get interested in worms. For my first science project at school I made a huge worm farm. Though all the kids teased me about it." I pause, I don't want to bring the mood down and tell her the real story, about how me and my dad were in his truck, and it got run off the road by a drunk driver, that I was seriously hurt, and my dad was killed.

Once I returned back to school after four months in hospital, the other children bullied me about having no dad anymore—because little kids can be cruel—and that to make up for having no friends I ended up fascinated with my worm community.

"So when did you move from worms to snakes?" she asks without missing a beat.

Since I was comfortable talking about that, I answer, although it was supposed to be my turn to ask. "Worms are invertebrates. At first, I thought snakes were bigger worms. Then I learned they're in the reptile family and vertebrates because they have a spinal column. Once I learned they shed their skin, I was hooked. Eventually after a lot of bugging, my mom relented and let me get a pet snake, as long as I didn't keep their food in the restaurant refrigerator."

Amy's eyes widen as she suddenly realizes what snakes eat. She swiftly moves on,

“What happened to your boa constrictor? Rage said you had one when you were a teen.”

Glancing away, I respond, “He died of septicemia. I didn’t know he was sick until it was too late to save him.”

“That must have been traumatizing.” The kind and compassionate tone of her voice makes me feel vulnerable. “I was seventeen. It was awful because at that point I’d had him for coming up on five years.” I don’t tell her that I didn’t have a lot of friends back then, and my snake was the one I told all my secrets and fears to, the one I shared all my small victories with.

“That’s when you transferred all your time and energy to electronics. It’s hard to bond with a toaster or a clock, right? It was safer to pour all your time and energy into things instead of living creatures.”

Damn, this woman is all too perceptive. I’m saved from having to answer her question by my drone picking up motion below. “I’ve calibrated my drone to focus in on vehicle-sized movement.”

She leans over to look at my screen. “Where are you? I’ll bring my drone there as well.”

“Yes. Two sets of eyes are better than one,” I tell her. “I’m on the northern part of your grandfather’s farm about two miles from here.”

“Got it. Give me a minute to get there.” Within a few minutes, she alerts me that she’s near. “I see your drone.”

“Stay high. If they see us, they will shoot our drones out of the sky.”

“Really?”

I frown as I keep tracking the van down below. “Yeah, ask me how I know.”

“I see. That’s how you lost your old drone, right?”

I nod. I haven’t told her that I saw her grandfather’s dogs chasing her that day in the cornfield, I was worried it would make me sound like a creeper—and now that so much time has gone by, I’m worried how she’ll react. So instead I change the topic, “They’re branching off on a dirt road on the left. I’m going to note the GPS location so we can find it again later. Don’t let them out of your sight.”

“I’m on it,” she says with determination.

I get a lock on the GPS coordinates and then zoom out to follow her drone. We follow the van for what seems like hours, since her grandfather owns several thousand acres, that’s not surprising. We chat as we keep track of the van, excited that we might be getting somewhere with finding her mother. If not that, then maybe I can figure out where all these vans are going.

Amy

I can't help the frustrated sound that escapes from my lips. "My drone's battery is depleting. I need to make it back before the battery runs out completely." The last thing I need is to wreck one of the drones he took God only knows how long to make from scratch.

He tells me quickly, "Use the return to home feature. The drone can retrace its own flight pattern back to the basecamp."

I glance around seeing nothing that looks like a basecamp. Maybe the drones all go somewhere else to land, kind of like a Roomba. "Where's basecamp? I don't see anything but us here."

He gestures to the controller in my hand. "That's basecamp as far as your drone knows."

I'm so embarrassed that I blush furiously, "Oh yeah, that makes sense."

"The return to home feature is the button on the side."

"Is that your own invention or do all drones have that?"

"It's a standard function, though what I've done is make a slight tweak. If my battery gets critically low, the drone automatically lands before reaching basecamp, but I've fixed it so that the moment it touches ground it'll send a GPS signal back to the controller, so I know where to pick it up. Once the battery is completely depleted then

the GPS won't work. Usually you want to avoid getting into that kind of situation, because that's how you lose drones. But this way, at least I can get to it before some lucky fucker finds it."

I carefully lay down the controller and move closer to him. "I can't believe you just break things apart and repurpose them that way. I'll bet you have a genius level IQ."

He snorts a laugh as he gazes at his screen, still tracking the van. It looks like it's slowly crawling along a dirt road that's getting narrower and narrower.

"Where do you think they're going?" I ask curiously.

"Wherever it is, someone's been there before. Otherwise there wouldn't be a dirt road."

"Good catch," I admit. "Then again, maybe it's from the eighteen hundreds or something, like an old road to a railroad that no longer exists? There used to be lots of mines around here."

"That's possible. What I want to know is why they're going all the way out into the middle of nowhere. If your grandfather is holding your mom away from the farm, then he could have another property out there."

"It could be because they have to feed my mom and administer her meds."

His eyes never leave the screen, even when he answers me. "It could be. If that's true, at least we can rest assured that she's still alive."

Something painful and dark twists in my gut at the thought that she might not still be alive. No matter how hard I try, I can't bring myself to believe that she's dead. If she were dead, how is it that I still feel so connected to her?

Ven's free hand comes out to rest on mine. "Don't worry. If I have to move heaven and earth, I'll find her."

I lean over onto his shoulder and watch the screen along with him as he tracks that van. We're tracking along and there are no problems seeing the vehicle, but then there's a long line of trees for a mile or two that obscures the view, and we lose track of the van. Ven doubles back to look for it and brings the drone down lower and flies it along the side of the road.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," he says intensely as he searches around.

We don't see any side roads, nothing. Then he gets an alert that his battery is running low. He curses under his breath.

"Do you have enough power to get back?" I ask, worried about him losing his new drone.

"Naw, I don't."

"What's the plan now? Will it land and do the GPS thing like you said?"

"I don't want to risk it, the land here is too open, especially if your grandfather or his men use this road regularly. I'm gonna land it by an easily identifiable natural landmark and come back for it later. Make sure it's hidden from view." I watch him set the drone down next to a huge oak tree with a heart carved into the trunk.

When he's finished, I say excitedly, "We could retrieve it now. I'd be more than willing to help. Why risk something happening to it?"

"I need to get together some of my club brothers because we're going to be breaching private property, and I want to figure out where that fucking van disappeared to. If

this has anything to do with your mother, we just might find her tonight.”

My hand comes out to land on his arm, and I caution him, “Please be careful. I don’t trust those farmhands slash so-called uncles of mine, not to make you disappear like they did to my mother.”

His expression turns warm. “You really care so much about what happens to me?”

I bring my hand up to cup the side of his face and caress his cheek with my thumb. We can’t seem to stop gazing into each other’s eyes. I tell him softly, “Yeah, I do care about what happens to you, Serp.”

A smile ghosts over his face. Before he can say something sweet, I interject some levity into our situation. “I can’t let anything happen to you because I’ve still got two more questions to ask.”

He laughs, clearly amused by my teasing.

I realize that a happy Ven is twice as handsome as a serious one. Without giving him a chance to object, I lean over and give him another kiss. “That makes three.”

“I’m beginning to think this kissing has nothing to do with wheedling information out of me. You just like throwing a lip lock down on me whenever you fancy.”

“Anything’s possible,” I tell him before hopping up, I dust off the back of my pants and help him load the small drone I was using back into the special housing he’s added to his motorcycle to transport them.

When we gear up and get back onto his bike, the sensation of having the wind blowing over me is addictive. I can totally see why these bikers in the Savage Legion love to ride the open road. It feels like a kind of freedom I’ve never realized was

possible.

Having my arms around him feels more intimate now that I've kissed him. I'm falling for this guy, harder and faster than I ever thought possible. Meeting his lovely mother was just the reprieve I needed from the endless grind of keeping my mom's case going.

We finally get back to the clubhouse in the late afternoon. The prospects have set up a grill outside, one of the prospects seems to be in charge of the cooking and in addition to the grilled meat he brings out trays of delicious looking canapes. I hadn't thought I was hungry, but once I started, I made short work of my plateful.

When Ven and a handful of the other brothers leave to retrieve his drone and search for the van, I decide to hang out in the bar area to keep from worrying myself sick. I dared not get my hopes up that they would find my mom tonight for fear of getting let down. I hope and pray they do find her, because I need to know she's safe and not being abused by her asshole father. My grandfather has always been flat-out mean.

The bar is filled with brothers who didn't go with Ven. There are more club girls than I remember, and all the prospects are hard at work. It seems like business as usual. My reason for heading to the bar is to learn more about what bar tending here involves. I have to learn, because I need the job they offered me. My request for time off was answered with a curt reply from my boss telling me not to bother coming in again. I'd been upset and had wanted to argue since I got injured working there. But in the end, I just let it go, I have more to worry about right now.

I turn my gaze to the young prospect behind the bar, I like Evan—he's polite, respectful, and enjoys chatting. Quite the opposite of some of the surly teenagers who used to come into the coffee shop.

“Are you here just to hang out?” Evan asks.

“Nope, I’m here to learn how to mix drinks,” I say chipperly.

He glances up at my bruised face and the cut on my lip and responds doubtfully, “If any of the brothers found you behind the bar in your condition, they’d skin me alive. I’m supposed to be protecting the old ladies not exploiting them when they’re still healing up from a beatdown.”

The last thing I want to do is get Evan in trouble with the brothers. Arguing with the young prospect also seems kind of rude, so I slide onto one of the barstools. “Alright. Tonight, I’ll learn by watching.” Remembering what he said the other day about not being old enough to pour drinks, I ask, “Should you be behind the bar?”

“It’s all cool,” he says looking proud as punch. “I’m just helping out, I’m not serving alcohol.”

I nod, though my eyes go to the bottle of beer in his hands.

Before I have a chance to say anything a woman’s voice calls out, “Evan, how many times have I told you, get out from behind the bar. Do you want me to tell your mom?”

Quick as a flash Evan hops over the bar to join me on the other side. I turn to look at who spoke and see two women wearing property cuts coming towards me.

“Don’t tell mom,” Evan says sheepishly. “I wasn’t serving alcohol, honestly. I know you’d get into trouble if I did. I was just gonna hand Warren a bottle of beer.”

The woman, who’s super pretty with short spiky hair raises an eyebrow at him, “I’ve got four kids and taught for years. You think I can’t spot a lie? You know the rules.

It's not just me being a party pooper, the club and your parents could get into serious trouble."

Even hangs his head, but then the woman ruffles his hair, "I'm not gonna tell Mattie, but seriously, no working the bar. Vapor and Haze are round the back, I think they're looking for you, something about designing flash for the tattoo parlor."

With that Evan skedaddles off with a grin on his face, the woman sits beside me and her friend on the other.

She turns to me and puts her hand out for me to shake. "My name's Cleo and I'm the club president's old lady."

I shake her hand and respond, "I was introduced to Siege the other day. He seems like a nice man."

"Yeah, he is. All the brothers here are good, decent men." Gesturing to the other woman, she says, "This is Anna, Haze's old lady. We're both wives, but as you've no doubt realized, not all old ladies are wives."

Glancing down at my property cut, I nod. "Yeah, I think I fall into that category myself." I can't help but wonder if she knows that I'm in a fake relationship with Ven. I hate being deceitful with these nice ladies. As if intuiting what I was thinking by the expression on my face, she winks at me. "Yeah, Siege tells me almost everything. Most MC presidents don't, but we've learned to trust each other that way."

Relief floods my mind. "I'll bet that kind of open honesty saves a lot of problems in the long run."

"Yeah, we've got two sets of twins, three dogs and a cat to worry about. The last

thing we need is a bunch of secrets and cloak and dagger shit going on.”

The pretty redhead chimes in, “Yeah, secrets are relationship killers.”

Glancing around to see if anyone is listening, I lower my voice. “Do you mind if I ask you a question?”

“Of course not. We came to check on you tonight, to see if you needed anything,” Cleo responds.

I take another sip of my drink before coming out with it. “How did you cope with knowing your husband slept with all the club girls? Did it make you insecure?”

Cleo takes a moment to gather her thoughts, running her perfectly manicured nails through her short blonde hair. “That’s a really good question to be honest. I never cared that he had a robust sexual history before me. The brothers are all healthy men with strong sex drives. It’s the reason their MC has club girls in the first place.”

“So you were fine with all this,” I say, waving one hand around at all the women and men hooking up.

“To be fair, it was a problem in the beginning for me because one of the club girls set me up to think that Siege was still having sex with her while he was with me. It broke my heart, but Siege figured out what was going on and banned her from the club. Once I realized she’d set the whole situation up to look like they were having an affair, I couldn’t very well hold him responsible for something he didn’t do. From there on out, our relationship just got stronger and stronger.”

I glance over at Brittany and then look away. Anna leans over and puts her hand on my arm. “Don’t let that one intimidate you. She gave me a hard time when I first got with Haze. If you and Ven are trying to make something good out of this situation,

don't let anyone stop you."

I nod and we talk quite a bit about club life and how to alert the club if things are going terribly wrong at any point. I discover that Cleo is a social worker and that's why she likes to do check-ins with all the old ladies fairly regularly. It's refreshing to know that the MC has protocols in place for making sure the wives and old ladies are doing okay.

I notice that Brittany and all the other club girls are on their best behavior while Cleo is hanging out around the bar. That amuses me, but I don't say anything about it. That would be stirring the pot which is beneath the dignity of someone wearing a property cut.

Ven

We get to the ridgeline after dark. I wish I had my drone with the infrared camera right now, I hope it's still safe beside the tree. As it's a clear moonlit night and visibility is good, I send up one of my other drones instead, but we don't see anything unusual.

"This is fucking infuriating," Siege says irritably.

"No joke," I respond. "I tracked that fucking van for over two hours across several hundred acres and the damn thing just disappeared into the thin air."

"Nothing ever disappears," Rigs says while looking through his binoculars. "Zen said he couldn't find anything in the county records about old roads, towns, or businesses in this area. Since it's highly improbable that there would be old dirt roads that lead to nowhere, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say someone wiped the county records."

Several heads turn to look at him simultaneously.

I stammer, "Are you saying whatever's going on with the vans, goes all the way up to county or even state government?" If that's what he's insinuating, it boggles my mind. It smacks of conspiracy, and that seems highly unlikely to me.

Rigs glances over at me, lowering his binoculars. "Never attribute to high level coordination what can be achieved by low level government employees when someone greases their palms generously."

Now that made a lot more sense. “So what’s the plan?”

“We head down, breach the property, start where the road branches off and end where the van disappeared. This is clearly going to take the better part of the night, but it has to be done. This might solve the mystery of where these vans with the out-of-state plates are coming from, and what they’re doing in our neck of the woods.”

“I’m here to find Amy’s mother. To my mind everything else is secondary.”

Siege says, “Agreed. Human lives always come before solving mysteries and appeasing our curiosity. Let’s get moving.”

Rigs announces, “I’ve sent a message with the coordinates to both target sites. Remember, you’ve got to make the first rendezvous in order to be on the correct secondary road to reach the site where the van disappeared.”

We all murmur our agreement, mount our bikes and head for dirt road through the old man’s property. Our first rendezvous is the smaller one-lane road that branches off the main dirt road. Riding through the darkness with my club brothers on a mission to find Amy’s mom is the best feeling in the world. One way or another, I’m going to find Amy’s mother and bring her home safely.

We ride for miles under the cover of moonlight, we don’t want to draw attention to ourselves, so our headlights are off. As this is private land there should be no other traffic, and we’ll hear anyone approaching.

We all get to the first rendezvous point without incident, even the scouts we sent out in several directions reported nothing suspicious, and I managed to collect my drone, which was exactly where I landed it beside the oak tree. The only thing left to do is ride down the one-lane road into the area where the van went missing.

Rigs and Siege are in the lead position, they slow down, and we all stop at the coordinates and get off our bikes.

“Look,” Siege says. “Vehicles don’t just disappear. This van that Ven lost track of earlier had to go somewhere. We just need to find it.”

We all break apart on foot, cutting through the trees and literally walking a grid formation. While it doesn’t have to be as precise as cops looking for evidence, we want to make sure we don’t miss anything. Rage and I are walking together, but there’s no banter like we normally have, because we need to be alert to anything.

Being quiet pays off when we hear people laughing and a glass breaking in the distance. I use hand gestures to orient Rage in the direction I think the sound is coming from. Reaching for my cell phone, I send a message to my club brothers alerting them that we’ve found something and sending a location pin.

As we draw closer, we see dim lights. Dropping down onto our bellies, we crawl forward. There’s a cave ahead with a camouflage mesh covering the opening. I realize that’s how it escaped my drone. From the height it was flying it would have blended in, and I hadn’t wanted to risk a low-level swoop in case I got spotted. I might have picked it up if I’d been using the thermal imaging function, but as it was daylight the heat signatures aren’t always so good.

“I’ll be damned,” Rage whispers.

I glance over at his astonished expression. “Finally found them.”

Before long, my club brothers join us from every direction.

Rigs points out what we’re all thinking. “It smells like they’re cooking meth.”

We all recognize the cat piss stench. We can also see the outline of the van parked inside the cave. I assume it's deep, because the van barely fits into the mouth, and we can hear multiple people laughing and the noise of metal clanking echoing off the walls.

Rigs comes to his feet and nods his head towards the cave, indicating that he's going to do recon.

"Let me do it," I hiss.

He shrugs and steps back.

I get all the way without being noticed and pry back the netting to peer inside. I can see several men moving about. I quietly move to the other side and look in, trying to see if Amy's mother is in there. But it's just a bunch of men shifting boxes around as far as I can see.

I go back to my club brothers and make a report. "The van I saw earlier is parked there, along with at least a half a dozen men. Looks like they're stacking boxes, I suspect Rigs was right about them cooking meth. The stench was almost unbearable."

"Good job," Siege whispers. "Now, here's the plan. Rigs will lead one team, and I'll lead the other. Tank, you, Ven, and Rage are on my team. We'll squeeze past the right side of the van. Rigs, you, Dutch, and Talon enter on the left side, we'll strike at the same time and take them by surprise. The rest of you wait here and grab anyone who makes a run for it. I'd rather have them alive than dead, if at all possible, but if it comes down to you or them, do what you have to do."

Everyone nods their agreement and pulls out their weapons of choice. We take our places on each side of the van at the cave entrance. Siege and Rigs quietly cut through the mesh, and we surge forward just like Siege planned. Each of us tackles

the first person we get to, and even though they fight back hard, we manage to overwhelm them.

When they're all sitting on the ground with their hands and feet secured by cable ties, Rigs and Tank pull open the van to find it half-packed with meth. We're busy talking about what do about the situation when one man speaks up.

"Alright, this doesn't have to go sideways for your club."

Siege frowns at the stranger. "What the hell are you talking about? I think you mean this is going sideways for you and your idiot friends."

"Look, it's pretty clear you don't know who I am, but rest assured, this is my operation and I'm the one you need to talk to if you want to cut a deal."

Siege walks over to him and gestures at him and all of his cronies. "In case you didn't notice, we fought a little battle here and you lost. Exactly what reason would I have to cut any kind of deal with you, when I can set this shithole on fire and give each one of you a dirt nap?"

"Kind of extreme, don't ya think? This is a good money-making business, really well organized. Why throw away easy money? You're a biker. Bikers like to earn, right?"

Siege turns his head to the side slightly as if trying to figure this man out. "We're not a one percent club, dickhead."

"Oh, I'd be willing to offer more than one percent for your protection. Some locals have been spying on us with drones and they've spooked my drivers. I need them eliminated, and I'm willing to pay handsomely if you and your boys want to take on the job."

Siege moves forward and squats down in front of the guy. “What’s your name?”

“Edmund Grayson. My father owns this land,” the man says.

I come closer taking a look at the elusive fourth brother and ask, “Where are the three stooges? I’ve met your other brothers.”

Edmund’s expression turns smug. “I’m the smart one, they’re just hired muscle.”

“I suppose that makes you his favorite, right?”

“Yeah, he said I had promise. Trust me, the others are useful idiots.”

Squatting down beside Siege, I look him straight in the eye. “Is that so? Does your daddy know you’ve got a meth lab on his property?”

“What the fuck do you think? Even with a spread like this, he can’t make anywhere near what my operation does. Anyway, he’s not long for this world, and once the problem with the inheritance is sorted then I’ll make a killing here.” Looking from me to Siege and back again, he asks, “So are you in? If you take care of my problem with the locals and protect my shipments, I’ll cut you in for ten percent.”

Siege glances at me and nods for me to break the bad news to him. I snort a laugh and take great pleasure in telling him, “I don’t think that very generous offer is gonna work for us. We couldn’t very well spend the money if we eliminated ourselves.”

It takes him a few seconds to work out what I’m telling him, and then his expression turns furious. “What the fuck business does a biker gang have sticking their noses in my business?” Before I can answer, he begins cursing under his breath and then shouts, “You stupid fuckers are not gonna take over my business. I’ll see every single one of you six feet under first.”

Not caring for his threat, I push him back onto the ground and climb on top of him. I punch him in the face a couple of times to make the point that he's got no power in this situation. None at all. I poke him roughly in the middle of his forehead, "We are not an outlaw biker club. Get that through your thick skull. We don't want to fucking work for you and running our own little drug empire is not on our bucket list either."

"Fine," he says before spitting a mouthful of blood off to the side. "Why the hell have you bastards been stalking my drivers?"

I get up, then drag him to a standing position, his feet are tied, so I give him a second to stabilize himself before letting go.

Siege informs him, "I know you probably thought your operation was flying under the radar. Maybe it was for local law enforcement? But the Legion keeps a close eye on everything that goes on in our county. When dozens of vans, all with license plates from the states that border California drive through town on the regular, we knew something shitty was happening. We looked around and found you with not a lot of effort."

Looking more uncertain than before, he responds, "That's why we'd make such good partners."

Siege laughs, "Just a second ago, you wanted to make us your lackeys. Now, you're offering us a partnership. If we keep talking, pretty soon you'll be trying to get us to take this shitshow off your hands."

Struggling to work the cable ties off his wrists, he huffs out, "I'll be straight with you for just a second. What I really want is for the lot of you get the fuck off our property. You're trespassing. And now you know where our set up is, I'm gonna have to find another location. That pisses me off because hideouts like this are hard to find."

Rigs finally steps in because it's becoming increasingly obvious that poor Edmund just doesn't get it. We're talking, but he's in a world of his own, where he calls the shots and apparently nobody tells him what to do.

Rigs rattles him by delivering a swift gut punch and catching him by the shoulder to keep him from falling when he doubles over. "Now, I need you to shut your mouth and open your ears. Because if you don't, I'm going to personally send you to meet your maker. You got that?"

Rigs might be a man of God but with his black hair, black clothing, and that weird, oversized cross he wears, he looks a bit like a vampire if I'm being honest. Or at least, he's rocking the dark prince vibe pretty hard. Whatever it is about Rigs, his harsh treatment finally gets through to Edmund because he snaps his mouth shut and just nods.

Rigs lays it all out for him, saying the same kind of shit that Siege and I did. Somehow this time, Edmund is in the mood to listen.

"We're not an outlaw motorcycle club. That means we don't earn our way in life by engaging in illegal activities, and we sure as hell aren't going to get involved in the manufacture and transportation of meth across state lines."

"Yeah, I'm getting that."

"Sir," Rigs prompts him."

"I understand, sir," Edmund responds weakly. I can tell by the look on his face he's getting scared, but some small part of him still resents having to show respect to people he considers inferior.

Rigs continues, giving him a little shake to drive this important point home. "The

Savage Legion MC got its rep from way we deal with assholes who think they can operate in our territory. There is not one single chance in hell we're going to sanction a meth lab in Las Salinas or allow you to push drugs in our territory. So you might as well give up on the idea of continuing your little operation within fifty miles of the county line."

"Yes, sir. We'll pack it up and move on, it's gonna be hard to find another place like this, it's not like I've got a bunch of senile fucked up relatives I can call on," he mutters. Something crosses my mind briefly, that's the second time he's mentioned something about his father. He said he wasn't long for this world, is the old man dying? Or were Edmund and his brothers up to something else?

Rigs gives him a disgusted look. I don't think any of us actually believe he's going to leave without a fight, but that isn't my main concern.

"Rigs," I say his name in a low deadly tone.

Without looking in my direction, he tells Edmund. "You think we're just going to take you at your word and let you go? Hell no. You have to pay a price for operating in our territory without permission."

"Fine, what do you want?" he says angrily. The poor fool takes a minute to wipe the blood dripping down his cheek onto the shoulder of his shirt. It's all he can manage with his hands tied.

Rigs just gives him the evil eye. Edmund groans before rephrasing his question. "What do you want from me, sir."

Appeased, Rigs tells him, "We're looking for Carol, your father's only daughter. She's missing and I think you know where she is."

I move closer to hear what he has to say. I want to see every expression that jumps onto his face, to tell if he's lying or not.

Edmund staggers back, clearly wary of me getting within striking distance again. He frowns. "That stupid bitch? Why in the hell is everyone so obsessed with her?"

I punch him right in the mouth. Before I can say anything, Rigs pulls me back.

Suddenly Siege is on the other side of me. "If you want him to talk, don't break his fucking jaw."

Rigs just shakes his head and turns back to our mouthy prisoner. "Answer the damn question."

A stubborn expression settles onto his face. "I don't know nothing about that woman except that she's apparently my half-sister. She older than me and sickly. Stupid senile fool has her down to inherit his farm, but the bitch won't outlive him for long," he stops like he's said something he didn't mean to. Wiping his bloody nose again, he says, "You can beat on me all night and it won't matter. I can't give you information I don't have."

"He's lying," I shout, trying to lunge for him again. Some small part of my mind knows that I'm out of line, but my temper is getting the better of me. I don't know what this fucker is playing at, but I think I'm getting an idea. If land and money are involved, then maybe Edmund and his band of merry men are working some confidence trick? I wonder if they're even the old man's actual sons?

A short silence spins out in the cave, with Edmund daring us to beat the information out of him, his men afraid to say anything, and my club brothers standing around, ready for anything.

Siege breaks the silence with a bit of wisdom that I was too agitated to think of on my own. “So, you reckon you’re the old man’s favorite?”

Edmund wipes his cheek on the shoulder of his shirt again before jerking his chin up arrogantly. “I am. That means you had better let me go before he comes looking for you with hired guns. It won’t take him long to realize I’m missing.”

Siege smiles. It’s smug and self-satisfied. He walks up to Edmund and pokes him in the chest with one finger. “I’m counting on it. We need to get his attention and let him know who has you.”

Pivoting around he looks at our club brothers. “Make this place go boom. The bigger the explosion, the better.”

“What about his minions?” Rigs asks.

“They’re clearly not fighters, so they don’t matter.” Turning to the handful of bound men sitting in a short row, he gestures towards the van. “Unload the van and then get the hell out of here. This is a one-time only gift from our club to your bosses.”

They’re all staring at Siege in disbelief until he adds, “I know Eddie-Boy here isn’t the shot caller, so tell whoever it is, that the Savage Legion MC has shut down this entire operation in Las Salinas. Anyone who tracks back here will be going home in a body bag. Got it?”

Although Edmund is complaining loudly in the background, the men all start nodding.

I’ve got to admit that I’m confused as hell. “I don’t get where you’re going with this, Prez.”

Siege gives me a lopsided smile, extremely pleased with himself for some reason.

But it's Rigs who answers as he pulls the first minion to his feet, cuts the cable ties off his wrists and ankles and gives him a shove in the direction of the van. "Our club president has decided to trade the old man's favorite son for Carol Grayson."

I have to tell Rigs and Siege my theory, so I gesture for them to step out of Edmund's earshot, and hiss, "I don't think they're his sons. I think they're pulling some kind of scam on the old man. Did you hear him say inheritance? What if the old man is senile and forgetting what he did to his daughter, or maybe he's now repentant and wants her to inherit? These goons turn up not long after his second wife dies to try and stake a claim."

Siege nods, "The thought crossed my mind too. If Amy's mom is set to inherit the farm, then it stands to reason that they'd want to keep her close. At least until they've gotten the old man to change his will."

"Money is the root of all evil," Rigs adds darkly.

"Though what if it isn't that?" I start second guessing myself.

My club president shrugs, "I think we can safely say that Rufus Grayson either has Carol, or Edmund and his brothers know where she is. But if what Edmund says is true and he's daddy's favorite, then taking him might get the old man to show his cards."

"What if he doesn't want to trade?" I ask worriedly.

Rigs' eyebrows shoot up. "I hope to hell he does. Because if he doesn't, that means we're gonna drop him and bury him deep."

Catching the drift of my club president's plan, my anxiety clicks all the way down.

We all step back so we're standing beside Edmund, I give the man a smile, "I call dibs on taking him apart piece by piece."

Siege chimes in, "Granted. We'll start with Rufus Grayson's most favored son and work our way down to the least favored."

By this time Edmund has stopped talking and is all ears. Understanding the gravity of his situation, he starts negotiating in earnest. "Look, I know I was being a dick before, but we can work this out. "Let me go, and I can fetch the woman, she's nothing but trouble anyway, especially when her kid started snooping around."

Siege stops smiling and his expression turns cold. "That woman is your sister and her kid, your niece. Why did the asshole take her in the first place?"

Edmund looks shifty. "Nothing nefarious."

"So tell me," Siege shoots back. I'm all ears."

"Cut me loose and I'll tell you everything you want to know."

Siege jerks his chin at Rigs. "Cut him loose. If he tries to run, kill him."

Edmund grumbles, "Jesus Christ. You guys are the jumpiest bunch of fuckers I've ever seen in my entire life."

The minute Rigs cuts him loose, he takes a gigantic step back, rubbing his wrists. "You don't have to turn every fucking thing into a capital offense. You do know that, right?"

“I’m tired of hearing the sound of your voice. Tell us why he took Carol Grayson, or so help me you will regret it. Make it quick and concise.”

Shooting Siege a dirty look, he says, “Fine. My old man has a few fucking screws loose.”

“Like dementia or something like that?” I ask.

“Yeah, probably. I’m not a damned doctor but something is sure as fuck wrong with him. He didn’t want us around when his wife was alive, guess he was ashamed of us or something.”

“Or didn’t want her to know about his cheating?” Rigs mutters.

“Yeah, something like that. After his wife got sick, we started dropping around and paying the old man a visit. He kept going on about his daughter, how he regretted what he’d done and saying he wanted to make it up to her. Turns out the stupid fucker changed his will and left everything to her.”

I jump in, “So you’re planning on holding her captive until he dies, then killing her too?”

Edmund’s eyebrows almost disappear into his hair at that, “Wait? What? No! Well, okay maybe Big Joe said something like that. But the thing is, the old man’s mind keeps going back and forth all the time. He didn’t remember changing his will, as far as he’s concerned his bitch of a daughter upped and ran off thirty years ago. We decided if we moved in, then maybe we’d get him on a lucid day and get him to change the will. Problem is the old man is batshit crazy half the time, so there’s no way any attorney would notarize it.”

“Okay, this sounds like a fucked-up telenovela, you wanna tell me where Amy’s

mom fits in to all this?” I’m trying to get my head around what he’s saying, but it sounds so messed up I’m not sure I’m following.

“The old man is sick, not just in the head, and if he dies and the will isn’t sorted then everything goes to our sister. We wanted to keep her in our sights, that way, if he goes before this mess is sorted, then maybe we can persuade her to sign the farm and land over to us,” Edmund pauses and catches our eyes, “Look I don’t mean we were gonna torture her, just offer to set her free if she gives us what is ours. But then...”

“Then what?” I demand.

“It got kind of fucked up,” Edmund says.

“Kind of? Like this isn’t the craziest redneck shit I’ve ever heard,” I spit out.

“Hey, I resent that. I’m not a fucking redneck. Anyway, I managed to get her to come to the house, I have a friend who works in the hospital pharmacy, and he managed to get the delivery address for her meds changed. Problem is, when the old man opened the door and saw her, he thought she was his dead wife.”

“Fuck!” Siege exclaims. Rigs looks concerned.

Me, I’m confused as fuck, “Which one?”

“The first one, Amy Beth’s mom,” he answers.

“Don’t tell me, he’s keeping his own daughter as a wife,” Rigs’ tone is menacing.

Edmund shakes his head, “It’s nothing like that, I don’t think the old man would be capable of sex even if he wanted to. No, he’s got some fantasy about having his family all together. He’s got poor Carol cooking and cleaning like a good mom. We

sit around the dinner table every night, say grace, and make polite conversation. He's happy as a clam, thinks he's finally getting the family he deserves."

"What about his other three sons. Aren't they invited to dinner?"

"Hell no. Big Joe and Hal are fucking animals, and Dan isn't good at pretending to enjoy the happy family life he's providing. They take their meals in the barn and sleep there too."

While everyone is trying to wrap their head around his story, I'm furious. "In other words, he's slaving her out. He has to be. Carol is way too sick to be cooking and cleaning for five men every day. I know you said you weren't gonna physically hurt her, but this is absolute bullshit."

"Of course she isn't doing all that singlehandedly. Dan does most of the work for her, and the other two deal with the farm, leaving me plenty of time to..." he trails off.

Yeah, leaving him plenty of time to run his meth operation. While a lot of what Edmund has said rings true. I don't think he's telling the entire truth. My mom was right, this one is the sneaky one. "So, let me get this straight, the lot of you are just running Amy in circles, thinking her poor mom is lying dead in a ditch somewhere, while you're all playing happy families with her mom? That's fucked up."

"Yeah, it is," Edmund replies sarcastically. "Want to know what's even more fucked up? The fact that the only fucking thing the old man was ever good at was buying up property, sleeping with every woman who crossed his path, and spawning bastards like me and my brothers. I can't be everywhere at once and earn enough money to keep the farm afloat. If the four of us are ever going to inherit the old man's seven thousand fucking acres, I've got to keep all the balls in the air. My brothers might not be all that smart but they're the only family I fucking have."

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Amy

Ven didn't come home last night. Am I worried? Yes. Can I do a damn thing about it? No. I took out my cell phone several times overnight and pulled his number up. But I chickened out each time at the last minute, if he was doing surveillance and my ringtone alerted the bad guys that he's there, it could be disastrous. I know it's probably silly to think that way. Ven is an intelligent man, who would think to turn his cell phone off in a dangerous situation. Still, I couldn't bring myself to take the chance.

I got up at the crack of dawn today so I could be downstairs when he got back. Right now, I'm down in the bar area ready and waiting in my property cut. The thing is, I can't calm down. So I pace back and forth in front of the door with a cup of coffee in my hands. I know there's no reason to be so worried about a big strapping biker like Ven, especially when he's got his club brothers at his back. They're apparently used to fighting the good fight.

When my cup is empty, I dump it unceremoniously on one of the empty tables and walk outside to stretch my legs and pace some more. Hopefully, I can get a better view when they pull in. My legs are starting to get achy when I hear the thrum of multiple motorcycles in the distance. Eventually they come into sight, paired up by twos and enter through the gates which the prospects have opened ready. Ven catches sight of me and pulls his motorcycle over in front of me. His helmet comes off and the second I'm within reach, he grabs me and gives me a bear hug that he follows up with a long lingering kiss.

I wrap my arms around his neck, forgetting that he's probably doing this just for

show because I'm supposed to be his old lady. I think only his club officers know our relationship is just meant to keep me safe. At first, I tell myself that I'm just doing my part to put on a good show but when one of his big arms wraps around my waist and pulls me in tight, my thoughts splinter.

Suddenly, the rest of the world literally disappears from my mind. There's only Ven and his hungry kisses and hard body. My hands slip through his hair, and I hear something clang against the handlebars, it's him ditching his helmet. Then he pulls me towards him. When I'm sitting in his lap, while he's still astride his bike, I feel like the queen of the world. Having his hands roaming over my body and his tongue twining with mine awakens my arousal.

Then it all comes to a screeching halt when a familiar voice rises above the others. "What in the actual fuck is going on here? Amy Beth, are you actually with this biker, like for real?"

I glance up to see Edmund, one of my grandfather's asshole farmhands—who I now know is my uncle—standing there, looking worse for wear. The thing that gets me is the look of shock on his face. I smother back a smile because I don't give two hoots in hell what this man thinks of me.

"Your grandfather would be disappointed in you," he states quietly.

Instead of responding to him, I look up at Ven. His eyes are all dazed and half-lidded. There's an overlay of desire clearly evident on his face. It's very apparent he's feeling exactly the same kind of emotions that I am in this moment.

I can feel the bulge of his cock against me, it's clear that our PDA is having an interesting effect on this man. I turn around and lift my hands back to his neck then pull him in close for another kiss.

“Get a fucking room,” Edmund groans.

I murmur, “What’s he doing here?”

Ven’s arms come out around me again and he lifts me as he gets off his bike. “Later, sweetheart. We need to have a little talk first.”

I can tell by the tone of his voice that he means sex and I’m there for it. I’m still aroused from the lip lock he threw down on me and so damn grateful he came back safely that I want to get naked with him and wallow in all the attention he will give me.

My arms are around his neck and my legs around his waist as he takes off to the clubhouse. I can hear the shouts of encouragement from his club brothers, but instead of being embarrassed that they know exactly what’s going on, I feel myself getting even wetter. I’m the most sexually aroused I’ve ever been in my entire life. I don’t care what this looks like or who sees us. All I care about is getting some face-to-face time with him, feeling his warm body against mine so that the small voice in the back of my head will quieten down, the voice that said he was going to get hurt or wind up dead trying to find my mother. But he didn’t. He’s here, whole and about to ravish me.

When we get to top of the stairs, my hands reach down, and I dare to squeeze his ass. This man has buns of steel and an outstanding sense of humor because he gives my ass a firm swat and tells me to calm down.

I don’t though. Instead, I run my hands down his back and park my fingertips in his back pockets. He makes a sexy noise in the back of his throat when I wiggle my fingers against his ass cheeks. After the endless pacing and worrying, this is just what I need to blow off steam.

He carries me to his suite and kicks the door closed behind him. In a matter of seconds, we're in front of his bed. He tosses me onto it and tells me, "Get ready to have that pretty pussy of yours licked until you scream. I'm going to grab a shower super quick."

I reach out for him, intent on telling him that no shower is necessary. But he's gone before I can get the words out. I bounce up off the bed, begin stripping off my clothing and make myself comfortable in just my underwear. It's hard to let go of the bra because I'm modest by nature. However, if there was ever a moment to be bold, it's now. Sex with Ven is sure to be the highlight of my entire life and I can hardly wait for him to finish in the shower and come to me.

I'm experiencing some strange euphoria. All my life's problems have momentarily receded in favor of enjoying this one experience. This is something I'm doing just for me.

When the bathroom door comes flying open and Ven walks in with a glistening body and a towel slung haphazardly around his waist, I forget how to breathe. Ven is the most beautiful sight I have ever set my eyes on.

Little trails of water are running down his ripped torso. One big hand is holding the towel together at his hip. I take a moment to admire the ink covering his chest and crawling down one arm. It's mostly nature scenes, with snakes, and he has his club's name across his shoulders with the logo beneath. It's huge and covers his entire back.

I tell him admiringly, "You're absolutely gorgeous. You know that, right?"

He doesn't answer. It's as if he doesn't consider himself handsome or he's used to hearing how attractive he is, and it just goes in one ear and out the other. Either way, it doesn't matter, because it's obvious that he's the hottest man I'll ever have the chance of hitting.

Rather than answer, he drops his towel and reaches out with one huge hand to tug the blanket covering my body downwards, slowly revealing my nearly naked form. When he sees that I kept my bra and panties on, he smiles.

“This will never do for what I have in mind, babe.” Reaching down he unsnaps my bra and pulls it off, one strap at a time. He’s still gazing at my breasts as one of his hands drifts down and grabs the side of my panties ripping them right off my body.

I let out a gasp. I should object to that kind of masculine display but I’m far too aroused.

“Sorry,” he mumbles. “I’ll buy you more.”

I nod, all in for whatever this man wants today. The next thing I know he’s smoothing his rough hands over my body as if he’s trying to figure out where I’m sensitive. Ven learns more about me in a few minutes than most men I’ve dated learned in months. Through his touch, I’m learning things about my body that even I never knew. A light touch on the back of my knees makes my arousal spike. That’s weird because it’s not an area I would have thought was sexy.

I fall back as he moves over me with his bulky form. His body is hard, muscular, and warm. I like the expression on his face. It’s one filled with pure unadulterated lust. He wants me as desperately as I want him. When he comes down to kiss me, I reach up encircling his neck with my arms. When our lips touch, my legs automatically part and come up on each side of body. I can feel his cock, thick, throbbing, and hot, resting on my stomach.

His tongue slips into my mouth and he starts seducing me with his lips. As we twine tongues, his hands are everywhere, touching, caressing, and arousing my passions. Ven is everything I’ve ever wanted in a man, and this is everything I’ve ever wanted in a sexual experience. My thoughts begin to splinter as my arousal builds.

When his hand slides between our bodies to touch my pussy, I groan with pleasure. “You feel so good on top of me. All I want is more, more, more when I’m with you.”

His lips move from my mouth to my neck, and he whispers back between kisses and licks, “I’m going to take my time with you, make your first time with me special.”

“Every time with you is going to be special, because you’re all I want,” I tell him.

When his tongue swipes over the hollow of my throat, I shamelessly groan at the sparks of pleasure it provokes. He does it over and over as his hands part me and he slides his thick fingers through my wet folds. My body trembles with arousal as I run my fingers through his hair.

For many long moments we’re wrapped up in each other, each too needy to tolerate moving on to bigger and better things. Then he begins to kiss his way down my body, careful to look for more of those tantalizing pleasure spots. He finds another right above my clit. When he licks and sucks at that spot, it feels so amazing that I forget for a brief moment that I even have a clit.

His fingers slide inside me, and I can’t believe how wet I am for him. He says something about how good I taste and then licks me from my opening all the way up to my clit and back again. I rake my nails along his shoulders, encouraging him to continue giving me what I need. His devilish tongue never misses a beat. It’s as big and strong as the rest of him.

He plunges two of those thick fingers in me at the same time and is none too gentle. It makes me come far too soon. I’m disappointed because I wanted to hold out longer. I gasp as I realize this man is not stopping.

His fingers are still inside me, as my greedy pussy pulls and tugs on them as another orgasm rolls through me. His mouth moves to my clit, and he licks, his tongue

expertly flicking and circling me. I can't decide what I like best, the small tight circles he makes around the top of my clit or when the gently laps over the top. Both are distinctly amazing sensations. Both pale by comparison to him sucking on my clit. I don't last long before I'm coming so hard again it makes my head hurt.

I think he's going to finally give it up, but he doesn't. Ven is like an orgasm giving machine, only my clit is getting really sensitive especially when his beard grazes over it. I begin shoving his head away, too breathless to tell him to stop. He gets the message though. I almost come all over again as he looks up and licks my glistening honey from his lips.

"When can I do that again?" he asks with complete seriousness.

"After I suck your dick?" Yeah, I phrased that as a question.

His expression shifts to one of indifference. "Next time then," he answers.

I start to argue about fairness and all, but Ven has already pushed me back onto the bed and is running his thick cock over my slit, coating himself in my juices. I like the sensation and ride his cock for a few minutes, avoiding my clit.

"Your cock feels strong and..." I lose track of my thoughts when he leans down and begins licking and teasing my nipples. After a few minutes, I forget I was even talking.

Ven doesn't forget through. He asks, slyly, "My cock feels strong and what?"

I just shake my head as he taps the head of his cock over my clit, threatening to provoke another orgasm.

He adds playfully, "Strong and capable perhaps?" Bringing the head of his cock to

my hungry core. He slides in a bit and adds, “Strong and big?”

With that he slowly slides himself into my body as if to make a point about being big. I can feel my pussy stretch to take him. “Ginormous,” I say breathlessly.

He chuckles. “How do you know it’s not that you’re small and I’m just normal size?”

I smack his shoulder and say, “Now is no time for jokes. This is important business.”

He laughs out loud and rolls us over, pulling me on top of him. “There. Take as much or as little of me as you want, at your own pace.”

“God, I love that you did that.”

Sitting on top of him with his hands around my waist trying to relax long enough to take all of him, I look down at him. “You have a gigantic cock, sexy humor, and give up control in the bedroom. That makes you a triple threat.”

He props up on one elbow. “How so?” The expression on his face is worried. It takes me a minute to realize he took my words literally.

“I mean those are all things that women love, which makes them more likely to fall in love with you. You know, like I am.”

His face lights up. “You’re falling in love with me. Good. I’ve already decided that I’m keeping you.”

I slide down a couple more inches on his cock and bounce back up, before trying to take him again. We work at it, as I think over his statement about keeping me. Again, I should object to such a possessive statement. I don’t because I like the sound of being his far too much to say anything he might construe as off-putting.

When I slide all the way down, finally impaled on his girthy cock, I feel a sense of achievement. I move myself up and down, feeling my walls clench him as his thick shaft rubs my g-spot. My breath is coming out in pants, and I can feel myself close to coming again, but my thighs won't stop trembling after those first orgasms and I keep losing my stroke. I tap his side. "Your turn to take over, hot stuff."

He carefully wraps his arms around me and rolls us until I'm on the bottom.

"Start slow and then you can go as fast as you like, okay?"

"Of fucking course it's okay. Everything after licking your beautiful pussy is just the icing on the cake, a bonus pleasure."

"I really am falling in love with you, Ven."

"Good," he says as he pulls almost all the way out and begins pressing back inside me. "I decided long ago that if you'll have me, I want to make you mine. You're perfect for me."

"Great. We'll work out the details later." Pulling my knees up to my chin, I tell him, "Right now, I need you to move."

"Yes ma'am," he responds with amusement. "My woman will always get exactly what she wants when it comes to cock riding."

When he pulls out this time, he pushes back in a little more forcefully. It feels so amazing that I chant for him to do it again and again. I can feel his thick cock slide over my g-spot and when his thumb comes out to gently rub against my clit, I have to work hard to fight off another orgasm. He's hitting so deep with this position that I can't think of anything else apart from how amazing this feels.

Ven is an extremely talented lover. He gets everything right, from the speed, to the thrust and even the extras like giving me a little double thrust before pulling out at random intervals. When he picks up speed, pure pleasure courses through my body. He holds one leg close to his body and uses that hold to jerk me against him when he makes contact with my body. Everything about this experience is amazing. I can't help but orgasm again and again. I lose count at three on top of the ones he gave me during oral.

The last time I come so hard that I feel like I'm literally choking his cock. He moans and continues to fuck me through the entire thing. After my orgasm slows, I'm vaguely aware that Ven is thrusting into me hard and fast. This is the no frills version of sex where Ven is chasing his own orgasm. When he finally stills, and shoots his load deep inside me, I realize we didn't use a condom. That probably wasn't the wisest of ideas, especially considering his past with numerous club girls, but right now I'm too blissed out to worry.

Everything about Ven feels like love and family, home and hearth. I fall asleep with images of what could be between us if we are brave enough to see where this relationship leads. I know deep down in my heart that Ven is the one for me. I can't imagine myself with any other man.

Ven

I climb out of bed once Amy is fast asleep. It may be morning, but even after being up all night I still have what it takes to wear her pretty ass out between the sheets. Amy is that mixture of sweet and sexy but with a strong personality. I want to stay there all day with her, but I have business to deal with. I didn't tell her that we've discovered her mom is definitely being held at the farm, me and my club brothers have to decide how best to handle the rescue mission, and I don't want Amy getting her hopes up until we've got a solid plan in place. Hopefully, there'll be no need for us to go in with all guns blazing, and the old bastard will hand her over in exchange for his son.

I slide out of bed and get dressed, knowing full well that Edmund is in our lockup in the basement. When I leave my room, I make sure the door is locked, Amy can get out, but no one can enter without a key. Not that anyone associated with my club would do something like that, but I'm not taking any chances.

I head downstairs to the basement and open the large metal door. The area we use as a small jail is soundproofed so we need not fear things getting too loud, though truth be told, the thought of Edmund's squeals disturbing any of my club brothers drinking at the bar is the least of my problems.

Evan comes to his feet when I enter the hallway. "Didn't you check your messages? Siege and my dad want to talk to you in Siege's office."

My hand goes to my pocket, and I pull my phone out as I mumble, "No I've been busy."

“Yeah, we all heard,” he says with a smirk.

Glancing up from reading the message from Siege, I tell Evan sharply, “Maybe it’s time to keep your ears shut, prospect, and focus on guarding our prisoner” I feel a bit shitty reprimanding him, he’s a prospect and they need to show respect, but as he’s also Rigs’ son, we tend to let him get away with stuff.

Evan shrugs, “Sorry Ven, I was just kidding. When I took over from Crow, he said you’d gone upstairs with Amy, it doesn’t take a genius to know why.”

“How’s the prisoner been?” I ask.

“Whining and talking shit about how his father is gonna storm the clubhouse,” Evan says.

“Sounds about right. I’m off to see what Siege wants, if shit-for-brains gives you any trouble, then get one of the brothers to give him a beat down.”

Evan nods and sits back down on the wooden chair. He’s got a sketch pad with him, and I can’t help but notice the designs, “Looking good.”

“Thanks, man,” he says with a smile. “Vapor says he’s gonna put some of my designs in the flash book at the shop. I want to learn to tattoo, but they won’t let me loose on a person until I’m eighteen, so I’m stuck tattooing pork belly until then. It sucks.”

I try and remember back to how I was when I was Evan’s age. Not anywhere near as sensible, that’s for sure. He’s got an old head on a young body, I guess it’s because before Rigs and Mattie found him, he’d been having to support himself and his grandmother. It might seem like the club officers are being sticklers for the rules with him, but his mom and dad want him to enjoy what’s left of his childhood without having adult responsibilities.

I hotfoot it upstairs and knock on Siege's door. When he tells me to come in, I step into the room and the first thing I see is Dan sitting in a chair in front of Siege's desk, surrounded on either side by the other club officers. He looks super anxious and his head snaps around to look at me as I walk up. He practically jumps out of his chair when I approach. "I didn't do it," he stammers.

I wave him back down. "Yeah, we know you're just an accessory after the fact. Sit back down."

He hesitates for a second then does as he's told. I jerk my chin at Siege and my club brothers and say, "Hope you all got a couple of hours of shut eye."

Rigs responds grumpily, "We didn't, so let's get right down to it."

"So what's Danny-Boy doing here?" I ask.

Siege gestures to Dan to fill me in on what he's already no doubt told them,

"A cave on my father's property was firebombed last night. Someone left Edmund's cell phone there with a Savage Legion business card. The old man sent me to ask you where Edmund is."

"Yeah," Siege interjected. "We blew up the meth lab your brother had set up in there."

"What?" Dan gasps.

"I'm guessing by your response Edmund didn't tell you about his little side hustle. We don't need a major meth operation funneling drugs into Las Salinas. Regardless of who owns the land, this is our territory. There's also the little matter of your half-sister. We brought Edmund here because want to trade him for Carol Grayson, who

we believe is being held against her will.”

“Look, we’re not animals. We’re doing everything we can to take good care of her. She’s actually a real sweet woman. If we could, we’d let her go. But...” he pauses, I’m guessing he doesn’t want to reveal what his brothers are up to.

“We know about your little plan, try and get your pops to change his will, and holding Carol hostage in case he dies before he signs the papers,” I say.

“You know?” Dan says with a shrug. “I didn’t wanna be a part of it. It was Edmund, Big Joe, and Hal who came up with the idea. I needed someplace to stay and went along with it.”

“So the plan is to wait until your father has a lucid moment and get him to change his will, that’s what Edmund said, but I’m not buying it,” Siege fixes him with a stare.

“It’s true. Edmund thought he might be able to forge the old coot’s signature, but his attorney wants him to sign in his presence, and he’d only need to take one look to see that Rufus is living in cloud cuckoo land,” Dan mutters.

“Edmund said he had a few screws loose. So what’s the story?” I ask.

“I don’t know what Edmund told you, but when we found out that the will had been changed, we asked him about it, but the old man had no memory of doing anything of the sort. He said that his daughter was dead to him, and the more we asked the more disturbed he got. We figured if we hung about, we might get him on a good day...” his voice trails off.

“Go on,” Siege says.

“That was almost eighteen months ago, after staying for a few months we realized he

didn't have good days. He was stuck in the past, convinced that his wife was away at her parents. That's his first wife, Carol's mom. That's when Edmund had an idea, he thought if Carol visited then maybe it would jog his memory, except it didn't work out that way. When he saw Carol at the door, he was convinced she was his wife."

I shake my head in disbelief, when Edmund had spun this tale last night it seemed so farfetched, but here was Dan spouting the same shit.

Siege throws in, "You better not fucking tell me he's using his own daughter as a stand in for his wife because, so help me God, if he's touched her in any kind of wrong way, he's a dead man."

Surprise and revulsion jumps onto Dan's face. "Hell no. He would never."

Siege's eyebrows shoot up. "Yet he'd hold her captive and sic dogs on his granddaughter, but this other thing is a bridge too far, right?"

Dan sighs. "Okay, maybe he really is that crazy. I don't know if he would or if he wouldn't, but I do know that his pecker stopped working years ago. It's why he had a falling out with my mom. My mother said she was relieved that he stopped coming around because he was off his rocker and wildly unpredictable."

"Shit," Siege responds, "He must have been a handful back in the day. He must have got with your mom in his late fifties? You're not much older than Amy."

"Look, I don't know about all that. All I know is my mom lost touch with him for years."

"Getting you away from him sounds like a pretty smart move on her part. What made you decide tracking him down was a good call?" Rigs' question is a good one, because Dan certainly didn't have a great quality of life right now, busting his ass for

slave wages on his father's farm.

"I didn't," he responds irritably. "Big Joe tracked me down. Told me that I was the son of a rich man and stood to inherit property if I stepped forward. Since both my gran and my mom passed, I've been all alone. It sucks working one low paying job after another, so I decided to roll the dice and see if my dad was as crazy as my mother had told me all those years ago. Let's just say my mom knew what she was talking about when it came to Rufus. He ain't gonna last forever. I'm staying there not only for my inheritance, but to help Carol and try to keep my three older brothers from totally self-destructing."

"Oh yeah? How's that going for you?" I ask, knowing full well that he's got no control over the others. I've seen that much with my own eyes.

"Not well. It's clear that the old man favors Edmund over me, Big Joe, and Hal. Ed runs the fucking show down at the farm, and the other two think he walks on water and will do anything he asks, no matter how morally reprehensible it is. I know if he asked them to kill Carol they would—that's one of the main reasons I've stuck around, other than those idiots, she's my only flesh and blood, someone's gotta look out for her. I never trusted that shady bastard, and from what you said about the meth lab, I was right. I think he's setting us up for a fall, and he's planning on taking everything for himself."

"Why did your dad take such a shine to Edmund?"

Dan shrugs, "Edmund is a fast talker and slick like a used car salesman. To be honest, he acts like a pompous prick. I think that's something my father could relate to, since he's the same way. Maybe he sees his younger self?"

"Well, none of us particularly give a shit about the old man or his fucked-up family dynamics," Siege tells him. "There are only two things on our radar. The first is the

most important. We want Carol released and back where she belongs with Amy. Holding her hostage is apeshit crazy and has to stop. The second issue is Edmund's meth business. He needs to fuck off with that shit. We're not going to tolerate a full-blown meth operation in our territory."

"Why do you care? I'm sure Edmund tried to make a deal with you, I know what he's like."

I speak up again, "We're not an outlaw motorcycle club, just a regular one."

Dan frowns, looking from one to another of us. "Ed said you're a bunch of criminals. So, you're all straight edge? Isn't that fucking weird. I thought I was the only one in the entire fucking county that didn't do a little meth."

I take a step forward and gaze down at him. "Edmund's a fucking liar. You should've known better than to believe his bullshit."

"Yeah, I'm getting that. The part you're not getting is just how little control I have about what goes down on that farm. If I kick up too much fuss and my father gets rid of me, who's going to look out for Carol? Ed, Big Joe, or Hal would kill her in a heartbeat and probably do away with our dad too. I just try to shut the fuck up and deal with shit, ya know?"

For some godforsaken reason, I believe what he's saying is true. "Do you think your father will trade Carol for Edmund?"

He gives another shrug. "Who the hell knows what goes through his mind."

"What's your best guess?" Rigs' stern voice causes Dan to glance over at the older man.

Dan takes a few minutes to think over the question before saying, “I think the old man is going to gather up his guns, drag along Big Joe and Hal and come for Edmund himself.”

When we don’t immediately respond, he adds, “I know that sounds all kinds of crazy but you gotta understand you’re not dealing with a rational person, sometimes he doesn’t even know what decade it is. You know why he got so pissed when Amy showed up? He thought she was Carol. So yeah, he thinks his daughter is his dead wife come back to life, and his granddaughter is his estranged daughter who he blames for the death of his first wife,” Dan shakes his head with the craziness of it all.

“Where’s Jerry Springer when you need him?” I mutter.

“Hey, I’d buy tickets for that show,” Dutch says.

“He’s dead, but maybe Dr. Phil would be interested?” Tank offers.

“Alright, thanks for being honest,” Siege interrupts trying to get back on topic. “Drawing him off the farm and making him come to us will mean bullets aren’t flying around Carol.”

“That’s a smart move. She’s not moving as fast as she once was, I try and make sure she gets her meds, but she really needs to see a doctor.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll get her out of there. Tell the old man he’s got twelve hours to make up his mind about the trade.”

“Or what,” Dan prompts.

“What do you mean or what?” I ask.

Rigs chimes in again, “The kid is asking what we’re gonna do if doesn’t agree. Remember, we’re not talking about someone who’s firing on all cylinders here.”

Dan glances at Rigs and responds, “A demand only works if there is a consequence attached. If not, Rufus might decide to just wait you out.”

Siege says, “Tell him that if we don’t hear back in twelve hours, we begin removing fingers and work our way down.”

Dan’s eyebrows jump up. “Seriously? You’d do that? So why twelve hours instead of eight or fourteen?”

I get irritated by all the talking when Dan needs to be on his way to deliver our message. I warn him, “More than twelve hours is just giving him extra time to round up hired guns, we’re being reasonable here, not stupid.”

“I guess that makes a certain kind of sense. I don’t think he’d round up hired guns, but maybe Big Joe or Hal would.”

I interject, “I know we told you that we’re not outlaw bikers, but you need to know that doesn’t mean we’re not dangerous. If we don’t get Carol back in twelve hours, I’ll start taking Edmund apart myself.”

“There’s no need to be so vicious, dude.”

I lean forward and get right into his face. “We’re savage, not vicious.”

He pales.

Rigs steps closer. “We’re trusting you to do the right thing here, Danny-Boy. Don’t let us down because I guarantee getting on the wrong side of us will make whatever

your father or idiot brothers do to you, seem like a fucking vacation.”

Dan swallowed thickly. “I get it. No one wants this situation to go sideways. I’ll do my part to make the trade happen.”

Siege looks thoughtful, “Why don’t you tell your old man or brothers that when you left our property you saw someone with a cut that said Iron Demons MC, spying on us.”

Dan looks stunned. “Why would I lie about something like that?”

I catch on immediately. “It’s because the Demons are an allied club. If anyone did get the bright idea to get some hired guns then they might approach a club they think is our enemy, it would ensure things go our way and less people get killed.”

Rigs is quick to point out, “Don’t suggest that outright. Just tell him what you saw. Your father needs to think the idea was all his.”

Dan finally gets it. “You guys are sneaky as fuck but there’s no guarantee he’s going to make that connection.”

“If not then we roll with the plan we just put in place.”

“Alright, we’ll do this your way,” Dan says with a sigh.

Siege turns and pulls out his cell phone to call Stark from the Iron Demons MC, just in case. Rigs and I send Dan on his way and begin brainstorming how to handle the coming battle.

Amy

By the time I finally get up, it's early afternoon. I fully expected Ven to be sleeping off his all-night sleuthing operation but he's long gone. I can tell, because his side of the bed is stone cold. I'm dying to know what kind of information they got out of Edmund, so I rush through my morning routine with the intention of finding Ven. He's not sent me any texts, so I'm assuming that means that he's still in the clubhouse.

After heading downstairs I take a look at the bar area, there are a few brothers and club girls drinking, but no sign of Ven. He told me that they hold prisoners in the basement, I'm not sure if I'll be allowed down there but it's worth a try, so I saunter back to the staircase and head down. When I reach the bottom, there's a huge empty space with doors off to one side. On the far side of the room there's a metal door with a window, a bit like ones that you see in TV shows about prisons. Evan is sitting outside the door intently drawing. He looks up when he sees me and jumps to attention.

I cautiously approach him and ask, "Is everything okay, Evan?"

He automatically steps in front of the door, blocking my view of the window. "Yes, ma'am. Everything is fine. The other prospects have breakfast ready if you want to go back upstairs."

"Why are you down here? Are you guarding Edmund?"

The moment the words fly out of my mouth, I know that's exactly what he's doing. I

can tell by the look on his face that I wasn't supposed to guess that. "Aren't you a little young to be guarding prisoners?"

"I'm almost eighteen. My dad said I'm old enough to stand in as a secondary guard."

"What's a secondary guard?"

Suddenly, the door flies open, and another brother steps out. "You are not supposed to be near the lockup. But since you asked, the secondary guard is a backup. If the guard on the other side of the door gets overwhelmed by the prisoner, the secondary guard is supposed to raise the alarm and ensure he doesn't make it through this door." Leaning forward slightly, he says, "That would never happen because the door is steel, filled with concrete and has a deadbolt. In other words, you're perfectly safe in this area as long as you don't distract the guards with a bunch of useless questions."

I throw up both hands in a gesture of surrender. "Sorry I asked."

Evan glances at the other man. "Talon, is it really necessary to be so rude to our guest?"

"Mind your business, prospect."

"You know I have to report this to Ven, right?"

Talon shoots me an easy grin. "Sorry if I came off as rude. I've been up for forty-seven hours straight, and I'm probably crankier than usual."

I force myself to smile back. "Sorry to hear that. I'll just mosey on upstairs and get out of your hair."

"Appreciate it, Miss Amy."

Without another word, I make for the stairs. Talon kind of scares me a bit. The whole main floor is in a ruckus which is in stark contrast to the calm just before I headed to the basement. I wonder what's happened in the space of five minutes. The women are running around packing up stuff and the men are apparently preparing for some kind of violence because they're all wearing weapons. I shove my way through the crowd to find Ven. I catch him coming out of the back offices and run to him.

"What's going on? The place is utter chaos."

He grabs me and pulls me close. "We sent a message to your grandfather that we're willing to trade Edmund for your mother. We believe he's going to say, 'hell no' to that idea, and come with men and guns to take Edmund back by force."

"You know where my mom is?" my voice sounds shrill.

Venom puts his hand on my shoulder, "Sorry babe, I wanted to tell you earlier, but we needed to make sure our intel was correct and come up with a plan."

I open my mouth to protest, but he stops me.

"I know I should have told you, but I didn't wanna get your hopes up until we knew what we were gonna do. But your grandfather has forced our hands."

Shock roils through my gut. "Holy shit. I'm sorry that I brought this kind of trouble down on your club."

He doesn't seem at all upset. Instead he tells me, "You brought down nothing, sweetheart. It's all down to that old bastard. To tell the truth it's better if we stand our ground and let him come to us, than have to take that farmhouse apart. Things could go sideways pretty damn quick, and we don't want your mom near when bullets start flying."

I glance away as I try to process his words. “Oh, that makes sense. I just hope no one from your club gets hurt. My grandfather can be real asshole when he wants to be, he might not have all his marbles, but he’s still crafty as a fox.”

For some reason that makes him laugh, “That old man will have to get up pretty early in the morning to catch me unawares.”

I stare up at him, my hands fisted in his shirt as I try to explain my grandfather to him. “That old man is cunning and sly. Don’t turn your back on him in a fight. In fact, don’t let him out of your sight full stop. He’ll sneak around and attack you from behind if he gets half a chance.”

His hands come up to wrap around my upper arms. “You’re really worried about me, aren’t you, sweetheart?”

I nod my head, lowering my eyes. “I just found the man of my dreams. I don’t want to lose him trying to get my mom back.”

His expression turns indulgent. “Don’t worry, you’re not gonna lose me.”

Someone calls his name, and he yells, “Be right there.”

Turning back to me, he says, “All the women are relocating. Evan has agreed to escort you to my mom’s place. You’ll be safe there while we deal with your grandfather. After he’s been neutralized, we’ll go and get your mom from his place. We interrogated Edmund while you were sleeping. He says there’s an abandoned mill on the property, and they stash her there when they suspect someone is going to come looking for her.”

A distant memory jumps forward in my mind. I remember going there as kid. It had an old-fashioned water pump with a rusty metal handle. When we pumped the water,

it came out dirty at first but ran clear after a few minutes. We always drank from it because it was best tasting water ever. I don't tell Ven that I know where the old mill is because I plan to go there and rescue my mom while these men duke it out with my grandfather. Ven would never allow me to go there on my own but I'm not going to let anyone, or anything, get in the way of me rescuing my mother.

“Alright. That's great news. You and your club are doing a bang-up job of figuring this whole thing out.”

“Yeah, it's been a trip. I gotta go. You go straight to The Serpent's Den, alright?”

He kisses me goodbye, and I watch him head back with his club brothers and gear up.

I don't wait to hook up with Evan because I already know he's standing guard in the basement. I just rush out, get into my car, and take off. I'm not quite stupid enough to go straight there and risk running right into my grandfather and his men. Instead I go gas up my vehicle, buy a cup of coffee and park up behind some trees so I can see if, and when my grandfather and his thugs branch off on the road that leads to the Savage Legion's clubhouse.

I sip my coffee and wait. A few minutes later, I get a text from Ven.

Ven: Where are you? Evan can't find you.

Me: I couldn't find him, so I just took off.

Ven: You shouldn't be traveling alone at a time like this.

Me: It doesn't matter, because I'm almost there already.

Ven: Oh, okay. Drive safe and I'll let you know when the conflict is over.

Me: Call me right away. I'm really worried something will happen to you. I want to know when you're safe.

Ven: You got it, baby.

I slip the phone into my cross-body bag and take another sip of my coffee. I feel bad lying to Ven, I know what I'm doing might seem reckless, but I have to get my mom out. While I have every faith that Ven and his club brothers would defeat my grandfather, I couldn't risk something happening and one of my grandfather's men going back to hurt my mom before the Savage Legion rescued her.

Suddenly, I spy half a dozen rag-tag vehicles headed towards the clubhouse. Two of the vehicles I recognize as belonging to my grandfather. They are all filled with men. I can't make out all of them, but I do see Big Joe, Dan, and Hal. With Edmund in lockup, that means there's no one at the farm to keep me from getting my mother and getting the hell out of there. I wait until they are all the way out of view before pulling out and heading to the farm.

As I drive out of town, my mind begins thinking over where my mom is most likely to be, the farmhouse or the mill. My gut tells me that my grandfather would have locked her up in the mill, but I don't feel like I can drive by the farmhouse without having a look there first, since I'm fairly certain there's not going to be any of my grandfather's men there. Some small part of my mind thinks he may have locked her in the basement or attic, chained her to something heavy so she can't get away.

When I get to the fork in the road and have to choose to go the Grayson ranch or the mill, I take the left turn, to my grandfather's farmhouse. My stomach is churning, and it's almost making me nauseous enough to throw up. I have a really bad feeling about all this, but I don't stop because this might be my only opportunity to find her.

I pull my car right up to the front door and get out. I walk around the back of my car

on shaking legs and open my trunk. My trembling hand reaches for the small caliber handgun that I've had stashed away in one place or another since I came of age. It's been ages since I last touched it. I fumble around to find the clip, slam it into the grip of the gun and stuff it into the waistband of my jeans. Standing there, staring into my trunk, I feel heavier, even though the gun is small. It's the burden of carrying a lethal weapon, a little voice in the back of my head whispers.

As I approach the house, I see an axe lying abandoned on a chopping block. Reaching out, I wrap my hand around the handle. In for a penny, in for a pound, I tell myself, as I pull off the plastic safety cap and stalk up to the front door. I've got a lot to do and little time to get it done. I give the door handle a twist and find that it's open, I guess when you're out in the middle of nowhere stuff like home security doesn't matter, either that or my grandfather is just so arrogant that he wouldn't even consider anyone would try and break in.

Stepping through the front door, I call out my mother's name. "Carol Grayson, if you're here, yell out."

When I don't hear anything, I rush into the living room and begin searching behind furniture, in closets, and anywhere else that makes sense. Moving to the dining room and kitchen, I yell, "Mom, it's Amy. I'm here to rescue you. If you can't scream, make some noise, so I can find you."

The house is still eerily quiet. I don't let that stop me. I keep moving and searching upstairs, the attic and even the basement. By the time I'm convinced she's not there my lungs are burning from repeatedly shouting her name.

When I don't find any trace of her at the farmhouse, I stagger back out to my car, toss the axe into the passenger seat and drive out to the mill.

In the quiet of the car, I realize my phone is beeping. Wiping the sweat from my brow

with one arm, I wonder if I should see who's calling. I already know it's probably Ven. He's likely figured out I didn't go to his mother's place and is trying to find me. I can't let anything get in the way of my one opportunity to find my mother, not even the man the love.

I'm all ready to ignore it and continue with my mission, but then I realize it could be that Ven has intel for me on finding my mom. Maybe she was in one of the vehicles I saw? That thought motivates me to pull out my phone and check the messages.

There are no messages, but my phone is littered with missed calls from Ven and even one from his mother. I remember that hardened tone of her voice when she gave him advice on this situation. My instincts tell me to call her first.

I try and keep my voice as light and breezy as possible, "Hey Meli, It's Amy. I saw that you called. What's up?"

"You were supposed to come to me," There is something about her voice. Not angry, but flat and deadly serious, nothing like the bright bubbly tone she used when we first met.

"Yeah, sorry. There's been a change of plans."

"Non ," she states firmly. "Stop driving. Do it now."

A chill creeps up my spine. "Um, how do you know I'm driving?"

"Because I can see you, ma petite ."

I break hard and it's a good thing I do, because a dark colored SUV pulls right in front of me, cutting me off.

The window slides down and Meli shouts, “Get in. We go together.”

I open my door and tell her in no uncertain terms, “You can’t be here, Meli. It’s too dangerous.”

Her eyes are strange, cold, defiant but her tone is light, “This is not my—how do you say? First rodeo. Get into my car.”

Turning around, I grab the axe from the passenger seat and stomp over to her vehicle. I jerk the door open and ask, “You sure you want to go on this wild ride? Things might get ugly, but I’m not leaving without my mom.”

Finally there’s a hint of a smile on her face. “Of course not. Why do you think I came? You are like me, you will not let a man tell you what to do.”

I jump in and rest the head of the axe on the floor between my legs. The minute the door closes, she hits the gas, leaving me scrambling to get my safety belt snapped into place.

I ask, “How did you find me?”

“Serp put a tracker on your phone, he knows when you run away to save your mother on your own. It took me a while to get here, but I came for you.”

“Do you even know where you’re going?”

“My son sent me the coordinates.”

Shock roils through my gut. “I’m surprised Ven approved you coming to help me out when he didn’t want me anywhere near this farm.”

“My Serp is a smart man. I teach him everything I know, make him strong and resilient.”

Glancing at the speedometer, I see she’s tearing down this dirt road doing almost sixty miles an hour. She must have the shock absorbers straight from hell because what should be a bumpy ride is anything but. Something strange is going on here, something I can’t quite put my finger on.

“What... what did you teach him exactly?” I ask her, more shocked than anything.

Her tone is sad as she explains, “I once had a man. He was everything to me, friend, lover, husband, and father of my child. I was na?ve back then, so he teach me everything I need to know to live in his world. He teach me self-defense, how to shoot straight, tread lightly so I am not seen or heard, and how to track animals and my enemy. He was a man of the land, and I was a city girl fresh off the plane from Paris. I learned his ways, lived side-by-side with him for many years before our son was born. We taught our son together until...”

Her words drift off. I swallow thickly, fully aware that she sees herself in me. That’s why she told Ven to train me. I thought she just meant martial arts. Now, I’m starting to think she means everything. There’s more to this story, Ven hasn’t told me much about his upbringing and something tells me it has a sad ending.

“Can I ask what happened to him, your husband? Ven hasn’t told me anything about his father.”

She shifts gears and speeds up to the point where I’m uncomfortable with how fast she’s going. There’s a long silence, but she finally answers my question. “His truck was hit by a tractor-trailer, the driver was drunk. Both he and my son were injured. He was strong, my Barron. He lasted for five days before he died but the injuries were too bad. My Serp was only a child, a boy of eight. He had to go through so

many surgeries and so much pain.”

Oh God, that’s why he doesn’t drink. It’s because a drunk driver killed his father. It makes so much sense. “I’m really sorry you lost the love of your life. I can’t imagine what that must have been like.”

Barely glancing at me, she keeps her eyes on the road. “It was something I do not wish on my worst enemy. I only wish my Serp could have known his father as a man. But I see him, and even without his father’s influence he grows so similar.”

When I don’t immediately respond, the tone of her voice lifts and she gives her head a little shake. “But life goes on and so must the living. I take care of what is mine, and what is dear to those I love. My Serp cares deeply for you, when he realized what you do, he call me. I came for you, for us women must stick together during times of strife, n’est-ce pas ?” One hand lands on her hip and I see she’s got a gun three times the size of mine holstered there.

I’m seeing Melusine in a new light. When I’d met her at the restaurant, she had seemed so sweet and innocent, but it’s clear that Ven’s mom is one kickass woman. “Thank you for coming out today. I don’t know what we’re going to find at the old mill. I hope my mom is alone. I think she is because I saw my grandfather and all his men headed for the Legion’s clubhouse, and there was no one at the farmhouse.”

“Then all is well. You are safe because you are with me. Unfortunately, your grandfather and his men will rue the day they attacked the Savage Legion MC, for they have deal with those kinds of men many times before.”

The truth of her words calms my fears. I hope and pray that it all goes down just like she thinks it will.

Ven

Usually I'm always on the fringes of a battle, sighting the enemy and monitoring their movements with my drone. However drones are no good here when it's a straight up ambush. I'm handy with a sniper rifle, so Siege puts me in a tree facing the clubhouse. Rage is also good with a rifle but he's on the roof along with a couple more brothers with prior military experience.

I can tell Siege isn't playing around because he's got Edmund out in the open where a stray bullet can end his life. Me? I'm still not convinced that Rufus Grayson even cares enough about his meth cooking son to trade for him. Rufus is disordered in his thinking and extremely unpredictable. There's a high risk that he might put a bullet in Edmund's brain, load up, and leave. I don't trust this old man, not at all.

And that brings my thinking around to Amy. Siege and Rigs are holding out hope that the old man is bringing Carol to trade for Edmund. I tend to agree that this is a possibility, one we can't afford to pass up. Amy on the other hand, clearly thinks her grandfather is going to leave her mother behind and come here with the intention of having some kind of shootout. If that's true, the old man is in for a rude awakening. Members of the Legion don't die easy. We're more than a match even for organized gangs. I can't imagine a lone rancher and whatever men he can rustle up are going to be much of a challenge.

That's why I called my mother when I saw where Amy was headed. She's the only competent fighter I know who isn't already involved in this standoff with Amy's grandfather. If the woman I've sworn to protect is hellbent on searching that farm, I want her to have back up. My maman is all about family, so of course she jumped at

the chance to cover Amy's back.

We wait for what seems like forever for those trucks to come barreling up the road and into our parking lot. My earpiece crackles and I hear Siege yell. "They're on foot and they're surrounding us. Look to the woods."

I swing my sniper rifle towards the outer perimeter of our property and sure enough, these bastards are silently sneaking up on us from every direction.

I can hear Rigs' voice through my earpiece, "Wait until they cross over onto our property, then drop them."

Siege reminds us, "Kneecap them if you can. We can't interrogate them if they're dead."

To be honest, this is my least favorite part of this plan. I don't love killing, but kneecapping these bastards will not keep them from shooting us. So, when the first one crosses over into our property, I call it. "First one's mine," I say over the encrypted coms.

I aim for his right hand first because he's carrying a weapon. Then immediately aim for his legs. He's down in seconds, rolling around, trying to stop the blood from leaking out of his body. Of course that's more difficult when you've only got one good hand left.

Several more step onto our property and we drop them one at a time. Finally, a pickup truck pulls up with a driver and a single passenger. I look through my scope to see who it is. I see Big Joe step out from the driver's seat and Rufus get out of the passenger seat. I move around the tree and keep inspecting the vehicle. Something has me worried and I don't exactly know what it is.

Luckily, I can hear the exchange through my earpiece. Rufus shouts at Siege, “Why the fuck are you shooting at my men?”

“Why are they crawling up on our clubhouse like fucking spiders?” Siege throws back.

“I have a right to bring protection to a meetup,” Rufus snarls.

“You clearly came to make a trade, but you don’t seem to have the requested trade item. Technically, you shouldn’t even be on our property if you aren’t here to make good on the offer.”

“I wanted to make sure my son was alive and in good health.”

Siege is standing behind Edmund who has his hands tied behind his back. Our club president kicks the back of his legs, bringing him to his knees. “You can see for yourself that he’s just fine and dandy. Now, where’s Carol Grayson?”

“Why the hell would I care where that ungrateful bitch of a daughter is?” Rufus says.

Oh yeah, the old man is batshit crazy. Hopefully one of the three stooges has enough sense to follow our orders, though I can only see Big Joe.

Suddenly there’s a cloud of dust on the periphery and the noise of another vehicle approaching. Within seconds a black panel van pulls up. Dan gets out of the driver’s seat, “She’s inside,” he says as he comes over to stand beside Siege.

What the everlovin’ fuck is going on here?

Siege is all kinds of suspicious. “What are you trying to pull off? Let her out and we’ll exchange at the same time.”

“Sure,” Dan murmurs.

He walks over to the side of the van and knocks, the door slides partially open and Hal jumps out. He holds out his hand. “It’s okay, girl. You’re gonna be back with your daughter in no time.”

Siege pulls Edmund to his feet and allows him to start walking towards the van, ‘cause we all expected Carol to slide her hand into Hal’s and step out. That’s not what happens though. Edmund suddenly starts running towards the pickup truck, diving headfirst into the trailer. Hal jumps in behind him, as Big Joe gets into the driver’s seat and Rufus slips into the other side of the vehicle. Big Joe hesitates for a second and looks at Dan, who’s standing there with his mouth hanging open. Then suddenly there’s a squeal as the wheels spin and Big Joe speeds away towards the exit to our parking lot. None of us shoot because we don’t know what to make of the situation.

Siege steps towards the van but from my vantage point in the tree I zero in on the tinted windows. Unable to see if Carol is inside, I focus my binoculars on the open door. That’s when I see the van is filled with metal drums.

“Run,” I shout, holding down the button for my mic. “Get the hell out of here, I think it’s rigged to blow.”

Siege, Rigs, and Dan all start running in different directions. We all wait for so long that I start to think maybe I was wrong. Minutes tick by and Rigs takes a couple of steps closer to the van. I’m praying he stays back because what other reason would they have for leaving a van unless it was rigged to explode? I close my eyes, wishing I was wrong.

But I’m not. The van explodes, sending shards of metal and glass in every direction.

“Holy shit!” Rigs exclaims. It’s not like our club preacher to use profanities but seeing him covered in gray dust having narrowly missed being blown to pieces, I guess he’s allowed a curse or two.

When the smoke clears, I can see the explosion took off part of the front of our clubhouse, not only the porch but I can see directly into the empty bar area. Something dark twists in my stomach. How could we have been so far off base about this exchange? Dan sure called this one when he said his old man would bring a bunch of guys and try to take our clubhouse by force.

I jump out of the tree and begin pacing. If we were caught unawares by this slick motherfucker, Amy and my mom might be as well. I turn around to see if my bike is salvageable, because it was sitting all the way on the end of the front row of the parking lot.

Before I make it even halfway, Rage is at my side. “That was some seriously fucked up shit.”

“Yeah, it was. Not entirely unexpected but it wasn’t at the top of our list either.”

I march right up to Dan and punch him in the face so hard he falls to the ground. “What the fuck? Why didn’t you warn us about your old man trying to blow up our clubhouse?”

Siege is standing nearby and spits on the ground before adding, “Do you have any idea how much damage your old man just did to our building? Who do you think is gonna pay for that?”

Dan scrambles to his feet, looking a little shell-shocked. “I didn’t know anything about this. My father’s been acting strange ever since I passed along your message about the trade. He got really suspicious about the part about a rival club spying on

your clubhouse.”

Rigs speaks up, “That was our fault, we underestimated how paranoid your old man is.”

“When I got back, my brothers all started freezing me out, giving me menial tasks to keep me busy. Big Joe said Ed was earning too much money to be cut loose, that if we rescued him then he’d owe us big time. He reckoned that Ed’s drug business would make us even richer than any inheritance we got, so it was worth giving Carol back and doing the trade. I thought she was in the van, those bastards double-crossed me.”

Siege rakes one hand through his hair, clearly exasperated with the situation. “Someone is going to pay to repair this mess.”

I try to get everyone back onto the right page. “Our original goal was twofold, to figure out what those vans were doing in our territory and to find Carol Grayson. We achieved the first goal, figure out Edmund had a meth lab, destroyed it, and sent messages to his contacts letting them know never to step foot back in our territory. We just failed the second goal of getting Amy’s mother back unharmed.”

I glance over at Rage, thinking he’s going to back me up in trying to get everyone to storm the Grayson farm and help Amy, but he’s tapping away on his cell phone. The next thing I know, he’s running full speed into the damaged building and climbing through the rubble.

Siege and Rigs step closer. “We need to come up with a new game plan to rescue Carol, and we have to do it quick,” Siege says plainly.

Rigs adds, “That last thing we want to do is run off halfcocked, all hot headed because of what went down today. We already know that she’s not being actively

harmed.”

Before Rigs can continue, Dan speaks up, “You mean up until now she wasn’t being harmed, if they don’t think there’s a use for her then I’m scared she’ll be seen as expendable.”

Anger churns in my gut. “We should have just killed the fucker instead of trying to play nicely. People like that only understand one language.”

Rider throws in his two cents worth, “I gotta agree with Ven on this one. We could have given the lot of them dirt naps.” Gesturing around to the handful of Rufus’s men who got their legs shot out of from under them, he adds, “As it stands, all we’ve got is a bunch of floundering fish out of water. I’ll bet none of them know anything of worth.”

“We need to get out to that farm. Rufus and his men already have a head start on us and Amy decided to go there looking for her mom since they were all here.”

Siege goes ramrod straight. “What the fuck did you just say?”

“Amy went there to search for her mom.”

Dan gasps, “You don’t have very good control of your woman.”

Siege grumbles, “Who the fuck does. They’ve got a head start on us and know the area better. We need to get moving if we’re going to save both of them.”

I don’t even come clean about my mom heading out there to help her, ‘cause my club brothers will lose their fucking minds. I walk over to my bike, luckily it escaped the flying debris. But suddenly there’s the distinctive sound of a chopper closing in on our location. I can see it in the distance. “Fuck, the cops must have heard the

explosion! How are we gonna get to Amy now? If they've got the helo, then we can't give them the slip."

I'm only confused for a second though because Rage comes running out of the gaping hole in our clubhouse and throws my body armor at me, I see he's also carrying my gun lockbox.

"Gear up. I got us a ride to that fucking ranch. With any luck we can get there first because my friend's chopper will travel as the crow flies, but they have to travel on the road.

Siege asks, "How many will the chopper hold?"

Rage fastens his bulletproof vest, "Three, not including the pilot. It's an medivac chopper. They have room for one patient and two medics."

Rigs pulls out his weapon and puts in a fresh clip. "I'm taking that third seat."

Dan objects, "No. You should take me. I know the property like the back of my hand. I won't stop until we find Carol. She's a nice lady and worth risking my life to save."

I jerk my chin at him. "You've got two minutes to gear up."

Siege removes his bulletproof vest and hands it over to Dan, who has no clue in the world how to put it on. Siege and Rigs help him and then Rigs gives up his holster and handgun, handing it to me. "Sorry, I'm out of extra clips."

I don't take my eyes off that chopper as it lands. "It's fine, I've got extra in my kit bag."

Watching us gear up, Dan says, "Do I not get a gun?"

I stare at him for a long minute, dude seriously thinks we'd trust him with a weapon. He might profess innocence, but I'm not trusting him with a loaded gun. I glance at my club brothers over my shoulder, "It would be mighty nice if we could get a ride out after we fight off the assholes and save the womenfolk."

Siege says "We'll be right behind you. Zen sent everyone the coordinates."

When we climb into the chopper, Rage high fives the pilot and we settle down and strap in. That's when I tell Rage the bad news. I have to shout to be heard over the whirl of the blades. "My mom went out to the ranch to help Amy find her mother. Just thought you should know."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" he screams back.

We get a warning from the pilot through our headsets, "Calm the fuck down or I'm dumping the lot of you."

We shut the fuck up after that, but I can see that my Rage is spitting mad about my maman being involved. He's white knuckling the armrests so bad I think he might pop a vein. I look out the window at the white, fluffy clouds hanging in the blue sky and think about the reality of possibly losing my mom and the woman I've fallen hard and fast for, in one fell swoop. I pull myself together though, my mom is tough. From what I know of Amy, she is too, but my maman can kick serious butt.

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Amy

We pull up at the mill and at first, I'm disappointed because there are no vehicles or indication that anyone has been there in ages. I jump out of the car and take my axe because unlike the farmhouse, this mill is in a state of disrepair. The door's been boarded up, but my trusty axe will make short work of the decaying, dried-out wood.

I watch Meli squat down and look at the ground. She motions me over to look at what she's found. It's tire tracks and footsteps that lead away from the mill and off to the side.

"What do you think it means," I ask.

She brings one finger to her lips, shushing me. My mouth snaps shut immediately. I feel stupid for not thinking that my grandfather could have left one or more of his men here to guard my mother.

Meli pulls out her gun and holds it with both hands pointed towards the ground as she starts following the footprints. I remember her saying that her deceased husband taught her to track and shoot. Those skills were coming in handy now because she looks as practiced as any cop in the police dramas on TV. I stay close and alert for danger. Meli is wearing black pants, a black turtleneck and has her light brown hair pulled into a severe knot at the back of her neck. Her black knee-high riding boots with a flat heel, polishes off her outfit and provides good traction on the uneven ground. If I'm being honest, the black monochromatic color of her clothing makes her look a bit like a cat burglar. I don't say that of course because she already shushed me once.

I keep looking around, trying to see if there's an old cabin or barn that we're missing. These footprints are leading somewhere after all. I see movement in the bushes nearby and stop in my tracks to see what it is. A squirrel goes scurrying past with nary a pause.

When I turn around, Meli has surged ahead and is squatting down again. I hurry forward, worrying that she lost their trail. When I come up behind her, I realize she didn't lose anything. She found something. It looks like a root cellar or some such structure. She scrambles down the embankment, presses her back to the wall beside the door and gestures for me to call out to my mom.

Meli has smartly positioned herself to shoot whoever comes out the door, assuming it's not my mother, so I follow her directions. "Mom, it's Amy. If you're here, shout to me so we can find you."

My mom yells, "Run, Amy. It's not safe. Get the hell out of—"

She's cut off abruptly, as though someone shut her up. That infuriates me. Tossing the axe aside, I pull out my gun. I'm not above shooting someone to save my mom. Good thing I was quick about it because the door swings open and a man I don't recognize emerges. He's carrying a shotgun. The second his eyes land on me, he raises his weapon.

He doesn't get it all the way up because Meli presses her pistol to the back of his neck.

"Drop your weapon. Do it now," She demands. Her adorable French accent makes her words seem much less threatening than they would otherwise be.

I reinforce her words by lifting my own weapon and pointing it at his chest. "Do as she says," I say tightly. "If she doesn't riddle you with bullets, I sure as hell will."

Being boxed in with weapons bearing down on him from both sides, he doesn't really have a choice. He gently tosses his gun off to the side. It lands on the ground with a satisfying thud.

"Get on the ground, face down," I tell him. "Put your hands behind your head." I don't like him being on his feet near Ven's mother. He's twice her size and I can see him trying to jump her if he turns around and realizes how small she is.

He kneels and then moves onto his belly. When his arms come up behind his head, I realize that we don't have anything to tie him up with. I can tell by the look on Meli's face that she's realized the miscalculation we've made right along with me. The only thing that I can think of to solve our dilemma is to use the thin belt I'm wearing. It's more ornamental than practical but it'll have to do. I stash my weapon, remove the belt, and kneel beside him, bringing both hands down to the small of his back and bind him as tightly as I can, wrapping the long belt around his wrists multiple times in order to make it more difficult for him to escape.

"Anyone else in the root cellar?" I ask.

"Just Rufus's daughter," he responds. This man doesn't seem particularly scared or upset by us getting the jump on him and that worries me.

I scoot around him and step down into the cellar. It's dark but I see something move in the shadows. It takes only a moment for my eyes to adjust, and I realize that it's my mom lying on the ground. Her wrists and ankles are bound, but she's trying to sit up.

"Amy, is that really you?"

I rush to her side. "Yeah, mom. I've been looking all over for you."

“Sweetheart, you shouldn’t be here. It’s not safe for you.”

“I’m not alone but we need to get you out of here before Granddad returns.” I concentrate on untying the knots in her ropes.

She stammers, “Your grandfather has finally lost his mind. He calls me by my mother’s name and...” She trails off as I pull the last of the ropes off her.

Glancing up at her hurt expression, I finish her sentence, “Yeah mom, I know. His sons kidnapped you. We know all about it.”

“Who’s we?” she asks, her eyes big and scared.

I pull her up by one arm. “I’ll tell you about it later. Right now we need to get back to town.”

She nods, allowing me to lead her out of the cellar and into the daylight. She blinks at the bright sunlight, making me wonder how long she’s been underground. She’s also not too steady on her feet.

I ask, “How long has been since you had your medication?”

Glancing up at me, she replies, “Early this morning, Dan’s always good but he had to go out and I haven’t seen him since.”

Before we can make it five feet, Meli comes careening into us. My hands come out to catch her, not understanding why she’s colliding with us. Then I see two men over her shoulder. The man we tied up is now free and he has a buddy who looks almost like his evil twin standing at his side. To be honest, they both look a bit evil with their dark hair and matching smirks. They’ve also both got their weapons pointed at us.

“You ladies didn’t actually think you could just walk in and take the place over, did you?”

I step forward, pressing my mom behind me. “We just came for my mom. Let us walk out of here and no one needs to get hurt.”

One of the men scoops my axe up off the ground and gives it a brief once over. The other points Meli’s big pistol at me and says, “Hand over the gun and any other weapons you have.”

It takes every ounce of self-control I have not to get into a screaming match with this guy. I slowly remove my gun from the holster and toss it in his direction. He picks it up and laughs. “Look Boyd, it’s small, like a toy.”

The other man reaches out and maneuvers the barrel away from his face. “It can still do damage, Brock. So how’s about you don’t point the damn thing at me.”

Brock murmurs an apology, and they turn their attention back to us. “Come on ladies, we ain’t got all day. Rufus is meeting us at the ranch. He wants to have a word with you.”

Boyd is all smiles. “He’ll be thrilled to hear that we captured a French woman. How exotic,” he teased Meli.

“There are millions of us, connard ,” Meli responds bitterly.

They just laugh at her aggravation and walk us back towards the old mill. They put me behind the wheel of their pickup truck and Meli behind the wheel of hers. My mom clings to me, so they put her in back of the vehicle I’m driving. I can’t say I appreciate having a gun trained on me while I drive but I manage to get through it without breaking down and that’s all that matters.

As we get near the farm, I can hear a helicopter in the distance. My secret wish is for it to be a news chopper that accidentally captures footage of our abduction at the hands of these ruthless assholes, but the way this day is going, I don't think I'll be that lucky.

I'm ten kinds of angry that I finally found my mom and got caught trying to get her free of this mess. And I somehow managed to get Ven's mother wrangled up in my family's drama. As far as my grandfather goes, I'm not looking forward to seeing him. God only knows what he's got in store for me, the person who threw a huge wrench into his life.

He waiting for us on the porch when we pull up. He's almost indulgent with my mother when he sees her. More so than I've ever seen him, though his reaction to me is less indulgent.

"What the hell you doin' back here? You ungrateful shit of a daughter, should have let my dogs catch you," he spits out.

I glance at my mom for a second, before I realize he's addressing me. God, this really is fucked up. Edmund helps her into the house, and I remind him, "She needs her noon meds."

He looks over his shoulder, "I know. Why do you think we brought her back right away?"

I just stare at him because I don't trust a single word coming out of his mouth. I wonder what happened at the clubhouse, I know they were going to do a trade, Edmund for my mom. The fact that Edmund is here, and my mom clearly wasn't taken to the clubhouse, makes me uneasy. I had a bad feeling about all this when I left this morning, I hope nothing's happened to Ven.

I glance at Meli, wondering if she's thinking the same.

When the front door closes behind us, my grandfather glares at me. "You," he practically spits out at me. "Why can you never leave well enough alone, girl."

Rubbing one hand over my face I sigh. "I'm not a girl. I'm a woman. And I need you to know that I'm never going to give up trying to free my mother. You can't keep her cooking and cleaning like your personal slave."

"Brenda is back where she belongs, with her family."

"You stupid old man, she's not your wife! She's your daughter and you've been holding her prisoner here."

For a moment he looks confused, then the belligerent expression reappears, "I'm not having you turn your mother against me, it was your fault she left me all those years ago. She's home where she belongs and I'm gonna beat some sense into you, now."

"Neither of us are going to live out some tradwife fantasy on your ranch, old man. Ven and his club brothers are going to come looking for us."

"Yes, Edmund told me all about you and that dirty biker."

"My son is not dirty," Meli states firmly.

My grandfather stares at her, unsure what to make of her. "I think you need to go back to where you came from, missy. And take that son of yours with you. My daughter doesn't need to get herself mixed up with biker trash."

By this time Meli has had enough of my grandfather. She makes a rude gesture with one hand. "You are a senile old man with no wits about you. My Serp is going to take

you apart piece by piece for daring to think you can steal women away and turn them into your servants.”

Rufus makes a disgusted noise and gestures to Big Joe. “Get them inside and keep them quiet while I decide what to do with them.”

The hopelessly stupid man I now know is my uncle, shoves us inside the house and up the stairs. I drag my feet, reluctant to end up locked down like my mom has been for the last eight months.

Big Joe grumbles, “Get your ass moving or so help me God, I will break your legs and carry you.”

I roll my eyes and move a little faster.

“Whatever you say, Joe. Just stop pushing and shoving. Our legs aren’t as long as yours so naturally we can’t walk as fast as you can.”

“Well, you better do something, because I’m gettin’ real aggravated with you today.”

I didn’t clap back because I didn’t want to keep escalating the argument. He eventually routes us to a bedroom in the back of the house with metal bars on the windows. He shoves us roughly inside and slams the door shut. I can hear the deadbolt locking, so I know we’re here to stay, at least for the short term.

Meli rushes over to look out the window. “There is a helicopter circling overhead. What do you think that means?”

I shrug, “Probably nothing. Just some bigwig getting to a meeting quicker than usual.”

“It does not matter. My Serp will get us out of here. Merde ! Why did I leave my phone in the glove compartment?” She starts pacing back and forth in front of the window.

I drop down onto the bed and sigh. My cell phone was in the same place, when I’d armed myself to go and check out the mill I’d left it there. My eyes go back to Ven’s mom, this woman is still energetic and sounds so confident. I wish I had her optimism. I’ve spent so long trying to convince the police that my grandfather was holding my mom against her will but could never prove it. And now I’ve found her, I worry that we’re falling into exactly the same situation. Maybe now is the time to tell Meli my fears, if Edmund is here, then that means the trade for my mom went south, and no one is coming to get us.

Ven

While in the air I've slowly come to the conclusion that I might have to kill some people in cold blood in order to get the women in my life back. I check my guns to make sure everything is in order, feeling surprisingly okay with the probability that I might end up killing a man before the day is out.

Rage points down below. "Isn't that Amy's vehicle? It looks like someone ran her off the road."

My brother is not wrong about that. I let loose a long string of curses under my breath. This is bad. No wonder she hasn't been answering her phone. Those assholes got to her. There can be no other explanation for her abandoned vehicle.

"Go to the farm," I tell the pilot, and he does a tight circle and heads east.

After five minutes the Grayson ranch comes into view and something else catches my attention, "Rage, look," I shout. "It's my mother's SUV."

"Yeah, it looks like it," Rage answers. "I see Rufus' pickup truck that he came to the clubhouse in, but I don't recognize the other truck though."

Dan's hand comes out to rest on my shoulder from behind. "I recognize it. It belongs to Boyd and Brock Sanderson. They're Rufus' neighbors."

Glancing back at Dan, I say, "Fairly stupid ones, I imagine."

He nods. “Yeah, those two will do anything for a few bucks. I’m guessing as my brothers all came to the clubhouse, he hired those two to keep an eye on Carol.”

Great, I think to myself. Two men with zero moral compass have possession of my mom and the woman I swore to protect. What an abject failure I am when it comes to keeping the women in my life safe.

Rage turns to the pilot. “Change of plans, Jose. Can you land the chopper half a mile away, maybe behind the woods?”

“You got it, my friend.”

The helicopter manages to land behind the trees and the three of us jump out and start humping it towards the farmhouse where we know the women are being held.

Dan doesn’t say much but he keeps up and points out the most direct route. It’s as if he’s trapped in his own little world, trying to figure out how to reorganize his life around not being part of the Grayson clan anymore, now that he’s betrayed them trying to save Carol.

I ask him, “Have you ever considered joining an MC, Dan?”

His head jerks up and his expression turns bewildered. “Me? No, not for a second. I don’t even ride a motorcycle.”

“You could learn. I have an old soft tail that you can have. Consider it my thanks for helping us rescue Carol.”

“I might enjoy riding, especially since I’m gonna have an endless amount of time on my hands moving forward.”

Rage shoots me a strange look, so I drop the conversation for now. Maybe, I'm putting the cart before the horse. We need to get the women clear of this situation and then burn that fucking farmhouse to the ground and give Rufus and his band of merry idiots a dirt nap. They're all out of control and think they answer to no one. I don't think the old man is ever going to give up his happy families obsession and that puts both Carol and Amy in ongoing danger. Since I can't have those assholes popping up all the time to harass my woman and her mother, I'm gonna have to do something drastic. I just know it.

When we approach the farmhouse, we see Big Joe and another man sitting on the porch with shotguns. Dan states quietly, "It makes the most sense for me to try to sneak in and check on the women. I'm betting not everyone got the memo that my father disowned me. That will make it easier for me to slip in."

"Fuck that," I tell him in no uncertain terms. "I'm going in there and nothing is going to get in my way."

"Me too," Rage chimes in. "What the quickest way to get into the house?"

Dan glances at his watch. "I say we wait until it gets dark and go in through the skylight in the master bedroom, that's where Carol sleeps. My father sleeps downstairs because he doesn't like the steps, but he keeps the master bedroom just like it was when his first wife died all those years ago. It's a lot creepier than it sounds."

"I'll bet," I tell him, trying to envision what that would look like. "And no one else goes in there?"

Dan nods. "No one is allowed in that room apart from Carol. Edmund's room is on the first floor next to my father's. Me, Big Joe, and Hal stayed in the barn."

“Why the fuck didn’t you protest about your accommodation, can’t have been good seeing your brother getting the special treatment,” I say.

Dan shrugs, “Ed was the brains, I guess we all just thought it was fair. But in hindsight, fuck that piece of shit.”

“Sounds like there’s no love lost between you and your brothers,” Rage mutters.

“Ya think? Seeing as they set me up and were willing to let me get caught in that fucking explosion. No, there’s no love lost at all,” he says sounding all kinds of pissed off.

Still, I know he’s probably feeling conflicted about everything, I don’t want anyone getting killed today unless they’re asking for it, so I say, “I’m gonna text Siege and let him know our plan so he doesn’t come charging into the farm, unloading both barrels on these assholes.”

“For fucking sure,” Rage agrees. “Let him know we’ll be needing back up and transport out of here, Jose had to take the helo back to the hangar.”

I pull out my cell phone and quickly send an encrypted message to Siege. Then we wait and wait and wait some more.

We stay crouched down and out of sight for what seems like forever but was only a couple of hours. Once it gets dark, we wait for the lights to go out. Once the last light is switched off, that’s our cue that they’ve all gone to bed.

Dan leads the way, and we follow. He climbs up an apple tree and onto the roof of the house from there. We drop silently onto the flat roof without anyone below noticing.

As well as Big Joe at the front, there's Hal and a bunch of other men at the back.

Dan leads us right to the skylight and I elbow Rage out of the way wanting to be the first inside. I was hoping that when we looked in the window, we'd see the women, but the room was in darkness. Obviously, the old man had decided to hold them elsewhere. We open the skylight, remove the screen and I slip down into the room. When I hit the floor, I wait for a moment to see if I attracted any attention, when there's no sound of approaching footsteps I gesture for Rage and Dan to join me.

We gaze around the room in quiet awe. It's like something from the seventies with a groovy bedspread, lava lamps on each bedside table and thick shag carpet. There is a large tube TV with a manual dial. I walk up and look it over because I've never seen anything like this before. Realizing this is not the time to be checking out antique electronics, I say, "We really need to get moving before the women start panicking and thinking we've forgotten them."

Dan gives me a nod, "Follow me and whatever else you do, stay quiet."

He does not need to tell us that because our situational awareness is outfuckingstanding. I don't hold it against him though. He's inexperienced and not familiar with all the things our club has been through.

Dan is stealthier than I would have imagined him to be, he slips past several doors until he reaches one at the end of the corridor. He puts his ear to the door then nods.

I grab his shoulder and pull him back. "Is this the room they're keeping them in?"

He nods. "I can hear them whispering. Something about tying sheets together and escaping through the window."

I frown. "Looks like we got here just in time, if they did that then I have no doubt Big

Joe or Hal would put a stop to it. I'll break the door down if the two of you cover me."

"Not a chance," Dan states firmly. "The last thing we need is to wake up every fucking person in the house."

I open my mouth to object but he's already pulling out a credit card and going to work trying to breach the door lock. Danny-Boy's got some hidden talents, I think to myself. Though just when I think it's not going to work, the door pops open.

I go in first with my gun drawn, followed by Dan, then Rage brings up the rear, staying near the door and peering out. He's taken up the position of lookout and will alert us if anyone is coming.

I see the women sitting on the bed. All three of them freeze and stare at us with big eyes when we come in.

Before I can say anything, Amy jumps off the bed and flies into my arms. I catch her in the biggest bear hug imaginable. I just hold her while my mom gets to her feet and approaches. I hold out one arm and when she comes closer, I hug her with my free arm.

Rage comes quietly to our side. "Nobody came out of their rooms. So, I'm sure no one heard us enter the house, but we gotta get out quickly. Maybe save the reunions for another time?"

My maman steps away and gives Rage a quick hug, "Thank you for coming to rescue us, Rage. You've always been such a good friend to Serp."

Rage actually blushes like a schoolboy under her overt praise. It takes him a second to get his composure back, and then he states sternly, "Not joking about us needing to

get the hell outta here. We do not have the advantage numbers wise or weapons wise.”

“He’s right,” Carol states as she gets to her feet unsteadily. She walks over to Dan and gives his shoulder a squeeze. “Thanks for helping my daughter’s friends find me, Dan. You’re a good boy.”

Dan flushes red in an instant, even more so than Rage. “I’m a man, not a boy.”

My mom pats his chest affectionately. “Yeah, I get that. You’re about the same age as my daughter, maybe a little younger. I just think of you as another youngster.”

He rolls his eyes, “Can you not?”

She gives him an indulgent smile. “Whatever you say, baby brother,” she murmurs indulgently.

We decide there are too many men still outside to risk leaving the conventional way. We take a vote on all leaving though the skylight, which will take some maneuvering.

Amy points out, “My mom is not strong enough to hoist herself up.”

“I agree, that means one of us will have to carry her,” I tell them.

Dan automatically steps forward. “I’ll do it. I’m used to taking care of her.”

Carol shoots him a grateful smile. “Thanks again, Dan. You’re a godsend.”

We head back to the room with the skylight and take turns getting the women up through the window and off the roof ASAP. We send Carol and Dan through first, then Rage and my mother. When it’s time for me to help Amy out, all hell breaks

loose. The door to the master bedroom flies open and Rufus, Big Joe, and Hal come storming into the room.

Rufus screams, “Grab them. Don’t let them get away.”

I don’t have to yell for Rage and Dan to keep going without us. Rage will make sure that at least two women manage to make a clean getaway. I wrap my arm around Amy, pull her close, and take a running leap towards the skylight, grabbing it with one hand, I’ve almost heaved us up and through it, when someone grabs my leg and gives it a good jerk. It’s Big Joe, looking for a little payback for the beatdown I gave him.

I keep a hold of the frame and use my free foot to kick him in the face. By the grace of God, we manage to clear the skylight and land on the roof. Grabbing Amy’s hand I lead her to the tree and help her get her footing.

When we reach the ground, I hear my mom and Rage calling from the distance. I think we’re free of our pursuers, when suddenly armed men surround us about a hundred yards from the house. I shove Amy behind a thick oak tree and try and block her with my body. Fucking hell, we were so close to making a clean getaway. With no other option, I draw my weapons and tell Amy, “No matter what happens, stay behind me.”

Unfortunately, none of these men are bothered that I’m fully armed because they all have weapons too. I’m out manned and out gunned but I’m gonna do everything I can to protect the woman I love. I’m wearing body armor, but I’m not a fucking fool. I know it doesn’t make me invincible, but as long as these fuckers aim at my chest and not my head, I’ve got a chance.

I start shooting, starting with the ones who have their weapons raised and working my way down to the ones who are still dicking around. I think I’m doing okay on my

own until I realize that Rage and my mom are taking pot shots at them from behind a rusty oil drum about fifteen feet away. The problem is, there are just too many of them and too few of us.

When we're about to be overwhelmed, Siege, Rigs, and the rest of my club brothers come charging into the mix. I've never been so relieved to see my brothers as I am tonight. It takes only a few minutes for the shooting to stop. When the dust settles, I see several dead bodies and several more that are in distress. Rage gets to work on the ones that are still living, and I realize that no matter who is injured, the medic in him kicks into action. My mom has gone to check on Carol and Dan who are both standing looking shell-shocked.

Meanwhile, Amy clings to me for dear life. I don't blame her. My tough little woman has never been exposed to the kind of violence taking place tonight. I hold her close and let her bury her face in my chest.

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Amy

O h my God, I'm hyperventilating, and I can't stop. Men were shooting at us. I can't believe we almost got killed. I'd be dead right now if it weren't for Ven and his club brothers. Ven is rubbing my back while Rage talks me through how to stop hyperventilating and I try and calm myself down.

Just when I've steadied my breathing, someone starts screaming for Rage.

It's Siege. "Rage, get your ass over here. The old man caught a bullet from one of his own."

My head goes up and I rush along behind Rage. I literally hate my grandfather, but I didn't want to see him hurt. The old man is a liability, but it's clear that he's got memory problems and doesn't know what he's doing. When I get close enough to see what's going on, I realize he's much more than just hurt. Rage falls to his knees on the porch beside my grandfather, just as someone tosses a medical bag down beside him. He's cursing a blue streak under his breath, and it takes me a moment to realize why.

My grandfather is propped up on one elbow, too stubborn to collapse like a normal person, with a rapidly increasing pool of blood around him. He's also white as a sheet and struggling to breathe. He angry and trying to curse us all out, even though he can only get out a few words at a time, "Damn you all... Get off my pro... property."

Rage presses him back down. "You're gonna have to lie down and let me stop the bleeding."

Rufus shoves his hands away, or at least tries to. Rigs gets involved by stooping down and grabbing one hand. “Look, Rufus, you’re bleeding out. Let our medic help you.”

My grandfather looks over to one of the men who captured me and Venom’s mom, “Brock Sanderson, this is your f...fault,” before collapsing back. His hands drop to his sides, still and lifeless. He suddenly looks shockingly old and frail.

My hands fly to my mouth when Rage rips open his shirt. There’s a gaping hole in the lower part of his chest, and I can see the white of his ribs. I can’t watch, so to my eternal shame, I turn away. When I do, I bump into Ven’s big chest, and his arms come up around me.

I concentrate on pulling myself together because this kind of response is just not me. I’m normally the strong one, the one who keeps my shit together in a crisis. Then again, I’ve never witnessed a shootout, much less been involved in one. And seeing the one man I detest most in life laid low with a bullet to the chest has left me feeling conflicted. I should care that he’s hurt, but part of me doesn’t. I know that makes me a bad person but knowing what he did to my mom cancels out any feelings of compassion I might have had.

When I’ve just about pulled myself together again, a horrible gurgling sound reaches my ears. It’s a horrific, wet, rattling noise. I hear Rage cursing under his breath, “Fucking sucking chest wound is not cooperating.”

I turn around, steeling myself for the terrible image of Rufus’ last moments on earth. It’s the death rattle that gives it away for me.

The rattling noise stops. When I raise my head, Rage is still trying to seal the wound on my grandfather’s chest with what looks like a Ziploc bag and tape, but Rigs reaches out and grasps his wrist. “Enough. He’s gone. There was no way for you to

save him, brother. He lost too much blood and even if you had stabilized him the nearest hospital is too far.”

Rage slowly pulls his hands away and lowers his head. A long silence spins out as everyone is shocked that my grandfather is actually gone. Rufus was the one driving this situation whether intentionally or not. He was a stubborn old man who didn’t fit into the modern world. He was raised to think that women belong in the kitchen and children should be seen and not heard. For whatever reason, he couldn’t or wouldn’t move with the changing times, and that inability to learn and adapt drove my mom away and led to his death here today.

I kneel down beside him and for some reason I can’t quite grasp, I lean over and pull his shirt closed. Settling back down, I look over at the grim sight of my dead grandfather and the multitude of blood covered bandages lying around that spoke of Rage’s heroic attempts to keep the old buzzard alive.

The next thing I know, Ven reaches out and grabs me by one arm, hauling me to my feet before the blood starts to soak my clothing. He then does the same with Rage, who has been sitting staring at Rufus. Only Rage fights him, trying to shake Ven’s hands off him. Finally, Ven jerks him so hard that Rage comes staggering to his feet. His face is creased with several emotions that look like defeat, shame, and humiliation.

I step out and put my hand on his other arm. “Rage, stop. You can’t save everyone. You do know that, right?”

He pulls his head to the side, refusing to look at me.

I squeeze his arm, “My grandfather was older than dirt, meaner than a rattlesnake and the most stubborn man I’ve ever known. He hung in there long after all his friends passed. He lived free and proud, even though he didn’t believe others had that right.

Good or bad, he'll be remembered as a force to be reckoned with. Don't let one old man's death break you. I thought you were stronger than this?"

The moment the last sentence flew out of my mouth, I knew I'd hit a nerve. Rage's head snaps around to look at me, his eyes haunted. No words are forthcoming to explain the transgression, but I get the worst feeling that he wasn't able to save someone close to him, a father or grandfather maybe. Someone that my grandfather reminds him of. He's fighting his own ghosts tonight.

Realizing this, I let go of his arm. "Let's walk it off." Glancing around, I see Rigs covering Rufus' body with a blanket and the other brothers are rounding up all my grandfather's ne'er-do-wells. "We've got a lot to take care of here tonight," I tell him wryly.

Ven interjects, "Come on, brother. Let Rigs handle the body." Glancing at me he states quietly, "We'll see that your grandfather gets a decent burial."

I nod. It never crossed my mind that he wouldn't. When we turn, I see that Dan is standing beside my mom with his body bladed in a protective pose. He's a little more diligent than I would expect him to be considering that Ven's club brothers subdued all of Rufus' men already.

As we walk forward to meet them, Dan tenses. I don't understand his body language, but Ven does. He holds out both hands in a placating gesture and tells him, "Calm the fuck down, dude. The battle is over, Carol is free to return home with Amy and you're considered an ally, not an enemy. All's well that ends well."

Dan glances over his shoulder at my mom, who speaks up, "Once we put this whole mess behind us, we need to gather up our brothers and decide how we're moving forward from this."

Ven responds, “Edmund, Big Joe, and Hal shot at members of our club tonight. The club will have to decide what to do with them.”

Dan’s voice turns angry, and he takes a step closer to us. “What the hell does that mean? Is the Savage Legion claiming the right of judge, jury, and executioner tonight?”

Ven tries to move forward but I grab his arm, forcing him to respond while out of striking distance. “It’s the savage part of the Savage Legion that we talked about back at the clubhouse. Most folks in this neck of the woods have enough common sense not to attack the Legion. Most of the men here attacked for money. Your half-brothers did it out of a sense of family obligation to their father. That will be taken into consideration.”

Dan’s expression blanks out. “Let me get this straight, you can’t share proof of their wrongdoings here tonight without exposing your own, so you’re going to go after vigilante justice, right?”

“Yeah, something like that,” Ven responds. Something about the tone of his voice tells me this is deadly serious business, and I should stay out of it. Unfortunately, I need to know for my own mental health if murdering them is on the table. “So, what are the possible outcomes?”

Ven’s head swivels around to look at me, disbelievingly. I quickly add, “I’m not judging, just curious.”

He answers, “It could be anything from a slap on the wrist, to working off damages, to something a little more permanent.”

My blood runs cold because, on top of everything that happened here today, he’s talking about murdering three of my family members. Whether I like to admit it or

not, Edmund, Big Joe, and Hal are my uncles. Granted ones I detest for roughing me up all the time but they're family, none-the-less.

My mom's timid voice asks, "I would like to speak at the meeting that determines their fate. I don't believe they're bad men, they were just blinded by the thought of becoming rich."

Ven sighs, "I'll try to arrange it."

Rage walks off and I tug Ven by the arm until he follows. Something dark and scary twists in my gut to realize the man I love is capable of murder. We go about seven or eight yards before we see Ven's mother sitting on the ground with one of the brothers examining her ankle. We surge forward and Rage elbows the other man out of the way to look at it. She jumps when he touches it.

"I'm pretty sure it's fractured," he states grimly.

Ven motions Siege over. He looks down at her and asks, "What happened here."

Meli uses her hands to pantomime a jumping gesture. "When I jump out of the way, I hear crunch and have much pain."

Ven tells Siege, "We think it's broken."

He responds gruffly, "One of you can take her to the hospital. I can't spare both of you."

Rage speaks up, "You can take her, Ven. She's your mother."

This is the spot where the rubber hits the road. Ven responds, "We're blood brothers. We took an oath. That means you're just as much family as I am."

Meli's face lights up. I'm not entirely certain she truly understands blood oaths, but she appears to grasp that something positive happened for her son. It's really sweet, but I think he needs to talk to her one-on-one.

I suggest, "My mom and I can take her. I'm not sure the three of us want to see what's going to go down here tonight." Ven's arm closes tighter around me as if he's reluctant to let me go. When I glance over my shoulder, my mom gives me a curt nod of approval.

Siege rubs his chin, "This might be the best solution. We don't need women here to see justice done."

"Just don't go on a killing spree," I grumble as Ven lifts his mother into his arms.

Ven counters with, "We're not like that."

When Siege clears his throat, Ven clarifies, "Not normally like that."

After Rage stabilizes her ankle, he and Ven help us move Meli into the backseat of her vehicle and strap her in. My mom gets into the passenger side, and I climb behind the wheel. Ven lingers at the window on my side while Rage fusses over Meli, making sure she's comfortable and her injured ankle won't shift.

When Rage finally closes the door, Ven bends down to claim a short but fierce kiss. "Drive carefully sweetheart, and keep me posted, okay?"

I swallow thickly and nod. "Of course. Just... just don't let this situation turn you into someone you're not."

He gets what I'm driving at and tells me, "They'll probably cut off the lackeys with a stern warning and detain the rest at the clubhouse. Siege won't make any decisions

before calling a club meeting and allowing all of us to give our input.”

I feel the anxiety drain from my body. Just knowing they aren’t going to make any rash decisions tonight goes a long way towards setting my mind at ease.

He cups my cheek in one hand and lowers his voice. “We’re not monsters, you know.” His lips brush across mine and then he presses our foreheads together for a brief moment.

When he pulls back, I murmur, “I never thought you were.”

“Good. We always try to be fair, even to our enemies.”

“I’ll let you know when we get to the hospital,” I tell him awkwardly. I can still taste him on my lips, and I’m thoroughly shocked that after everything we’ve been through, his touch still affects me.

He taps the top of our car and says, “Off with you. I’ll talk to you soon.”

I start the car, feeling worlds more confident that the Savage Legion wasn’t going to kill anyone tonight. When I glance in the rearview mirror, I see Ven standing there staring at us drive away.

“My Serp has love in his heart for you, ma chérie .”

My mother turns to look at me, curiosity shining in her eyes. “It this true? Are you seeing this young man?”

I nod, giving her a tired smile. “Yeah, I most certainly am. Ven and his motorcycle club are the only reason I found you. They sifted through mountains of information, scoured the internet for signs of your whereabouts, and put up a good fight when

Rufus hired a bunch of thugs to stop their investigation.”

“Do you love him?” her voice is low, but I can tell she’s getting excited.

I nod again, my smile getting a little bigger.

“As in maybe one day in the distant future getting married? That kind of love?”

I smother back a laugh. “Yeah, mom. It’s the kind of love that’s filled with romance, property cuts, and wedding bands. I want it all with Ven.”

I turn briefly to make eye contact with Meli in the back seat. “How are you holding up? Are you in a lot of pain?”

“As long as I do not move, it is good,” Meli says.

“Did you know about this love and marriage thing?” my mom asks her.

Meli makes an impatient sound in the back of her throat. “Oui, oui . I seen it with my own eyes. They way they look at each other tells the tale, my son said it was not real, but I see.”

My mother looks pleased as punch. That’s all it takes for the rest of our journey to the hospital to be filled with chatter about weddings, babies, and the like. After what she’s been through for the past eight months, I let her talk away. I don’t know if anything she says will come to pass, but if I’m honest, the thought of walking up the aisle with Ven one day makes me feel like the luckiest woman alive.

I don’t know if Ven or Rage phoned ahead, but before I can even get out of the vehicle, medical staff come running out of the emergency room with a gurney and whisk Meli away. My mom runs behind them, shouting for them to be extra careful

not to accidentally bang her foot into something. I can't believe the change in my mom, I had expected her to have collapsed in on herself after the months of being held by my grandfather and her brothers. But it's like a new woman came out, one who's not afraid to speak up and make herself be heard.

I park up and go inside the ER. They allow both my mom and I in the bay to wait with Meli. Fortunately they aren't very busy, so the wait times are short. We step out to get coffee when the doctor comes to examine her. I try to talk to my mother about Rufus, but she doesn't want to discuss her abusive deceased father. I know she just needs a few hours to get used to the idea that he's gone. Wanting to gab about everything except the elephant in the room feels like some form of denial, which we all know is the first stage of grief. I just cut her some slack and give her a hug.

I can't believe she's finally back by my side. Truly, it's a blessing and I was starting to lose hope of that ever happening. We spent time with Meli while her ankle was x-rayed and put in a cast. Since it's a small fracture no surgery is needed, and she's discharged but told someone needs to stay with her for the next twenty-four hours, so we decide to take her to the clubhouse.

My mom and Meli chat all the way to the clubhouse, Meli is clearly feeling good because of the pain medication they gave her. It's kind of nice how they've taken to each other and my mother is coming out of her shell a little bit. A huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders now that she's back. If I'm being honest, it's a relief knowing my grandfather isn't going to try to snatch her away again. Even with the grief of his death bearing down on me, I feel lighter and more carefree than I have in my entire adult life. I'm still a bit wary about what Ven and his club brothers have planned for my evil uncles. But I feel certain that they're gonna hear my mom out and make her a part of the decision-making process.

While my mom and Meli are talking nonstop about weddings, my mind wanders back to Ven and what's going on back at the farm. I know that everyone else calls the Grayson spread a ranch, but I grew up thinking of it as farm and old habits die hard. I don't care about that farm, not one little bit and I suspect my mom feels the same way. It's a door best closed for good in my opinion.

Ven is definitely a door worth opening though. He's the most fascinating man I've ever met—in addition to being kind, generous, protective, and willing to put himself in harm's way to help me rescue my mother. He's rough around the edges, rides hard, and plays harder. He comes to bed late, wakes me up and wears me out with amazing orgasms and then gets up early the next day to protect our town and kick ass. I can't help but smile as I think of him.

And I keep on smiling right up until I get to the clubhouse and see the gaping hole in the front where the prospects have hung a tarp over. Ven had told me about an explosion, but seeing the damage with my own eyes, makes me realize how close I came to losing him.

I pull around the back, I see my mother gaping at the damage to the front of the building as we drive past. She just stares and stares some more before whispering, "Has the building been damaged long? Is it safe for us to go inside?"

"It wasn't like this when I left this morning, mom."

Meli speaks up. "Do not think about what could have happened. My Serp and his club brothers have faced worse."

I glance at her in my rear-view mirror and see her give a slight shake of her head. She's absolutely right, now is definitely not the time to think too much about whatever happened here. I personally feel as though today has just been one mini crisis after another. We all need to slow our roll and take a breather.

We help Meli into the clubhouse and head straight up to Ven's quarters. Once the door is closed and locked, all thoughts about what's going on outside fade away.

I make Meli comfortable in one of Ven's recliners where she can put her foot up. My mother prowls around his kitchen making us tea, I try and stop her because she's been doing enough for my grandfather and his men for the last few months, but she stops me and says that she needs to keep busy. So I let her potter around.

Just the three of us hanging out feels right. When I start to get to my feet to help, Meli grabs my hand. "Tell me about Rage. Are the three of you together now? Is that why Ven said he was part of our family?"

I must have looked confused.

In that moment, she clarifies, "I speak of ménage à trois. Three people, one love. I do not judge."

I can feel my cheeks burning and I shake my head. "No! Absolutely not! Nothing like that!"

This woman destined to become my mother-in-law settles back in the chair and says, "Tell me. I must know."

I sit back on the sofa, I'm probably not the best person to explain this to her but I'm going to try because I'm still not on board with them assuming she's going to happily run with the idea of Rage becoming her bonus son.

Thinking it over for a second, I choose my words carefully. "I believe Ven always wanted a brother."

"Yes," Meli agrees. "When he was a child, he wished for a brother."

“Well, he made a blood oath of brotherhood with Rage. The vowed to have each other’s back for the rest of their lives and live as true brothers, rather than just club brothers.”

Her eyes sparkle with interest. “Oaths were taken?”

“Yes, I think they want to be involved in one another’s lives, look out for each other like brothers would.”

My mother walks in carrying three mugs of tea and hands ours to us. “The more the merrier, right dear?”

I smile up at my mom and nod. “Yeah, I suppose. Rage doesn’t have anyone in the way of family, so he jumped at the chance.” Taking a sip, I drop the ball. “They were hoping you might even accept Rage as a kind of surrogate son, since he likes you so much and never had a mother of his own. What do you think about that idea?” I ask casually.

Meli’s eyes light up at the suggestion. “I never thought I would have the opportunity to have another son.”

“Ven thought you might like the idea.”

“Indeed I do,” she murmurs as she sips her tea.

We talk for a couple more hours, until we’re all utterly exhausted. Siege had gotten the prospects to make the room next to Ven’s suite ready for my mom and Meli, so me and my mom help Meli into bed and I make sure both of them are settled before I head back to Ven’s suite.

I grab a quick shower and fall into bed. I worry that I won’t be able to sleep for

worrying about Ven, but I find that sleep comes up on me, hard and fast, overwhelming my desire to stay awake until he gets home.

Ven

Rage and I are grim as we work through the wee hours of the morning to help our club officers divide Rufus' men into groups—essentially those who are cold-blooded killers and want us dead, and those who just wanted to make a quick buck. Luckily for us, most of the men fall into the latter category, surprisingly enough that seems to include his sons. We're gonna have to delve into that deeper, so Talon and few of the other club brothers take Edmund, Big Joe, and Hal back to the clubhouse. Dan catches a ride with them because he's not a member of the Savage Legion and therefore cannot be privy to how we handle this situation. I think he's on our side, though it might just be he's on Dan's side which is fair enough, from what he's told us already his brothers treated him as an outsider.

Siege and the club officers arbitrate each of the remaining men on a case-by-case basis. They're required to pay restitution to cover the medical expenses and burials of those who were injured or killed in this conflict. Most were willing to agree to anything to get away from our club unscathed.

That leaves us with two. Boyd and Brock Sanderson turn out to be a special kind of stupid. These two were the ones who hunted down Amy and my mom and brought them back to the farmhouse. I'm not sure exactly where they fit into everything, but ultimately Brock is the one who killed Rufus Grayson.

I think they're both under the delusion that Siege won't call the police and are talking up a heap of shit. He surprises them by getting on his cell phone and calling our contact at Las Salinas PD. While we're waiting for them to come, the sky opens, and rain begins pelting down upon us. Every brother stands firm while our enemies

become even more uncomfortable. Brock needs to face the consequences of his actions, both for negligently shooting Rufus and for kidnapping the women in my life. I don't give a fuck if it was on Rufus' orders, they aren't family, they owed the old coot no loyalty, and Brock fucking shot him. I say let the cops deal with the hired muscle and we'll deal with Rufus' sons. Finished with the whole sorry business, I jump in the van with Rage, Rider, and Tank and we head back to the clubhouse where I crawl into bed with Amy and collapse before my head even meets the pillow.

I wake up with Amy wriggling out from under my big arm. She rushes to the bathroom, and I can hear her throwing up. I jump up in the bed, wondering if it was something she ate. Throwing off the blanket, I head to the bathroom to see if she's okay.

She comes out looking somewhat recovered and I can't take my eyes off her. It's like every time I see her naked, she's more beautiful to my eyes. Amy is it for me. I feel it all the way down to my bones.

"Are you okay sweetheart?" I ask as I tilt her head up to look into her eyes.

She looks worried but simply replies, "Yeah, I had a bad dream, my mind must have gone over everything that happened last night. I thought I was okay about it, but then..."

Her words tail off. I take her hand and lead her back to the bed, "Want to talk about it? Seeing all that shit go down can't have been fun. Especially seeing your grandfather get gunned down, even if you hated the bastard."

She nods and looks thoughtful, "I think I'm okay about it. I'm more worried about my mom, what she's gone through for the last eight months. We spoke yesterday and

she seemed surprisingly upbeat about it, but I don't know how much of that was her putting on an act."

"Rigs is good at counseling people, so it might be an idea if you both talk to him. He knows some female counselors and therapists if your mom would prefer. Leave it with me and I'll see what we can come up with," I say with a smile. I give her a quick kiss, noticing that she tastes like my minty toothpaste. We settle back into bed, and I pull her close for a cuddle.

Just as we're getting comfortable my phone beeps. Normally I'd ignore it but given the events of last night I need to see what's happening.

After scrolling through my messages, I toss my phone aside with a smile. "Siege and Cleo are taking our mothers out to the patio for breakfast. He's telling us to take as much time as we need to recover."

"That's really good of him. I feel like I could sleep for days."

Something softens in her eyes as she lays back onto the bed and pulls me down on top of her. I came happily because I had spent all the hours since we were last together dreaming of having her under me again.

Cupping her delicate face in my hand I search for some evidence that she was really okay. The last thing I wanted was to put the moves on someone who wasn't in the mood.

She must sense my reluctance because she offers me some reassurance. "I'm fine Ven. I promise." When I don't immediately respond, she adds, "You worry too much."

"I don't think it's possible for a man to worry too much about the woman he loves."

“Loves?” she says.

“Too early?” My voice is rough, for a moment I regret dropping the L-bomb, but then her lips curve into a smile.

“I love you Ven, I know we haven’t known each other for long, but I feel it in my bones. You’re my forever guy.”

“You sure about that?” I say. In response she parts her legs and wriggles so I’m exactly where I want to be. My thick cock gets harder now that it’s pressed against her tender flesh. I’m dying to take her up on the pleasure she’s offering.

A lot has happened since we were last together. My cock is rock hard, and my need is off the chain, but it feels wrong to jump on her after everything she’s been through. As if sensing my hesitation her hands slide down my chest and towards my cock, my balls tighten up in response. She wraps one hand around my shaft and the other reaches down to cup my balls. I realize that we’ve repositioned ourselves instinctively so she can reach me. I’m taller, so all I can do from this position is kiss her forehead. I bury my face in her hair and enjoy the clean, crisp scent coming off her. It’s not quite feminine, more like the cucumber of my shampoo.

I pull her hands away and slide down to give her a long lingering kiss. The more passionate the kiss gets, the more she claws at my chest with her nails. When she starts to rub her body against mine, I realize that I’m overthinking this situation, she clearly wants me.

All my doubt falls away in an instant and is replaced with a mingling of love and lust. I go crazy on her. Kissing and nipping my way down her neck to her breasts. I take turns squeezing them in my hands as I lick and suck her nipples.

I can tell her arousal is soaring because when I kiss her stomach, she guides me by

gently pressing the top of my head. Pride surges in my chest when I realize she's eager to have my tongue on her clit.

I take my time exploring her with my tongue. I tease and suck on her clit until she's a quivering mess that finally comes apart in an explosive orgasm. God, the way she feels when she comes against my mouth is amazing. This woman of mine gets loud when she comes, always screaming my name for all the world to hear. There's something so ego gratifying about making the woman you love come so hard she loses control. I want to do this every single day for the rest of my life. I make her come once more by sucking her clit and slipping my finger inside her, rubbing her g-spot, and working her into a frenzy as she shudders at my touch.

By the time I'm finished she's about as desperate for my cock as I am to feel myself slide inside her tight, wet pussy. I ease into her body and lift her hips up off the bed so I can power into her at an angle that hits all the right places. She brings her hands up and clings to the headboard as I make her come all over my cock. Feeling her pussy clench down on me is a slice of heaven. I look down at her body and the way her breasts are bouncing with each thrust I make, and I end up losing control. I feel myself shooting my load long before I'm finished fucking her.

When I lower her hips back down onto the bed, she says breathlessly. "That was the most amazing sex of my life. I feel like I should I say thank you."

I grin down at her. "Darlin', you don't ever have to thank me for fucking you senseless."

She stretches, making my cock slip out of her sweet pussy. "I've been looking forward to that all day."

I snort a laugh. "You act like we're finished, sweetheart."

She gazes up at me, her eyes slightly unfocused. “You’re already up for round two?”

“Absolutely. How about you? You’re not wimping out on me, are you?”

She laughs at my bawdy joke. “Of course not. How do you want me?”

“Hand and knees, darlin’, hands and fucking knees.” My voice sounds gruff and needy even to my own ears, but I can’t help it.

She quickly scrambles into position. I take a moment to admire the curves of her ass and the way her pussy is so inviting from this angle. My seed is dripping out of her and running down her thighs, and for some reason that makes my lust surge. I grab her hips and dive back inside, this position is giving me a little more space to work with. After a few hard, rough strokes, I bring my hand around and dive between her soft thighs to finger her clit. She looks over her shoulder, clearly surprised that I’m intent on giving her yet another orgasm. She ends up having two before she collapses onto the bed face first. I come down on top of her and ride her hard until I fill her up for a second time.

I feel the need to stake my claim and make her mine before any of the men in this club start getting stupid ideas about luring her away from me. I know a lot of the guys think she’s my old lady, but once the truth comes out, then they’re gonna be after her like moths to a flame. But I’ve already decided I’m gonna make this fake relationship real if it’s the last thing I do.

My rational mind tells me that we haven’t known each other well enough to start talking marriage but that’s exactly where my mind is going. This woman is going to be my forever, I can feel it in my bones.

It feels like we’re both on the same wavelength when she says, “Our moms were plotting about getting us married off, last night.”

I keep rubbing her back as I reply, “Well, we wouldn’t want to disappoint them, now, would we?”

She turns over and looks up at me. “Be serious.”

“I am being serious. I’ve had a thing for you since I first laid eyes on you running through that cornfield.”

The moment the words are out of my mouth, I regret bringing it up.

Shoving me off and sitting up she says, “You were there, and you didn’t do anything to help me?”

I move back to give her some personal space. “No. It wasn’t like that.”

She crosses her arms over her naked breasts and demands, “If that’s not how it was, tell me how you saw me running through the cornfield.”

“I was on an assignment for our club and caught sight of the whole thing on one of my drones. I saw you running from the dogs, and I was helpless to do anything, but then I saw you get away. I checked the local newspapers but there was nothing mentioned, so I figured I might have been mistaken about what I saw. Then when I met you at the coffee shop and you were okay, I didn’t want you to think I was stalking you or something.”

“So us meeting in the café, that wasn’t planned?” she asks warily.

“Nope. That was pure chance, I was still doing surveillance in the area and Rage suggested we meet there. Obviously, after seeing you worked there, I had plenty of reasons to visit,” I say with a shrug. I bring my hand up to stroke her face, “We good? I thought you were going to claw my eyes out there for a second.”

She has the decency to look embarrassed before apologizing. “I’m sorry about the outburst. If I’m being totally honest, I’m feeling all kinds of conflicted about my grandfather being killed.”

“I’ll bet you are,” I tell her firmly. “He was your grandfather, but he was also the man who kidnapped your mother and tried to turn her into a household servant against her will.”

When I pause to see how close I am, she picks up the conversation. “When we were held in the room at the farm, she told me what it was like for all those months she was held prisoner. My grandfather had totally lost the plot, he was convinced that she was his wife come back to life. He never did anything to her, and he treated her okay,” Amy pauses, and I see something flash across her face. “She actually said it was nice getting to know him again. How as a kid he’d hated her, but when he thought she was someone else he was kind and caring—”

“Stockholm syndrome,” I mutter. “You know where people start to empathize with their captors?”

She shrugs, “Maybe. She said that her brothers weren’t so bad, a bit rough around the edges, but other than have her cook, clean, and take care of the house, no one mistreated her.”

“Siege will let her decide what happens to them, we’ll give her a few days to decompress then we’ll have a debriefing. If she wants to get the cops involved then I’ll make sure that happens, whatever your mom wants. This is her choice,” I say. To be honest if it was me, I’d drag the bastards into the desert and get them to dig their own damn holes.

Amy heaves out a huge sigh, “About Rufus, grandfather or not, I don’t think I’m too worried about if he’s going to heaven or hell. You know what I mean?”

I take her hands in mine and glance up to catch her eyes. “I don’t blame you for that, sweetheart. That old man was living on borrowed time since the day he was born.” Giving her hands a squeeze, I tell her, “Maybe it’s time to work on forgiving yourself for not grieving too hard for the old buzzard.”

She glances down at our joined hands. “Thanks for being there when I needed you and for allowing me the opportunity to get to know you better. You really are one of the best men I’ve ever met.”

“If this MC were the boy scouts, I’d get a badge for that, right?” Her face lights up at my gentle jibe.

“Badge? You deserve a freaking medal.” Her expression turns from playful to serious.

“If you and I are going to see where this leads, I need you to know that I’m only interested in dating for marriage.”

My hand stills on her hip because she’s saying the things I want to hear. I try and stop the smile I feel snaking across my lips.

“Before you toss me out on my ear, let me explain. I really like you Ven. Just because I think our relationship has legs and might be going somewhere, doesn’t mean you have to feel trapped or agree. I know I’ve brought you nothing but trouble but if you decide to give me a chance, I’ll prove to you that I’m the right woman for you.”

Rather than comment on all that, I kiss her. And then I just don’t stop, ‘cause I’m crazy about her. Eventually, she pushes me away and points out, “A kiss is not an answer. Are you interested in something real with me, or am just another club girl to you? I know you said you love me earlier, but what you say when you have a hard-on, might not be what you think after sex.”

I look down to see she's poking one lovely finger into my chest with each word in order to drive her point home with me.

I grab that pretty finger, bring it up to my lips and kiss it before explaining, "I'm definitely on the same page. I'm ready to settle down. I didn't think I ever wanted to get married and start a family until I met you. Then my whole life changed. I wanted nothing more than the opportunity to help you find your mother and get to know you better. I'm so glad I did. You're so fucking smart, brave, and beautiful. I'd have to be mentally deficient not to do everything humanly possible to sweep you off your feet."

She pats my chest lovingly, "Consider me well and truly swept. You did a bang-up job on both of those things, babe. And somehow made me fall in love at the same time. I can't imagine loving anyone else but you, Ven."

"Yeah, I'm pretty amazing," I tease her.

"Even though that's true, if we get engaged, I'd prefer a long engagement period to give us a time to get to know each other better and to find a new place to live." She glances around the room. "You can't raise a family at the Savage Legion clubhouse, and I lost my apartment and my photography studio when it caught on fire."

"About that," I tell her grimly. "One of the things Edmund told us when we interrogated him was that Big Joe set fire to your photography studio."

Instead of losing her mind, Amy's eyes narrow. "Let me guess. He thought if he destroyed my livelihood that I would be too broke to keep the search alive for my mother, right?"

I nod, giving her hips a gentle squeeze. "Yeah, that's how they thought it would go, but they totally underestimated you. When you lost your primary means of earning, you got creative."

“About that. Have you ever heard the old saying that necessity is the mother of invention? I was good at thinking outside the box, because I had to be.”

“Well, I’ll see about finding us a place to live, but first I want to see if we can find you another photography studio,” I say as I meet her gaze.

“Really?” she looks so excited I can’t help but grin, but then her expression darkens, “I don’t know how I’d make the rent though.”

“Don’t worry about that, my club has property throughout town, I’m sure Siege could find you a unit that would work for you. Some are lying empty, so rent’s not gonna be a problem. With club businesses, usually a percentage of the earnings are given over in lieu of rent, but you can have a chat with him, and Dutch, who’s our treasurer and work something out.”

She’s silent, and for a moment I think maybe she’s gonna get angry and think I’m trying to control her life. But then she pulls me in for a kiss, saying, “What did I do to deserve you?”

“I’m thinking the same thing, darlin’,” I answer.

There’s an ominous thump coming from outside my suite and Amy just about jumps out of her skin. “Oh my god. Did Edmund, Big Joe, and Hal escape the locked room?”

I pull her back down into my arms. “I guess we need to talk about those idiots as well.”

“Did they really escape?”

“No, of course not. In fact they’re going right to the secure unit they escaped from

two years ago. Well, Big Joe and Hal are.”

Amy relaxes on my lap. “What do you mean by secure unit? Like a psychiatric hospital or a jail of some sort.”

Frowning, I tell her, “Maybe a little from column A and a little from column B. They were both convicted of a crime spree that included knocking over some convenience stores, wounding several of the employees and even managed to steal a car.”

A confused expression settles on her lovely face. “To be honest, they don’t seem smart enough to do something like that all on their own.”

“Which is why their crime spree was short-lived and they wound up getting caught. The jury found them guilty on all charges. Unfortunately, their psychological exam showed they weren’t safe to be released in the community and they were also in need of intense psychological intervention to remain relatively stable. So they ended up in a psychiatric facility. Which was where they met their other brother.”

Amy’s expression clears. “What? Edmund was there too?”

I shake my head, “No, but he found them. I guess that’s when they started to cook up their plan.”

She looks thoughtful.

“We have a contact at the Las Salinas PD. Between arresting your grandfather’s killer and catching the two escapees who’ve been hiding out on your family’s ranch, he’s managed to earn himself a promotion,” I add.

“That’s a two birds, one stone situation if ever there was one,” she responds.

“I agree. That only leaves Edmund to deal with. He’s been kind of running the show and had his finger in every dirty little pie down at the ranch.”

“Well, unless I miss my guess, he’s probably the one my grandfather willed his ranch to. That means he’s going to be a very rich man,” Amy says.

I realize I never told her the whole reason this mess started, “Interesting you should mention that,” I tell her. “Our club attorney, Smoke, started looking for your grandfather’s will. Edmund was convinced that it had been changed in favor of your mother—that was the reason they kidnapped her. Long story short, they were hoping that they could convince the old man to change it to make them the heirs. Problem is, when our attorney looked into it, Rufus didn’t actually have a will, at least not one that had been filed or officially notarized.”

“So they abducted my mom for no reason?” she says.

I nod, “Yeah, that’s about the size of it.”

Amy looks thoughtful, I guess it’s a lot to take in. Then she says, “What does that mean in the context of my grandfather’s death?”

“In the state of California, if a man dies without a will, then all his assets are divided equally among his children. Smoke reckons that means that it will be divided equally between your mom and all four of Rufus’s sons, assuming there’s proof that they are his sons. Naturally, Big Joe and Hal’s share will go into a trust for them. If Edmund knows what’s good for him, then he’ll agree to forfeit his share in exchange for safe passage out of our territory and not being pursued by the Legion for his many crimes against your family and our club.”

“Oh, wow,” she responds, clearly shocked by this turn of events. “I was not expecting him to roll over quite that easily.”

I pull her in tight, “That leaves your mom, Dan, and the ingrates. A four-way split of seven thousand acres and the ranch, plus whatever other businesses Rufus had, is going to be life changing money for the four of them.”

Her face brightens, “I’m glad about how the situation was handled.”

“To be honest, I think Siege and Rigs just wanted to reach a solution, so they could go home and forget this ever happened.”

Her face flushes a light pink, “I can understand that. Maybe we should suggest Edmund’s share goes to your club for all their help? The clubhouse got damaged and that’s not gonna be cheap to repair.”

“I believe that was brought up, but our club officers refused.” Pulling a stray strand of hair out of her face and tucking it behind her ear, I say, “I’m sorry grandchildren don’t have inheritance rights in California.”

She makes a dismissive gesture with one hand. “I don’t care about my grandfather’s money. I never did. I’m just happy my mom is inheriting enough to set her up for life. She deserves some peace and happiness after everything she’s been through.”

My phone beeps again and I pick it up. “It’s a message from Smoke, saying that he’s meeting with Dan and your mom about the funeral and estate. They’ve retained him to guide them through this process. Apparently, your grandfather had some oil and gas rights that need to be dealt with immediately upon his death or it might slow down the process of sorting out his estate. Your mom is requesting your presence to help her understand the situation better.” Looking up from my phone, I ask, “Are you good to go or do you need to rest some more?”

“No. I got a few hours of sleep. If my mom needs me, I’m good to go.”

I'm a bit sad that my dream of spending the day in bed with my woman has been spoiled, but the sooner we deal with this, then the sooner we can make a start on the rest of our lives.

Ven

It's been a couple of months since everything went down at the Grayson farm. Siege, Rigs, and Smoke did a damn good job of unraveling a complicated situation and ensuring that everyone involved got what was coming to them in one way or another. There are still some legal issues to work through, but hopefully that'll all be finalized soon.

Everyone has been working hard to put the whole situation behind them. My mom's ankle has healed up. She's taken a real shine to both Rage and Carol, so we've become like an extended family.

Today is a very special day. I pull up in front of the clubhouse to find Amy waiting for me. She's wearing jeans and a red blouse that looks amazing against her black hair and pale skin. She does a twirl for me and shows off the new property cut. When we were in a fake relationship, she had one of our generic 'Property of Savage Legion MC' cuts, but now my name is proudly on her back. A surge of pride flashes through me on seeing my woman wearing my name.

She comes running out and climbs onto the back of my bike like she's been doing it her whole life. Grabbing her helmet out of my rear storage compartment, she puts it on quickly and slides her arms around me. Everything about this interaction feels smooth and natural. Amy was born to be a biker's old lady, mine to be exact. She might have come into my life by accident, but I couldn't have picked a better woman to call my own.

I rev my motor and off we go. One hand drifts to my vest pocket to make sure I have

what I need. A little hard square presses against my palm and I'm reassured. We speed down the highway along the coast, a gentle breeze swirling around us and the salty ocean air filling our nostrils. I enjoy snaking around the curves along the familiar route to my maman's restaurant.

When we pull in and I cut my motor, Amy takes off her helmet and runs her fingers through her hair. The minute she sees all the other bikes, her mouth falls open.

"What's all this? Is there a party that I'm unaware of?"

"I guess a lot of the brothers had the same idea I did for a romantic dinner for two with their old ladies."

I think for sure she's going to guess what's going on, because the whole restaurant is packed wall-to-wall with members of my club. Her mom is there with a new neighbor she's made friends with. The middle-aged man is gray at his temples and has a neatly trimmed goatee. He's into antique cars so I've already put him in touch with our auto repair shop making sure he gets the friends and family discount. They look good together and it's nice to see her mom getting out and about.

If my woman is suspicious about my motives for taking her here tonight, she doesn't show it. Instead, she just waves at people we pass as I lead her to the only empty table in the entire restaurant. It's the same table we sat at the first time I brought her here, the one with the amazing view of the garden. One of my mom's servers practically races back to take our drinks order. She's all smiles and really excited. I subtly give her the dial it down look and she tries to smother back her wide smile. Everyone is staring at us. I swear to God, you would think these people have never seen a man propose before.

While Amy is looking over the menu, I slip the ring box out of my vest pocket and put it on the edge of the seat beside me for the server to take. We already have a plan

in place, and I just hope she's sly about picking it up. I immediately realize what a foolish expectation that was because the moment we give our orders and hand her back the menus, the server makes a big production of picking the ring box up.

"Oh, wow. It looks like I dropped something on the floor. Let me pick that up before someone steps on it." She snatches up the ring, hiding it behind the menus. Amy gives her an odd look while I press two fingers to the bridge of my nose, wondering why I ever thought I could pull this off. What in God's name was I thinking? My initial plan had been to write 'MARRY ME AMY' in rocks and take Amy out drone flying with me. Having her come across the proposal that way seemed ideal, but my mom convinced me that a romantic meal at her restaurant would be better. Truth be told, I think my mom and Carol just wanted to be able to witness the proposal firsthand. So, I went to work on plan B.

Suddenly, Amy's hand lands on mine. "Are you okay? You seem a bit distracted tonight. We could have stayed at the clubhouse if you weren't up to a night out."

I freeze in place for a brief second, trying to think of something clever to say. I end up mumbling, "I'm fine. More than fine."

She presses her lips together before telling me, "If fine stands for fucked up, insecure, neurotic, and emotional then maybe you are."

"What the actual fuck does that mean?" I'm not angry, so much as floored that she would say something like that to me.

She raises an eyebrow, and I can tell she's trying not to laugh. "It might mean that you can't take a joke."

Before I can respond, our smiling server comes back with our drinks and some bread for the table. I automatically reach for the bread. The basket is filled with baguette

slices and there's a ceramic dish of butter to accompany it.

"Rage might be addicted to my maman's croissants, but I like her homemade bread the best." I dip a piece in the fresh cream butter and cram the whole round in my mouth at once.

Amy dips the edge of her bread in the butter and nibbles at it like a civilized person. I can't help but smile at how polite she is. It's one of the many things I find endearing about her. Sitting here looking at her, I realize something. When I first met her, she had a much more forceful personality. Some might even call her pushy. The longer we've been together, the more chilled she's grown. Don't get me wrong, she'll tell you off in a heartbeat if you cross boundaries, but she's not so much on edge and ready to snap at people. Pride surges in my chest as I realize she doesn't have to be so on guard. She's got me for that now.

We make short work of our meal, for our starters we both had French onion soup, and for the main I had the coq au vin and Amy had the ratatouille. Amy praised my mom's cooking to the sky. The restaurant isn't fancy, it's more the bistro-style that you'd find on any street corner in Paris, than fine dining. But the charm of those places is simple food cooked incredibly well, and that's something my maman excels at.

Amy's surprised when our ever-smiling server brings out a bottle of alcohol-free pink champagne and pours a flute for each of us. When our dessert comes out, it's a mini profiterole tower with wreathes of spun sugar and garnished with fresh raspberries.

Amy looks at it with wide eyes.

Glancing up from the dessert to me, she comments, "This looks worthy of a Michelin star restaurant. You must have been one spoiled little boy growing up."

I laugh, “At the time I didn’t realize I was eating fancy stuff, it was just mom’s experiments for the restaurant.”

She continues to look at the choux pastry tower in amazement, “My mom is a good cook, but her baking is limited to bread, apple pie and brownies.”

“Try it, it’s even better than it looks,” I pull off the top choux bun and offer it to her.

As she takes a delicate bite, I’m thankful she’s not a glutton like me, I’d have stuffed the whole bun in my mouth. As she swallows, I’m having second thoughts about my great idea, but suddenly after another bite she hesitates, then brings her fingers up to fish out the object.

I just smile as she dunks it in her glass of water and dries it off on her napkin.

She looks from the ring to me, her voice is shaky as she says, “I’m guessing your maman didn’t lose this when she was baking?”

“Do you like it?” I ask, eager to know if I chose according to her personal tastes.

“It’s beautiful,” she says as she bites her bottom lip.

Taking the now clean ring from her, I say, “You know that you’ve quickly become my whole fucking world, sweetheart. In addition to being my old lady, I want you to be my wife.”

“Absolutely. I want to be your wife,” as the tears run down her cheeks I slip the ring on her finger.

Then I hear my mom’s voice, “Did I hear correctly?”

Amy's head whips around to look at my mother with a huge smile on her face and she replies, "Oui, belle-mère."

My mother gives her a kiss on both cheeks then rushes round to do the same to me. Amy just called her 'mother-in-law' in French, and the fact that she learned that makes me realize that maybe this isn't as much of a surprise as I thought it would be.

Of course there's raucous applause and loud stomping of feet echoing through the small restaurant. All my club brothers come over and congratulate us. Obviously, they'd gotten the heads-up about the proposal. Doing something like that in public is always fraught with danger, but I knew that me and my Amy were both on the same page.

After an hour or so, we bow out because I have another surprise for the woman I love. But instead of leading her back to my bike, I take her down a winding path past my mother's house all the way back to a special spot. I have something important for her to see.

Her hands fly to her cheeks when she sees the large white canvas tent I've pitched. It's strung with lights and inside I've made it nice for us.

"What is all this?"

"If you approve, it'll be the spot we build our first home. That's if you don't mind being close to my mother."

She gives me playful smack on the arm. "Of course not. I adore your mother. She's my new role model, seeing the kick-ass way she handled herself with my grandfather's men was nothing short of inspiring."

Although I'm not sure how I feel about that new bit of information, I set it aside in favor of making our special night perfect. I pull back the flap of the tent and usher her inside. She takes a second to slowly spin around. When she turns back to me, she asks, "Did your mom help with all this?"

I step forward and pull her close. "Of course not. I have a brain and good taste. I picked it all out and arranged it myself just for you, because I wanted tonight to be a night you'll remember for the rest of your life."

"You did a wonderful job. The lights, fresh flowers, and that rug is so luxurious."

I glance over my shoulder at the queen-size bed. I've made it up with all white bedding, like a bridal bed. "I was thinking that we might spend the night here. I can make you scream my name all night long and no one will hear."

She immediately begins unsnapping my cut and then unbuttoning my shirt. "Maybe, I can make you scream my name for once. What do you think about that idea?"

I grin, "With your talented mouth, fingers, and pussy anything's possible, darlin'."

I'd considered rigging up my phone so we could have some music but deciding what songs would accompany such a special night was too much pressure. So instead, we have the sound of the waves, which to be honest is probably a hell of a lot more romantic. We make short work of undressing each other, when we move together, it's sensuous, sexy, and sweet. This is everything my mind, heart, and body has been missing out on for all these years. It's the dream I was never bold enough to dream.

Once we're naked I take a moment to appreciate her curves in the soft glow of the artificial candles I've set all around the tent. Real candles would have been better—but putting out a fire in a tent because you accidentally knocked over a tealight is a good way to ruin a romantic evening. I pick her up and toss her onto the

bed. Seeing her laying there all naked and eager for my cock while my ring glistens on her finger, makes me as hard as a rock.

I come down on top of her and pour my heart out to her in a kiss that's meant to seal her to me. Her hands roam over my chest and down my abdomen. This woman of mine loves to touch and tease me almost as much as I love doing the same to her. I spend plenty of time on her breasts because I love the way she moans as I suck her nipples deep into my mouth. My attention there also ramps up her desire and I want her writhing, wet, and willing when I fill her with my cock.

The best way to get her really wet is by licking her pretty pussy. She loves it when I do that and so do I. Tonight, I take extra care to take my time, starting out slowly, and building the intensity until she explodes on my tongue. Women always taste good, but Amy is like nectar on my tongue. She's slowly becoming an obsession for me, and I want to please her in every way possible.

I pick her up, although she's still in a boneless heap from the orgasm I just gave her.

"Where are you taking me?" she asks, as I carry her out of the tent.

There are no streetlamps here, so the stars look like jewels. Moonlight dances over the sea below, and other than the sound of the waves crashing against the rocks it's silent. I walk across the ground with my love in my arms, "We can go back to the tent if you want, but it's such a nice night, I thought we could lie here and watch the stars as we make love."

As I say the words, I start to cringe, thinking that maybe what sounded romantic in my head, in reality is a huge turn off for her. Before I do an about turn, she says, "That sound perfect, but won't anyone see us?"

I shake my head, "No, this is private land, it's all my mom's. Well, ours now because

I've bought this parcel for us. I used to play here as a child, see the trees back there?" I point over to a large oak. "I bet my swing is still there."

"A swing?" she says and lets out a delightful giggle as she wriggles free from my arms and runs to the trees.

I catch up with her just as she's about to sit down on the wooden seat, I hand her the blanket I'd brought for us to lie on, "Here, you might wanna put this down first. I don't want you getting splinters in your pretty ass."

She spreads it on the swing and sits down then experimentally pushes off. I don't know who gets the idea first, but we both suddenly stop and look at one another.

"You're at just the right height," I say.

"Right height for what?" she asks sounding all kinds of innocent. I'm just about to explain my idea, when she gives me a wicked grin. She kicks out her feet and swings backward and forwards, "So how does this work?"

I grab the ropes to stop the swing, then move closer to her. My cock is rock hard again, and just thinking about being inside her has a small bead of precum leaking out my tip, "We can use it anyway you want. You can lie back, and I can fuck you like this, or you can lie over the swing if you want me from behind."

She smiles slowly and parts her legs, showing me her pussy. It's glistening in the moonlight, "Fuck, babe. You are one sexy woman."

"I'm wet just thinking about you," she murmurs. My cock twitches in response and I can't wait to slip into her soaking wet pussy.

I gently take her hands from the bottom of the ropes, and I bring them up to grasp the

top of the swing. “Hold tight and don’t let go until I say, sweetness. Can you do that for me?”

She nods, and I lean over, brushing her pussy with my cock, and give her a firm kiss as I slowly push the swing back, then pull it to me again as my cockhead rubs against her. The height is perfect.

“Oh!” she says in surprise.

I chuckle darkly as I get to my knees, “We’re only just beginning, let me get you warmed up again.”

“I think I’m pretty warmed up as it is, I feel so wet,” she squirms on the seat.

My eyes go to her pretty pussy, “I want to see you dripping wet for me.” With that I pull her in close.

Using my tongue and mouth on her again, I make her come hard with my fingers teasing her g-spot. The way she writhes against my face makes my cock jump.

As I notch myself against her entrance, I look into her eyes as I fill her with my long, thick shaft. I love seeing the pleasure on her face and the way she gasps as I stretch her wide. Feeling her soaked pussy gripping me tightly is the best feeling in the world. Holding both sides of the swing, I use it to move her back and forth on my hard cock. Something about the long, smooth strokes drives her wild. Watching her taking the pleasure I give, makes my balls draw up and it takes all my skills of concentration to hold off coming until she does. Then I jerk the swing back and forth, seeking my own pleasure as her pussy contracts around my cock milking me dry. Nothing in my life has ever felt this good and I know all the way down to bones that nothing ever will. And this is what it takes for me to come as I cry out her name, “Amy!”

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:38 am

Amy

Six Months Later

I 'm sitting on the back porch of Meli's home. She has a big two-story Victorian that's adjacent to her quaint little restaurant. It has the same fairytale style landscaping to make a seamless transition between the home and restaurant. This whole area is so picturesque that when I was looking for a venue for our wedding there was nowhere else I wanted.

The more I get to know Ven's mom, the more I love her. She's a very sweet, generous woman, who has not only welcomed us into her beautiful outdoor space for our wedding ceremony, but she also insisted upon catering the entire wedding reception herself. I'm the luckiest woman alive to be marrying Ven and gaining such an awesome mother-in-law.

I hear a voice coming from the sidewalk. "Today's the big day."

I watch Dan walking up with a large package in his hand. It's wrapped in white paper and tied up with silver bow. I can't imagine what's inside. I wave for him to come to me and watch him tromp up the footpath, come onto the porch and set the gift down at my feet.

"You didn't have to get me a gift, Uncle Dan."

He waves away my comment with one hand. "Of course I did. It's a wedding and I'm your uncle."

I had finally warmed up to Dan after my mom told me how he took such good care of her when she was being held at the farm. My mother is really quite fond of him and sees him as family, so I try to see him that way too, especially when I heard how his brothers had left him at the clubhouse to his fate.

“You’re looking pretty sharp in that suit. It looks custom made.”

He fidgets, clearly uncomfortable with my compliment. Smoothing his hand down his suit jacket, he grumbles, “I have a strangely shaped body. Normal suits don’t fit me right. Carol found someone who makes custom suits, only she calls them bespoke. I don’t care about all that. I just want a suit that fits.”

“Well, Miss Stephanie is going to be all kinds of impressed.”

He blushes so hard I think his head is going to explode. “She’s been real nice to me.”

Yeah, since my mom wanted nothing to do with the ranch, Smoke split it so that she got more cash assets and Dan got the land the farm was sitting on. Dan’s now a rich ranch owner who can afford bespoke suits. He wasn’t sure what to do with all the land, but the Savage Legion bought a couple of hundred acres to use for weapons training, so as a result Dan has been hanging out at the Legion clubhouse on the regular. Of course, the club girls have been all over him as his new money has made him immeasurably attractive—despite the fact he’s not a club brother or prospect. He only has eyes for one woman, though. And I honestly believe Stephanie truly likes him too. He treats her like a lady and always brings flowers and chocolates when he visits her at the clubhouse.

Before I can respond, Stephanie pops around the corner and waves at him. I like the way she lights up when he smiles at her and I can see that it’s the man she wants and not his bank account. Who said club girls can’t make good partners?

“Sorry, gotta run, Amy. See you at the wedding.” I give him an indulgent smile as he

rushes to join his woman.

Strong arms slip around me from behind and Ven pulls me back against chest. “Your uncle sure wrapped a nice wedding present.”

I glance down at the big box. “I’d bet the farm that Stephanie wrapped it for him. You know that Dan is all thumbs at fine motor skills.”

“Aren’t we all,” Ven replies.

I turn around in his arms and run my hands up his ripped torso. He’s wearing only the silk pajama bottoms I got for him. His pajamas match my long, white silk robe. Together we look like a perfectly matched wedding couple. Today is our big day and having friends and family gathered feels like having the best of everything, far more than I deserve in fact.

He asks, “Do you think we’re rushing things just a bit?”

My eyebrows shoot up, “Hell no!” I tell him as I run my hands over his chest again. Because, God, that never gets old. “I think that when you know, you know. You’re the one thing in this world that I’m a hundred percent sure about. Nothing in this world could make me call off the wedding at this point.”

“Glad to hear it, sweetheart. I never doubted you, but some of my club brothers thought you might be doing too much.”

My hand went down to my stomach, I’m not showing yet as it’s too early, but Ven and I are having a baby. “You mean because I’m pregnant, we’re in the process of building a house on your mother’s land, and I’m struggling to get my photography studio back up and running?”

He nods.

“I’m guessing it’s the single club brothers who think I should be spending the next eight months sitting around on my ass? Seriously, having a baby is the biggest incentive to get my life sorted that there is,” my eyes are wide with indignation.

Ven shrugs, “I see their point, I’m worried that you’re taking on too much and how that’s going to affect our baby.”

Now both of my hands are anxiously touching my belly, as I ponder his words. “Even though the doc says everything is fine, maybe I should slow down a bit.”

Ven excitedly shouts back to someone in the house. “You owe me a hundred bucks, Rage.”

Rage stomps out, slaps a hundred bucks into Ven’s hand and heads straight to the restaurant without a word.

Ven is positively gleeful and shouts after him, “That’s what you get for betting against my fiancée.” He holds his hundred dollar bill up to the sunshine and then hands it to me. Grinning at me he adds, “Easiest fucking money we ever made.”

“What was that all about?”

“Rage said you were headstrong and would never listen to a word I had to say. Don’t worry, I made him eat his words.”

I narrow my eyes, “Don’t be too sure, sunshine. If you think I’m gonna be barefoot and pregnant you’ve got another thing coming. When I said slow down, I just meant delegate the work, not call off—”

“Shush,” Ven says with a wicked glint in his eyes, “I know what you’re like. I know you’d never do anything just because I asked. But we’re one hundred dollars richer now, how many bottles of photographic developer is that gonna buy?”

I give him a playful shove, “You two are turning out to be more competitive than I imagined you would be when you became blood brothers. Careful you don’t push him too far, babe.”

“Are you fucking kidding me. That man has the skin of a rhino. Trust me, he’ll be okay.”

Suddenly, Meli is at the door, wearing a lovely red silk dress. She looks amazing with her hair piled up on the top of her head. “It is time to get dressed for zee ceremony and you are both sitting here shooting zee breeze. This will not do. Allons y !”

Today felt like I was caught in a whirlwind of activity. We got dressed together. Despite the traditions against it, Ven zipped me into my long white gown. It was plain satin with no beading or fuss. I loved the streamlined simplicity and the way it hugged my curves.

Once we’re ready, Ven falls to his knees before me, cups my belly with his large hands and begins to talk to our baby. He whispers all things a baby would care about, like that they were being born into a family with a lot of love to give, a family who would never take him or her for granted. His voice drops and all I hear is whispering after that. I stand there in my wedding gown while he has this very important talk with our child.

After that he kisses me, presses his forehead to mine and whispers, “I love you more than I ever thought I could love another person. You’ve brought joy and happiness into my life. Thank you for agreeing to be my wife. I’m going to work hard every single day to ensure you never regret marrying me.”

I cup his face in my hands and tug him down for a kiss. “You’ve become my whole world, Ven. As long as you continue to be the man I fell in love with, I’ll be the

happiest woman on planet earth.”

Just when I think this man can't surprise me anymore, he pulls me into his arms, cups my ass cheeks in both hands, and lifts me up. Something about his kisses this time were hotter and more needy than before. He only sets me down when Siege comes to take him away to his spot for the wedding ceremony.

I check my makeup one last time and head out to the backyard. There are chairs set up, huge bouquets of roses with baby's breath, and lots of smiling faces. My mother and Meli are sitting in the front row, each in their respective sections.

Since I don't have a father to walk me down the aisle, Dan does the honors. I can tell that he's practiced his pacing because during the rehearsal, he let his anxiety get the better of him and was rushing me down the aisle. Now, we're in a dignified lock step, with Ven beaming from the groom's position up front, beside Rigs who's performing the ceremony.

My hands are shaking but the huge bouquet of roses hides that fact pretty well. When I walk past all the club brothers who worked so hard to help me rescue my mom, they are beaming. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I will always have a soft spot in my heart for these men. They are good people, down to the very last brother.

We decided to forego attendants, which streamlined the procession. Something buzzes above my head, and I realize that Evan is capturing video footage from overhead with one of Ven's drones. Having a video of everything will become a cherished family heirloom, enabling me to relive this special day over and over again as the years march on.

Standing in front of all our friends and what little family we have, drives home how found and created family are just as important as biological ones. When Ven and I turn to each other, I realize that every single thing I ever dreamed about was coming true because Ven is the perfect, protective partner whose big heart and handsome face

are all I need to find my personal happily ever after.

We say our vows and mean them from the bottom of our hearts. When he kisses me for the first time as my husband, it's too perfect for words. When he pulls back, the look of love on his face blows my mind.

He cups my face in his hands and asks, "How does it feel being married to a member of the Savage Legion MC? It is as scary as you thought it would be when you first met me?"

"It feels amazing, Ven. How about you?"

"I've never been fucking happier. I've got a beautiful, loving wife and a child on the way. My life is looking up."

When we walk back down the aisle as a newly married couple, I can't get over how thrilled I am to start our new life together. With one hand firmly in his and the other still grasping my bouquet all is right with my world.

Intent upon ringing every ounce of pleasure from this day, I stop at the end of the grass and toss the bouquet over my shoulder. The fact that Stephanie is the one to catch the bouquet seems fair in some convoluted kind of way. She's all smiles and so am I.

As first days of the rest of our lives go, this is shaping up to be wonderful one, filled with laughter, righteous friends, and mothers who get along. Who could ask for more?

THE END